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HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIORS OF MARGINALIZED BATTERED WOMEN: THEORETICAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

By

IDA DUPONT

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Criminal Justice in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the City University of New York

2004

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Abstract

HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIORS OF MARGINALIZED BATTERED WOMEN: THEORETICAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

By

Ida Dupont

Advisor: Professor Barry Spunt

This dissertation explores the help-seeking behaviors and coping strategies of economically, racially and/or socially marginalized battered women. To analyze the help-seeking behaviors and coping strategies of this subgroup of battered women, 100 formerly battered women were identified and extensively interviewed at a number of community-based social service agencies located in low-income neighborhoods throughout New York City including community centers, homeless shelters, needle-exchange programs, health clinics, prenatal care programs, congregate housing for people with AIDS, and welfare centers. Interviews focused on the extent of battered women's reliance upon formal and informal sources of help; women's perceptions of the effectiveness of helpers; and the impact of institutional responses on battered women's subsequent help-seeking behaviors and coping strategies. This study is a theoretically-guided project which applies the

Modified Survivor Theory, a new theoretical model based on the Survivor Theory (Gondolf, 1988). The Modified Survivor Theory claims that while battered women actively seek help from a number of both formal and informal sources, there are a number of individual-level (personal), institutional and structural obstacles that constrain and shape battered women's choices. In particular, negative institutional responses can have several detrimental outcomes: battered women may remain in abusive relationships longer, or they may they rely upon *extralegal* methods of dealing with the abuse such as fighting back or using "street justice" (getting friends or family members to threaten or harm the abuser). The findings of this study largely support the main tenets of the Modified Survivor Theory—that battered women actively seek help from a wide range of formal and informal sources despite experiencing numerous personal, institutional and structural obstacles. And as expected, women who perceived helpers to be ineffective were more likely than women who regarded them as effective to physically fight back against their abusers. However, other aspects of the Modified Survivor Theory were not supported by the findings: battered women were not more likely to remain in abusive relationships longer or to utilize "street justice" if they regarded helpers as ineffective. Ultimately, the narratives of the woman in this study lend credence to a characterization of battered women from marginalized backgrounds and communities as "anguished survivors" who exert a diversity of coping strategies and help-seeking behaviors in response to severe abuse according to the limited and often inadequate options available to them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research project is dedicated to Sarita Wilson without whom this study would have been nearly impossible to undertake. Sarita introduced me to a vast network of women who were ultimately willing to talk to me about the violence in their intimate lives largely because of her influence. I will always be grateful to her for granting me access to an unfamiliar community as well as opening her home to me. I thank her and all of the women in this study for being willing to openly talk to me about experiences that are normally kept hidden. I was tremendously moved by their resolve and strength to rise above social conditions that most people would find unendurable. Their stories are forever etched into my memory and continue to inspire my work. My hope is that I have done them justice.

Many thanks to my advisor Dr. Barry Spunt for agreeing to see me through this project and for providing guidance, tangible advice, and support throughout. I am also grateful to my committee members Dr. Lou Schlesigner and Dr. Andrew Karmen for carefully combing through my manuscript and offering their insights and suggestions. I am also appreciative of the tutelage I received early in the process from Dr. Natalie Sokoloff. Thanks to Dr. Ric Curtis for introducing me to several of the needle exchange programs and homeless shelters that later served as recruitment sites for this study. And thanks to Dr. Sean Wheeler for helping me make sense out of the seemingly senseless: my statistics.

I was inspired and nurtured during this process by a number of friends and family members. Most importantly, I would like to thank my parents for their steadfast support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

INTRODUCTION

A significant portion of the literature on battered women wrestles with the question, "why don't they just leave?" Before the emergence of the battered women's movement in the 1970's, battered women were customarily viewed as helpless, pathological, masochistic, and irrational (see Schneider, 2000; Stahly, 1996). The "Learned Helplessness Theory" largely supports this view of battered women by suggesting that over time, battered women become psychologically paralyzed by the effects of the abuse and are increasingly unable to seek help or leave (Walker, 1979, 1989). However, with the help of feminist scholarly work, battered women are increasingly being portrayed as agents who actively seek help and exhibit strength as 'survivors' (Collins, 1998; Gondolf and Fisher, 1988; Mahoney, 1994; West, 1999).

An emerging literature on the help-seeking behaviors of battered women suggests that women are not passive in the face of abuse and that they seek help from a number of sources. In fact, a growing body of work suggests—contrary to the Learned Helplessness Theory-- that battered women's help-seeking behaviors *increase* as the severity of the abuse escalates (Bowker, 1983; Gondolf and Fisher, 1988; Horton et al, 1987; Pagelow, 1981; Wauchope, 1988). This alternative perspective of battered women, also referred to as the "Survivor Theory" (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988), suggests that women actively seek help and make *rational* choices with regard to help-seeking. According to Gondolf, it is not battered women, but *helping institutions*—police, prosecutors, therapists—that suffer from "learned helplessness" due to their inability to adequately assist battered women (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988).

While domestic violence researchers are increasingly focusing on the agency and active help-seeking behaviors of battered women, there is another body of work that documents the substantial *individual-level*, *structural* and *institutional* barriers that battered women face when trying to leave abusive relationships (see Barnett, 2000, 2001; Hampton et al, 2003; Lowe, 2001). *Individual-level obstacles* like threats of retaliation from abusers; fears that abusers will take the children, societal expectations keeping the relationship/marriage together and a range of emotional factors may prevent some battered women from seeking help or leaving. *Structural barriers* (i.e. financial dependency on the abuser, lack of child care, restrictive welfare policies, limited shelter spaces or unavailability of affordable housing) can also make leaving seem unachievable. Finally, *ineffective and inadequate institutional responses* to battered women by the police, court officers, counselors, and other service providers may prevent women from seeking further assistance. Given these significant obstacles, some battered women may reasonably conclude that staying in the abusive relationship is preferable to the alternatives.

Arguably, racially, economically and socially marginalized battered women face the greatest structural and institutional hurdles in their process of getting safe/leaving. They are more likely than their higher income counterparts to rely on impersonal public institutions (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988); to seek refuge at domestic violence shelters (which are often filled to capacity) (Hunt, 2001); to require limited low-income housing (Dobash and Dobash, 1992); to be impacted by restrictive welfare policies (Brandwein, 1999); and to lack affordable, adequate child care (Brandwein, 1999). Evidence also suggests that poor women, particularly poor women of color, are at much greater risk of

severe and lethal violence at the hands of their intimate partners than their higher income, white counterparts (Hampton and Gelles, 1994; Hampton et al, 1998; Straus et al, 1980). Despite a general trend showing a general drop in domestic violence homicides, poor women, particularly poor black women, are still the most at risk of being killed by their abusers. In 1998, black women were victims of domestic homicide at a rate of 4.5 per 100,000 compared with 1.75 per 100,000 for white women. Black battered women are also substantially more likely *to kill* their abusers than battered women from any other racial or ethnic group (Websdale, 1999). Given the particular institutional and structural obstacles that low-income women of color face in addition to their greater vulnerability to severe and lethal domestic violence, this population warrants specific scholarly attention.

While much of the literature on battered women has focused on "leaving" abusive relationships (i.e. studies on why women don't leave or the barriers to leaving) there is relatively little scholarly work addressing the steps leading up to leaving, including help-seeking. Help-seeking is an important line of inquiry because it represents the point at which battered women publicly acknowledge the abuse to outsiders. At the moment of help-seeking, agencies and institutions have an opportunity to help battered women redefine their experience as serious and abusive and can offer them and their children tangible and potentially life-saving services (i.e. shelter, an order of protection, the arrest of the abuser, and legal advice) (Browne, 1987; Davies, 1971; Gondolf and Fisher, 1988; Oberschall, 1973). However, negative responses from helping agencies may discourage battered women from further help-seeking which, in turn, could have serious ramifications. Battered women may remain in the abusive relationship longer than they

would have, had they received effective assistance (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). Or, they may feel that they have no alternative but to deal with the abuse as best they can. Some may resort to taking matters into their own hands by using physical force (forceful resistance or retaliatory violence) or by getting others to threaten or harm the abuser (street justice).

Help-seeking can be a crucial step in the process of ending/leaving abusive relationships and while there is a substantial literature on how battered women make their decisions to seek help, what kinds of sources they turn to for help, how individual-level, structural and institutional obstacles impact women's help-seeking behaviors, and how effective helping agencies are in women's process of leaving abusive relationships, there is relatively little scholarly work on the consequences of ineffective responses to battered women by helping agencies. For example, how do negative institutional responses impact battered women's subsequent help-seeking behaviors and decisions about leaving? What coping mechanisms do battered women rely upon when help-seeking efforts are met with inadequate or ineffective responses? This study seeks to address these questions.

The theoretical framework utilized in this study, the Modified Survivor Theory, was created specifically for this study based largely on Gondolf and Fisher's original Survivor Theory (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). The Modified Survivor Theory suggests that battered women are active help-seekers. At the same time, the theory recognizes that battered women's help-seeking efforts are not limitless (Okun, 1986) in great part due to the many individual-level, institutional and structural obstacles that they often must overcome. Similar to the original theory, the Modified Survivor Theory underscores the

significant deleterious impact that inadequate and insufficient institutional responses can have on battered women. "The failure of help sources to intervene in a comprehensive and decisive fashion allows the abuse to continue and escalate" (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988:12) and makes it harder for battered women to escape abusive relationships. Thus, battered women may remain in abusive relationships not because of learned helplessness, but in large part because of the barriers that they face in their process of help-seeking.

According to the Modified Survivor Theory, when help-seeking efforts are met with inadequate or ineffective responses by helping agents, battered women sometimes rely upon a variety of coping strategies that may or may not effectively address the violence. In the absence of effective legal remedies, they may feel that they are "on their own" and must deal with the abuse by "taking matters into their own hands". This study examines the use, effectiveness and consequences of two such extralegal coping strategies: 1) fighting back (including forceful resistance and retaliatory violence) and 2) street justice (soliciting family or friends to threaten or harm the abuser). The Modified Survivor Theory suggests that women's reliance on such extralegal responses to battering suggests a stance of anguished resistance, but not helplessness.

The Modified Survivor Theory also suggests that leaving abusive relationships is a process involving a number of stages: 1) a shift in a perception of the relationship as abusive; 2) a realization that the relationship will not improve (despite efforts by women to alter their own behavior or to influence abusers); 3) some catalyst or turning point (i.e. severe injury); 4) the abandonment of the dream of an idealized relationship, family structure or marriage; and perhaps 5) the realization that the relationship may not end due to the shared custody of children (Barnett, 2000:345). According to the Modified

Survivor Theory, effective responses by helping agents may guide battered women through this process and, ultimately, empower them to leave.

The Modified Survivor Theory thus includes the following elements:

1) Battered women actively seek help from a number of both formal and informal sources;
2) There are a number of individual-level, institutional and structural factors that present obstacles to help-seeking (and ultimately, leaving abusive relationships).
3) When helping agencies are unable or unwilling to provide effective assistance, there may be several negative outcomes: women may remain in abusive relationships longer (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988); they may take matters into their own hands by physically fighting back against their abusers (Moss et al, 1997; Richie, 1996); or they may resort to street justice to try to end the abuse (Moss et al, 1997).
4) Leaving abusive relationships is a process involving a number of factors and influenced by a number of factors. Effective institutional responses may guide battered women through this process and, ultimately, empower them to leave.

This study was conducted by extensively interviewing 100 formerly battered racially, economically and/or socially marginalized women about the abuse they endured, the help-seeking behaviors they utilized, their perceptions of the effectiveness of helpers, and the impact of helpers upon battered women's subsequent coping strategies and decisions about help-seeking and leaving. The interviews were one-time, semi-structured

interviews conducted individually using an Interview Questionnaire (see Appendix: Interview Questionnaire) that was specifically designed for the study. The Interview Questionnaire includes the following general topic areas: 1) demographic and background data, 2) abuse history, 3) help-seeking behaviors, 4) institutional responses, 5) women's use of extralegal forms of justice, 6) obstacles to help-seeking/leaving and 7) the formal and informal interventions that helped the most and least in the process of getting safe/leaving.

The sample consists of 100 formerly battered women who are racially, economically and/or socially marginalized women. Women were recruited for the study at community centers, homeless shelters, needle-exchange programs, health clinics, prenatal care programs, congregate housing facilities for people with AIDS, and welfare centers located in low-income neighborhoods throughout New York City including Crown Heights, Flatbush, South Bronx, Red Hook, Lower East Side, Bushwick, and East New York. Other women were identified through the use of snowball sampling, a method of identifying new participants by asking women already taking part in the study to tell others about the project.

The narratives by women in this sample were moving and often disturbing. More than three-quarters reported having been "severely" abused by their partners. Severe abuse, for the purposes of this study, includes repeated incidents of the following types of violent acts-- kicking, punching, choking, threats with a gun or knife, stabbing, shooting, burning, threats to kill and a pattern of non-physical forms of abuse like threats to harm, attempts to control the woman, and emotional abuse like name calling. For most of the women in this sample, domestic violence was one of many other seemingly

overwhelming problems. For some, abuse had been a life-long presence: a high proportion of these women had been abused as children, often sexually, and then as adults, usually repeatedly. Many had been drug-addicted and a significant number of these women were now living with HIV or AIDS. The vast majority of women also endured the indignities and hardships of a life of poverty and racism. It is within this context that their lives must be considered.

Due to the relatively small sample (n=100) and the recruitment process utilized, the findings of this study are not generalizable to other populations of battered women. On the other hand, this study attempts to improve upon an existing theory, the Survivor Theory (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988). Based on the findings from this study, the *Modified* Survivor Theory could be tested using a larger, representative sample. The Modified Survivor Theory represents a contribution to the domestic violence literature by presenting a new model of battered women's agency that takes into account not only the wide range of help-seeking behaviors that battered women exhibit, but also some of the *extralegal* strategies that battered women may utilize when help-seeking efforts with formal institutions fail, namely fighting back and street justice, while at the same time acknowledging the many personal, institutional and structural barriers that constrain battered women's help-seeking behaviors.

By talking directly to marginalized battered women—women who are disproportionately impacted by severe and lethal domestic violence and are therefore arguably the most in need of effective institutional help--it is possible to learn more about the nature and extent of their help-seeking, their perceptions of the effectiveness of helpers, and the impact that helpers had on women's subsequent actions. This

information could hopefully be used to improve policies aimed at this vulnerable population.

The first chapter provides an overview of the help-seeking literature emphasizing the obstacles--individual-level, structural and institutional—to battered women's help-seeking, as well as institutional responses of helpers and how they impact battered women's subsequent choices and actions. The second chapter provides a description of the theoretical framework utilized in this study, the Modified Survivor Theory, which was adapted specifically for this study based largely on Gondolf and Fisher's original Survivor Theory (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). In the third chapter, the study's data collection and analysis methods are outlined including a description of the sample and the methods used to recruit women for the study. Included in this chapter is also an explanation of some of the methodological weaknesses and limitations of this study. The forth chapter details the study's findings and in the fifth chapter, the case studies of 18 women are included to provide additional context and meaning to these findings. The sixth chapter provides a summary and discussion of the findings while chapter seven focuses on its theoretical and policy implications. Finally, chapter eight offers suggestions for future research needs to address some of the problems elucidated in the previous chapters with regard to the institutional responses to marginalized battered women.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Nature of the Threat

Many prevalence studies on domestic violence indicate that violence against women by their intimate partners is a very serious social problem that disproportionately impacts women. The National Violence Against Women Survey, conducted between 1995-1996 with 8,000 female and 8,000 male respondents, indicates that 25% of the female respondents (versus 8 percent of the males) reported being physically assaulted and/or raped by a current or former intimate partner (Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998). Similarly, the 1998 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) found that approximately 85% of all victimizations by intimate partners in 1998 were committed against women. The NCVS collects information about criminal victimizations from a nationally representative sample of households in the U.S. According to the FBI, killings of women represented nearly 75% of all murders attributed to intimate partners (Rennison and Welchans, 2000).

Several studies also suggest that women suffer more serious injuries from domestic violence than men. According to the National Violence Against Women Survey, 41.5% of the women who were physically assaulted by an intimate partner were injured during their most recent assault, compared with 19.9% of the men. Women were also more likely than their counterparts to report that they had received medical treatment, were hospitalized, received mental health counseling, lost time from work, or reported their victimization to the police (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000). These findings

suggest that studies on domestic violence should focus primarily on understanding and preventing intimate partner violence against women.

Prevalence studies also suggest that severe physical and lethal domestic violence occurs disproportionately among low-income women, particularly low-income women of color. Low-income women from all racial/ethnic groupings are at a significantly greater risk of being severely abused or killed by their intimate partners than their wealthier counterparts. And while women from all socio-economic groups are nearly equally at risk of experiencing minor forms of abuse, there are significant differences in the likelihood of severe assault or lethal violence for low-income women.

In their first national study on family violence, Straus et al (1980) found the rate of violence between husbands and wives to be 500% greater for families living at or below the poverty level, compared with the rate of spousal violence in high income (over $20,000) families (Moore, 1997). A more recent national survey, the 1998 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), supports this finding. According to the NCVS, women living in households with lower annual household incomes experienced intimate partner violence at significantly higher rates than women in households with higher annual incomes (Rennison and Welchans, 2000). Another survey (Sorenson et al, 1996) supports this finding that women from lower economic strata are at greater risk of abuse. Similarly, studies on homeless women indicate that this population has a disproportionately high lifetime prevalence rate of being severely abused by an intimate partner (Browne and Bassuk, 1997). 50% of homeless women are fleeing domestic violence (Ferraro, 1997). An emerging literature on domestic violence and public housing suggests that such environments place low-income women at very high risk for

domestic violence due to the confluence of architecture, location, density, and cultural environment (Raphael, 2001). Research on women on welfare also underscores the strong connection between socio-economic factors and domestic violence (Browne and Bassuk, 1997; Tolman and Rosen, 2001). Most disturbingly, low-income women are also at greater risk of being killed by their abusers than their higher income counterparts (Websdale, 1999).

Low-income *women of color* are particularly at risk of severe and lethal domestic violence. There are two main sources of data on domestic violence by race and ethnicity: 1) nonrepresentative community, clinical and shelter samples and 2) large-scale, nationally representative surveys. While nonrepresentative samples have, for the most part, yielded inconsistent and contradictory findings about intimate partner violence in communities of color (see Kurz, 1995; Joseph, 1997; Neff et al, 1995; O'Keefe, 1994; West, 1998), large national probability studies and data on homicide rates have consistently shown that intimate partner violence is significantly higher among some racial/ethnic groups, particularly blacks.

Two of the earliest attempts to measure the prevalence of intimate partner violence using large, nationally representative sample were conducted in 1979 and 1985. According to the first National Family Violence Survey, black women were victimized at a substantially higher rate than their white counterparts. The rate of severe black husband to wife violence was four times higher than white husband to wife abuse (113 vs. 30 per 1,000, respectively) (Straus et al, 1980). In the second survey, black wives were 1.23 times more likely than white wives to experience minor violence and 2.36 times more likely to experience severe violence (Hampton and Gelles, 1994). According to a more

recent survey, the 1998 National Crime Victimization Survey, black women experienced intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than that of white women, and about 2.5 times the rate of women of other races (Rennison and Welchans, 2000).

The rate of intimate partner homicide has long been found to be significantly higher for black women. In comparison to white women, black women face a considerably higher risk of being killed by an intimate partner: in 1992, the intimate partner homicide rate for black women (between the ages 18 and 34) was 6 per 100,000 compared to 1.4 per 100,000 for white women (Hampton et al, 1998). Although Latinas also have a higher rate of intimate partner homicide than white women, their intimate partner homicide rate is still considerably lower than that of black women (Websdale, 1999).

With the considerable literature connecting socio-economic factors and domestic violence, the popular contention that domestic violence occurs equally across class, race and gender is being seriously undermined (Moore, 1997; McKendy, 1997). However democratic this "universal risk" theory may be, it flies in the face of empirical research. Given the heightened risk for domestic violence low-income women face (particularly low-income women of color), researchers are justifiably concerned with the particular causes of the high rate of intimate partner violence among low-income populations as well as the many obstacles that impede poor women from leaving abusive relationships.

A Note About "Leaving" Abusive Relationships

Much of the domestic violence literature focuses on the need for battered women to leave abusive relationships. This focus on "leaving" has been criticized by some feminist researchers for a number of reasons. They argue that posing the question, "why don't battered women leave?" unfairly places the responsibility of ending battering on the victim (Schneider, 2000) rather than focusing on changing or removing the abuser (Baker, 1997). Some argue that the expectation that battered women leave abusive relationships suggests that this is the only logical response to domestic violence. However, studies suggest that leaving does not necessarily end battering. While battering *may* end if a woman leaves soon after the first incident(s) of abuse, this is not the case for a large percentage of battered women (Browne, 1987). Some battered women who leave are followed and harassed for months or years or even killed (Campbell et al, 1998; Jones, 1980; Martin, 1976; Pagelow, 1980, 1981; Sullivan et al, 1994). The high prevalence of "separation attacks" and murders of women who have left their abusers suggests that leaving is not always the best response to battering (Mahoney, 1994; Moore, 1979).

However, while it is important to recognize the need for a more balanced approach where leaving is not seen as the *only* or necessarily *most effective* response to battering, it is important to acknowledge that leaving is nonetheless the end goal of many battered women. While leaving may not be the solution for *all* battered women, it represents the paradigm from which our criminal justice, social service and health care

systems currently function. Thus, this study focuses on the process of leaving, with an emphasis on help-seeking as an important precursor to leaving.

Leaving has been conceptualized by many researchers as a process involving several stages (Barnett, 2001; Landenburger, 1989; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995; Moss, Pitual, Campbell, and Halstead, 1997) in which the woman has to 1) recognize the relationship as abusive; 2) realize that she can not make it better or that the abuser will not change; 3) experiencing some turning point (i.e. severe injury or the discovery that her children are also being abused); 4) giving up the dream of an idealized relationship or marriage; and 5) perhaps accepting that she may never be free from her abuser (i.e. shared custody of children). During this process of leaving battered women may be influenced by a wide range of either inhibiting or empowering factors (Okun, 1998). Inhibiting factors or obstacles are those processes or situations that make leaving more difficult (i.e. unsupportive response from counselors or ineffective interventions by the criminal justice system) while empowering factors are those that make it easier for women to leave their abusive relationships.

Studies suggest that battered women generally do not leave their partners after the first violence incident (Campbell et al, 1994; Follingstad et al, 1992; Henderson et al, 1997; Herbert et al, 1991). In fact, according to one study, battered women left and returned five times before finally ending the relationship (Okun, 1986). The following discussion on barriers to help-seeking may explain why it is so difficult for many battered women to leave abusive relationships.

Obstacles to Leaving Abusive Relationships

An emerging body of scholarly work on domestic violence has focused on explanations of why low-income battered women, particularly poor women of color, are more at risk of being severely abused or killed by their partners. One explanation may be that they face a wide variety of hurdles and barriers to leaving that more privileged women do not. Leaving abusive relationships is difficult for any woman, regardless of her racial, ethnic, or socio-economic background. In addition to the many hardships that all battered women face when exiting abusive relationships, poor women, particularly poor women of color, face additional structural and institutional hurdles when trying to leave abusive relationships.

Individual-level Obstacles to Leaving

Many additional factors make it difficult for *any* battered woman to escape her abusive relationship: fear of retaliation by the abuser (Browne, 1987; Campbell, 1992; Fleury, 2000); legal harassment by her abuser (i.e. threatening to file for custody, making false reports against the woman to the police or child protective services); the controlling and isolating tactics of the abuser (Schecter, 1988); and a number of emotional considerations including the hope that the abuser will end his/her violent behavior.

Batterers tend to socially isolate their victims (Stahly, 1996). They may also fear the retaliation of the batterer for leaving. Several studies confirm battered women's worst fears that their abusers may kill them if they leave. According to the National

Crime Survey, 70% of domestic violence occurs after the woman had left the relationship (Stahly, 1996:301). Battered women also fear for their children's safety and well-being. A study of 94 women in shelters found that batterers tried to keep women from leaving by threatening their children with harm, kidnapping, or by taking legal actions to gain custody of the children. In this sample, 20% of the women reported returning at least once because of threats to hurt or take the children (Stahly et al, 1988). A larger study of 37 shelters in California confirmed these findings: 34% of the women had been threatened with the kidnapping of their children, 11% reported that their abuser had kidnapped one of their children, and 23% of batterers threatened to file for child custody (Stahly, 1990). Some studies suggest that courts often penalize battered women who report child abuse by the batterer during custody disputes (Stahly, 1996) and that fathers are surprisingly successful in gaining custody of their children despite their history of battering (Chesler, 1986).

One reason battered women may remain in abusive relationships is that they do not identify their ongoing interactions as abusive (Barnett, 2001). They may believe, like so many others in our society, that some abuse within intimate relationships is commonplace, if not normal (Barnett, 2000) and perhaps not serious enough to warrant leaving. Some battered women may also blame themselves for the abuse and may feel that they must change their behavior to end the abuse (Barnett, Martinez & Keyson, 1996; Pape & Arias, 2000; Towns & Adams, 2000). Others may have adopted socially approved attitudes of love, hope and commitment to her relationship (Barnett, 2001). They are committed to the relationship and hope that their partner will change (Barnett, 2001). They may even feel that they can and should help their abuser change (Strube and

Barbour, 1983, 1984; Walker, 1984). The societal or cultural expectation to maintain a two-parent family may also keep some battered women from leaving (Barnett, 2001). This may be particularly true for deeply religious women (Barnett, 2001).

There is a considerably large body of scholarly work that focuses on the psychological processes that may take place when someone is abused which can inhibit battered women from leaving. Processes of denial, minimization and rationalization are psychological defenses that may keep some battered women in these relationships by allowing them to maintain a positive view of their intimate relationships while blaming some external agent other than the abuser for the aggression (Barnett, 2001). Battered women may also remain in the abusive relationship because the abuse has rendered them paralyzed by fear (Gore-Felton, Gill, Koopman and Spiegel, 1999) or debilitated by stress from the abuse (Barnett, 2001). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a prolonged reaction to stress that can be induced by domestic violence. Victims suffering from PTSD may experience cognitive distortions and deficits in problem-solving which can make leaving more difficult (Barnett, 2001).

Structural Obstacles to Leaving

The domestic violence literature points out the significance of structural obstacles to leaving abusive relationships, particularly for low-income women. Structural obstacles are defined as barriers arising out of "macro-level structural arrangements and social conditions that have a direct effect on one's access to opportunity and quality of life" (Hampton et al, 2003: 538). One important finding of the domestic violence literature is

that poverty can seriously undermine a woman's ability to alter her environment or find safety (Bassuk et al, 1998) largely due to her lack of financial resources and/or social supports. It is not uncommon for batterers to exert economic control over their partners (i.e. taking her money, not allowing her access to family income, and preventing her from getting a job). Several studies suggest that the fewer financial educational and occupational resources women have, the more likely they are to remain in abusive relationships Gelles, 1976; Pagelow, 1981; Aguirre, 1985). When battered women lack work experience or have low educational levels, they may find it very difficult to support themselves and their children by themselves.

Studies have found that a disproportionate number of women on welfare have been abused (Allard et al, 1997; Bassuk et al, 1996; Browne & Bassuk, 1997; Raphael & Tolman, 1997; Salomon et al, 1996). Because there is not enough emphasis on creating living wages for women, a large percentage of women who are able to get off welfare still remain poor (Loprest, 1999; Loprest & Zedlewski, 1999). To supplement low wages from low-paying jobs or welfare checks, women often rely on support from a boyfriend or the father of their children as a strategy for survival (Cole, 2001). As a result, some women "choose between danger and destitution" in order to support their families (Eden & Lein, 1997:158).

For battered women who work outside the home, they may be unable to keep their jobs because of workplace harassment by their abusers or because of the effects of injuries or trauma associated with domestic violence (Brandwein, 1999; Davis, 1999; Raphael, 1999). The loss of employment may disproportionately impact low-income women who do not have alternative economic resources or supports. Further, for many

battered women, particularly low-income women, a lack of affordable housing is a significant barrier to leaving abusive relationships (Menard, 2001; Websdale and Johnson, 1997). All of these economic barriers disproportionately impact low-income battered women and may substantially restrict their options when attempting to leave abusive relationships.

In low-income communities of color, institutional racism contributes to the economic opportunities of both men and women. As a result of racial discrimination, considerable racial disparities exist in education, employment, and income equality (Hampton et al, 2003:538). Unemployment rates are disproportionately high among some racial groups, particularly among African Americans: black males have an unemployment rate twice that of white males (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). In 1998, nearly one in four (24%) African American families had an income below the official poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). As some researchers note, one consequence of this is that men who face these economic hardships are less likely to marry the mothers of their children (W.J. Wilson, 1996). Consequently, nearly half of all African-American families are female-headed households, compared with 14% of White families (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). The stresses that black families face as a result of economic hardships and racial discrimination, black women may understandably have sympathy for their partners, even when they abuse them. In fact, some researchers suggest that the disproportionately high rate of domestic violence among black couples can be explained, in part, by these structural factors (Hampton et al, 2003).

Inadequate or Ineffective Institutional Responses

Battered women from disadvantaged backgrounds also face a number of institutional barriers to leaving abusive relationships (institutional barriers are defined as obstacles that battered women face through their interface with helping organizations including government and law enforcement agencies). Although domestic violence shelters are one of the most useful services for battered women, available shelter space is limited (Davies, Lyon and Monti-Catania, 1998; Hunt, K.L., 2001). The limited number of shelter spaces is particularly serious for low-income women who disproportionately rely on them for refuge (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). In addition to a dearth of shelter space for battered women, the U.S. lacks safe, affordable housing for battered women once they leave abusive relationships. A cross-cultural study, comparing domestic violence interventions in the U.S. with those in the U.K. found that such long-term housing is virtually absent in America (Dobash and Dobash, 1992). Having nowhere to go after leaving a domestic violence shelter may help explain why it takes battered women several attempts at leaving before they are able to make a final break from their abusers (Goetting, 1999; Lowe, 2001; Strube and Barbour, 1984). Given the shortage of *tangible services* like housing, employment, legal services, childcare and physical protection it is not surprising that many battered women are unable to leave or return to their abusers (Choice and Lamke, 1997; Thompson et al, 2000).

Arguably, poor, drug-dependant women belong to a subgroup of battered women that are among the most marginalized of all battered women. A small, emerging literature in this area suggests that battered women who are also drug-dependant are

disproportionately at risk of being abused by their intimate partners (Harlow, 1999; Sterk, 1999) and face significant obstacles to getting help. Intimate partner violence rates among women in drug treatment are two to three times greater than for women in the general population (A.M.A., 1992; Bennett & Larson, 1994; Browne, 1993). A study of homeless women in a substance abuse program found that participants had substantially higher rates of trauma-related disorders arising from a variety of violent victimizations (including domestic violence) than the general population (North et al, 1996). Within the homeless population, substance abuse has consistently been associated with higher rates of victimization (Padget & Struening, 1992). And yet, despite their disproportionately high rates of abuse, drug-addicted battered women are usually barred entrance to domestic violence shelters: currently only one domestic violence shelter serves women on methadone in New York City (Frye et al, 2001).

Many low-income women, particularly poor women of color, fear that their children will be taken from them if they report their victimization to law enforcement and victim services agencies. This fear is supported by the fact that black children are disproportionately represented in the foster care population: black children make up half of the foster care population despite the fact that they constitute less than 20% of the nation's children (Roberts, 2003). Battered women whose children are sexually abused, otherwise physically harmed or killed by their battering fathers face a wide range of legal problems: "they may be charged with criminal conduct for failure to protect, held liable for abuse and neglect, have their parental rights terminated, or face criminal responsibility for endangering the welfare of a child, for assault and battery, or for homicide." (Schneider, 2000:153). And since the primary directive of child protective

workers is to safeguard children or act in the best interests of the child (Edleson, 1998), child protective workers may feel obliged to remove a child when the mother is seemingly unwilling or unable to protect her children from her abuser (Berliner, 1998). For these reasons, battered women with children may rightfully fear discussing their abuse to anyone that could bring the legal or child protective services to bear on her life.

For low-income battered women, the recent changes in welfare policies add hurdles when attempting to leave abusive relationships (including federal five-year time limits on benefits and workfare requirements) (Bassuk, 1995; Brandwein, 1999; Browne and Bassuk, 1997; Raphael, 1997). Harassment by abusers (i.e. stalking, repeatedly showing up at worksites, making disruptive phone calls at workfare sites) may make it very difficult for women to comply with welfare's workfare requirements (Brandwein, 1999; Davis, 1999, Raphael, 1999). Some researchers argue that cuts in welfare further shift the responsibility of assisting poor women from the state to the family, which arguably places battered women at greater risk by increasing their economic reliance on their abusers (Fine and Weis, 2000).

Cultural insensitivity on the part of social service, health care, and criminal justice agencies may also influence the choices of battered women of color who are seeking to exit abusive relationships (Asbury, 1987; Asbury, 1993; Coley and Beckett, 1988; DasGupta, 1998; Hirschel and Hirschel, 1998; Joseph, 1997; Peterson-Lewis et al, 1988; Richie, 1996; Sorenson, 1996). When seeking assistance from the criminal justice system, many women of color, particularly black women, are faced with the choice between their own physical safety and protecting their assailants from a criminal justice

system that disproportionately incarcerates poor men of color (Richie, 2000; Sullivan and Rumptz, 1994).

Immigration policies have also negatively impacted immigrant battered women, particularly poor immigrant women of color (DasGupta, 1998). The fear of deportation, loss of custody of their children and lack of knowledge of their rights are some of the reasons many immigrant battered women do not seek outside assistance (Orloff and Dave, 1997; Sorenson and Telles, 1991). Researchers recommend that helping agencies provide sensitivity training to their workers on diverse cultural practices and attitudes regarding domestic violence, ensure that workers are conversant in the immigration and refugee laws impacting battered women; and offer bi-lingual services to non-English speakers (Sharma, 2001).

The Impact of Ineffective Institutional Responses to Help-seeking

While studies suggest that battered women seek assistance from friends and family, call the police, go to shelters, get orders of protection, and resist the violence in a number of ways (Abraham, 2000; Gondolf and Fisher, 1988; Hutchison and Hirschel, 1998; Stahly, 1996; Waits, 1998), some researchers argue that the institutional responses battered women receive are inadequate and ineffective. Such inadequate responses may have very serious consequences for battered women and their children. Evaluation studies of criminal justice and social service interventions for domestic violence suggest that many institutional responses are not effective in stemming the disproportionately high rate of intimate partner violence, particularly among low-income women.

Informal Sources of Help: Friends and Family

Studies suggest that the majority of battered women seek help from friends or family (Bowker, 1984; Goodkind et al, 2003; Tan et al, 1995; Thompson et al, 2000). However, minimal research has been conducted on the role that friends and families play in assisting battered women (Goodkind et al, 2003). The little extant research suggests that friends and family not only provide essential emotional support to battered women, but they also offer them tangible support (financial assistance, help with children, a place to stay) (Goodkind et al, 2003; Tan et al, 1995; Thompson et al, 2000). Women who receive social support from empathic friends and family have been found to have greater psychological well-being (Bowker, 1984). And according to more recent studies of battered women, the receipt of tangible support from friends and family was rated as being very important to ending their abusive relationships (Tan et al, 1995; Thompson et al, 2000).

At the same time, negative responses by friends and family can have detrimental effects on battered women. As one scholar suggests, "not all battered women have loving, supportive families with the financial means to assist them" (Goodkind et al, 2003:349). One noteworthy finding is that the greater number of separations women had from their assailants, the less likely they were to receive emotional support from family and friends (Goodkind et al, 2003). Goodkind et al presumed that friends and family get increasingly frustrated when battered women return to their abusers, despite their advice and assistance. While such a reaction by friends and family may be understandable, it is nonetheless problematic since the domestic violence literature suggests that leaving

abusive relationships is a lengthy process, with some women leaving and returning to their abusers many times before making the final break (Okun, 1986).

The Police Response

The police play an invaluable role since they are considered the "gatekeepers" to other helping agencies (i.e. health, social and justice services) (Robinson and Chandek, 2000). Police departments are also the only social agencies that are universally accessible to virtually every community at all hours of the day or night (Hutchison et al, 1994). More importantly, the police have the unparalleled authority to enter peoples' homes to stop or at least interrupt acts of domestic violence (Weisz et al, 1998). Police officers can, at the time of arrest, tell victims about available community services that can assist them (Barnett, 2000). On a larger scale, the police convey the message that battering is a crime (Stark, 1993).

However, the police response to domestic violence has been, and continues to be problematic. Domestic violence has only relatively recently been treated as a crime to be taken seriously by the police. The traditional police response was one of begrudging "temporary order maintenance" where police were trained to act as mediators and not to make arrests (Hutchison et al, 1994). Battered women, increasingly dissatisfied with the police's failure to provide them equal protection, filed lawsuits to pressure the police to treat domestic violence like any other violent crime (see *Bruno v. Codd*, 396 N.Y.S. 974 [1977]; *Scott v. Hart*, No. 6-76-2395 [N.D. Cal. 1976]; *Thurman v. City of Torrington*, 595 F. Supp. 1521 [D. Conn. 1984]). In the 1980's, the National Institute of Justice

funded large-scale research projects to test out the deterrent effect of arrest (as compared to mediation and separation of the victim and batterer). Initial findings suggested that arrest had the most powerful deterrent effect on batterers (Sherman and Berk, 1984). The combination of social activism and evidence suggesting the deterrent value of arrest resulted in the adoption of pro-arrest policies in most jurisdictions across the nation (Hutchison et al, 1994).

While the pro-arrest policies were initially hailed as a major success for the battered women's movement, researchers and battered women's advocates are increasingly skeptical about the benefits of such policies. One of the most discouraging findings of subsequent research on mandatory arrest policies suggest that batterers from marginalized backgrounds (particularly those with prior criminal records and who lack steady work) are not deterred by arrest and may even become more violent when arrested (Sherman, Schmidt et al, 1992). Sherman, Smith and Rogan (1992) found some evidence in Milwaukee that arrest only deterred those with a relatively "higher stake in conformity" (i.e. employed and married people). Similar effects were found for employment in Miami (Pate and Hamilton, 1992), and in Colorado Springs (Berk, Klap and Western, 1992). These studies call into question the effectiveness of the primary source of assistance for battered women from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Even with the existence of pro-arrest and mandatory arrest laws, the vast majority of domestic violence calls are not reported to the police (Kantor and Straus, 1990; Schulman, 1979) and of those reported to the police, only a small minority end in arrest (Bourg and Stock, 1994; Dutton, 1987; Ferraro, 1989; Hutchison et al, 1994; Robinson and Chandek, 2000; Worden and Pollitz, 1984). Dutton calculates that: "on the basis of

combined victim survey and police observational studies, we can estimate that for every 100 wife assaults about seven are detected by police and about one arrest is made" (Dutton, 1987:197). This conclusion raises two important questions: 1) why don't more battered women call the police, and 2) why don't the police make more domestic violence arrests when they are called?

The decision to call the police by victims

A substantial body of research is devoted to answering the first question, "why don't more battered women call the police". Research on the reporting rate of domestic violence is inconclusive—while many battered women *do* call the police for assistance, many others do not. Several studies of women residing in battered women's shelters found that approximately two-thirds of the women called the police (Fleury et al, 1998; Roy, 1977). Other studies have found that only about half of all battered women seek help from the police (Bachman and Coker, 1995; Langan and Innis, 1986). However, some studies indicate that the reporting rate is significantly lower. One survey conducted in Kentucky found that only 9% of domestic violence incidents were reported to the police (Schulman, 1979).

There are many possible explanations for the underutilization of the police. Some reasons have to do with the danger associated with seeking help. One study found that battered women are often physically prevented from using the phone or are threatened with more violence by their abuser if they attempt to call the police (Fleury et al, 1998). There is some evidence suggesting that women residing in low-income, public housing

are not afforded adequate police protection. According to Raphael (2001) areas where there are high rates of community crime, decrepit physical environments, lack of adequate resources or outright abandonment are also often characterized by slow or nonexistent police response. The strong mistrust of the police by women of color, particularly low-income women of color, may also contribute to an underutilization of these services (Rasche, 1995; Richie, 2000; Rivera, 1997). Low-income women, particularly women of color who are disproportionately impacted by the war on drugs (Correctional Association, 2002) may also be reluctant to contact the police if they or their partners are drug-involved (Hampton et al, 2003; Richie, 1996). Battered immigrant women, may be hesitant to contact the police because they fear deportation, do not know their legal rights, or do not speak English (Sharma, 2001).

There are several situational factors that seem to be associated with the greater reliance on the police. According to Abel and Suh (1987) women who have been abused for a longer period of time are more likely to call the police (Abel and Suh, 1987; Gondolf, 1988). As logic would dictate, the more severe the violence, the more likely are women to report the abuse to the police (Bachman and Coker, 1995; Bowker, 1984; Kantor and Straus, 1990). Demographics also seem to play a significant role in the extent to which battered women seek assistance from the police. Occupational status is inversely associated with calling the police (i.e. the lower the occupational status of the victim as well as the offender, the more likely they are to involve the police) (Bowker, 1984). Similarly, battered women with less education were also more likely to call the police than their more educated counterparts (Abel and Suh, 1987). Studies also suggest that certain racial or ethnic groups are more likely to call the police. Blacks are far more

likely to contact the police than whites (Hutchison et al, 1994). However, according to Hutchison et al (1994) this finding can be explained by the fact that black income is considerably lower than that of white income and lower-income households tend to rely on the police significantly more than their middle- and upper-income counterparts.

The decision by police officers to make an arrest

Even when battered women do seek help from the police, arrests are rarely made. The question, "why don't police make more domestic violence arrests" can be explained in part by the fact that the great majority of domestic violence calls concern acts which fall into the noncriminal category (i.e. there was insufficient probable cause to believe that a crime had been committed) which do not legally warrant an arrest (Hutchison et al, 1994). But what can explain the low arrest rates in misdemeanor and felony domestic violence where probable cause is present? Research indicates that a number of factors are inversely associated with police decisions to make arrests: police perception of victim as uncooperative (Belknap, 1995; Berk and Loseke, 1981; Buzawa and Buzawa, 1993; Ferraro, 1989; Smith, 1987); the attitude of some officers that domestic violence is "normal" for some racial groups (Ferraro, 1989); when disputants are married (Ferraro, 1989; Smith and Visher, 1981; Worden and Pollitz, 1984; Smith, 1987); when the suspect is not at the scene (Eigenberg et al, 1996; Feder, 1996; Robinson and Chandek, 2000; Worden and Pollitz, 1984); or when the incident occurs during the last hour of the officer's shift (Robinson and Chandek, 2000). On the other hand, several factors are positively related to making arrests including the presence of witnesses (Robinson and

Chandek, 2000); victim injuries (Feder, 1996; Ferraro, 1989); and incidents of repeat violence (Smith, 1987).

In some cases, battered women are being arrested along with their abuser or being arrested as primary physical aggressors. While there is widespread debate over the nature, prevalence, and severity of women's violence against their male intimate partners, there is virtually no data on the extent of the problem of female aggressors/batterers (Swan & Snow, 2003). Considerable evidence suggests that women generally use violence against their partners in self-defense or retaliation (Abel, 1999; Dasgupta, 1999; Hamberger & Potente, 1994; Swan & Snow, 2002) and that their violence is less injurious and less deadly (Archer, 2000, Brush, 1990; Makepiece, 1986; Morse, 1995; Sorenson et al, 1996). And yet, women are increasingly being arrested for domestic violence (Hamberger & Potente, 1994; Miller, 2001). It is not yet clear the extent to which battered women are being wrongfully arrested for domestic violence, but preliminary data suggests that the practice can have serious consequences for battered women and their children. In some cases, women who have been arrested for domestic violence are later denied access to shelters (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). And disturbingly, one study indicates that district attorneys prosecute arrested women at a higher rate than arrested men (Martin, 1997).

Another concern is of what happens when an abuser finally is arrested. According to Hirschel and colleagues (1992) arrest is rarely accompanied by an extended time in jail. An overview of various studies find that only about 25% of batterers are arrested, about one-third of those are prosecuted, and only 1% of those prosecuted actually receive any jail time beyond the few hours served after they were arrested

(Barnett, 2000). Many researchers suggest that even overnight incarcerations of batterers represent a greater deterrent to further abuse (Berk and Newton, 1985; Dutton, 1987; Hirschel et al, 1992).

Prosecution

Having rejected the overly optimistic view that arrest alone would deter domestic violence, researchers are increasingly turning their attention to the effectiveness of prosecuting and jailing batterers. The research on the effectiveness of prosecution is limited and findings are mixed. One study found that the prosecution of batterers indicated that it is a deterrent against further abuse (Ford and Regoli, 1993). Successful prosecutions are most likely to take place when prosecutors who are specially trained in domestic violence cases meet regularly with victims to prepare them to testify (Belknap et al, 1999; Sirles et al, 1993). Other conditions make successful and completed prosecutions more likely: victim advocacy and a coordinated community response (Gamache et al, 1988) and victims' cooperation in testifying (Cahn, 1992).

Prosecutors routinely complain that victims waste their time by dropping the charges or refusing to testify (Ford & Regoli, 1992). More than half of the women in one study failed to cooperate with prosecutors (Rebovich, 1996). However, many battered women may not follow through with their cases because they feel that the criminal justice system is ineffective (Erez and Belknap, 1998). They may also fear retaliation from the abuser (Ford and Regoli, 1993). The prosecution process can be prolonged, confusing and inconvenient (Weisz et al, 1998). The lack of tangible services like transportation

and babysitting can inhibit battered women from following through with the courts (Goodman et al, 2000). There may also be an incongruence between the victims' and the criminal justice system's goals (i.e. a woman may use the threat of a prosecution to get the abuser to grant her a divorce, and once this goal is met, she may drop the charges) (Bennett, Goodman & Dutton, 1999). Women of color, in particular, may be reluctant to follow through with cases because of the disproportionate incarceration of black men in the criminal justice system (Presser and Gaarder, 2000; Richie, 2000).

No-drop prosecution policies

Some prosecutors' offices have adopted aggressive no-drop prosecution policies in which battered women are required to cooperate with prosecutors regardless of her wishes, recantation or objection (Barnett, 2000). This policy has been alternately hailed and criticized by researchers. Some argue that no-drop policies protect women by placing the onus of prosecution on the state instead of battered women. Presumably, batterers cannot blame victims for pressing charges against them if there is a no-drop policy in place (see Buzawa et al, 1995; Hanna, 1996). However, others maintain that such policies disempower and potentially endanger battered women by going forward with prosecutions despite the pleas of victims fearing retaliation by their abusers (Mills, 1998; Stark, 2000). In extreme cases, battered women have been held in contempt of court and jailed for refusing to testify (Roth, 1998). It is not clear, from the limited research so far, whether the no-drop approach is effective in reducing recidivism (Davis et al, 1997). In its place, some prosecutors are using an alternative approach when

victims refuse or are unable to testify against their abusers. They treat the domestic assault cases as if they were murder cases- where no victim can testify. As evidence, they rely upon spontaneous statements made by the arrestee at the time of the arrest, photographs of the victims' injuries, and police officers' testimony (Barnett, 2000; Mills, 1999).

The Courts: Securing Orders of Protection

Apart from police and prosecutors, judges play a vital role in offering one of the only tangible services the criminal justice system can offer repeatedly battered women: orders of protection or restraining orders. By granting an order of protection to a victim, Judges compel batterers to comply with various conditions (i.e. staying away from the victim). This legal avenue affords women legal protection without necessarily having their abuser incarcerated (Finn, 1991). Some studies have found that restraining orders reduce the amount of contact between batterers and victims (Horton et al, 1987) and several studies indicate a high degree of defendant compliance (Chaudhuri and Daly, 1992; Fischer, 1992; Horton et al, 1987; Nickum, 1993). According to Buzawa and Buzawa (1990), having an order of protection may result in more positive responses from the police prosecutors and other court officers. One study found that regardless of the effectiveness of orders of protection, battered women thought of them as worthwhile because they documented the abuse, sent a message that the abuse was wrong, and alerted abusers that they could be punished for violating orders (Harrell & Smith, 1996; Stewart, 2000).

On the other hand, there are a number of problems with orders of protection. Victims are often apprehensive about applying for an order of protection for a number of reasons: fear of retaliation by the abuser; confusion over courtroom processes; and fear that they will not be believed (Ptacek, 1999). Unfortunately, judges sometimes confirm victims' worst fears by refusing to grant them orders of protection (Solender, 1998; Perry & Lemon, 1998; 2000). In cases where orders of protection are granted, judges sometimes fail to order the batterer to leave the home or provide financial support (Gondolf et al, 1994).

The effectiveness of orders of protection has been challenged by a number of studies. The enforcement of orders of protection is often so lax that battered women have been forced to sue police departments for non-enforcement (Barnett, 2000). And most judges do not punish abusers who violate the orders (Davis, 1998). Some suggest that the effectiveness of restraining orders is generally limited to mild cases of domestic violence (Chaudhari and Daly, 1992; Fernandez et al, 1997; Grau et al, 1985). According to Fernandez et al (1997), it was only when the violence was not severe, when batterers were employed and did not have prior criminal, drug or alcohol histories that restraining orders were effective in deterring future battering. Also when women are more financially dependent on their abusers, they are less likely to persist in obtaining a restraining order (Fernandez et al, 1997).

Domestic Violence Shelters

Domestic violence shelters were virtually nonexistent before 1976. Now there are approximately 2000 shelters for battered women across the country (Sullivan, 1997). In addition to providing emergency shelter, domestic violence shelters often provide 24-hour crisis hotlines, counseling, legal advocacy, children's services and a number of other support services. Shelters have been found to be one of the most supportive and effective resources according to the residents themselves (Bowker and Mauer, 1985; Sedlak, 1988; Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz, 1980). Berk, Newton and Berk (1986) found that for women who were actively attempting other strategies at the same time (i.e. calling the police, trying to obtain an order of protection, seeking counseling, requesting legal aid), a stay at a domestic violence shelter dramatically decreased the likelihood of further abuse. However, for residents who did not seek additional help, the shelter experience did not have any discernible positive effect (Berk et al, 1986).

Not all women have access to shelters. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, for every woman who receives shelter, three are turned away for lack of space (Sullivan, 1997). The lack of domestic violence shelters is in great part due to the lack of adequate federal funding: traditionally, shelters rely upon contributions or grants from local, state or federal sources. However, these funds are in relative short supply compared to other criminal justice expenditures (Wallace, 2002). One report underscores the problem of the dearth of domestic violence shelters in the United States: there exist three times more animal shelters than battered women's shelters in the United States (Senate Judiciary Committee, U.S. Congress, 1992).

Studies also indicate that not all women feel welcome or comfortable at domestic violence shelters. African American women are not as likely as white women to turn to domestic violence shelters unless the violence becomes quite severe (Sullivan and Rumptz, 1994). Coley and Beckett (1988) suggest that the delayed use of domestic violence shelters by black women may be due to restrictive shelter rules which conflict with the women's cultural values and practices (i.e. limited communication with family members and "no spanking" rules) (Coley and Beckett, 1988). Shelters may not be multilingual and may offer living or eating arrangements that are culturally alien or violate cultural or religious norms. For example, Orthodox Jewish women may not be able to keep kosher in a shelter (Wang, 1996). There are also a number of restrictions and rules at shelters that may also prevent some battered women from gaining access to them. Most shelters have rules prohibiting women from bringing older male children with them to the shelter for safety reasons (Renzetti et al, 2001). For drug-involved women, shelter space is virtually nonexistent: currently only one domestic violence shelter serves women on methadone in New York City (Frye et al, 2001). These problems of inadequate and inefficient domestic violence shelters represent an institutional failure to provide battered women safe havens from violence. Arguably, this institutional failure may breed retaliatory violence by women lacking adequate resources and suffering from isolation.

The Response of the Health Care System

Early studies on the healthcare response to domestic violence suggests that medical personnel did not ask their patients about domestic violence (Pagelow, 1981; Stark, Flitcraft and Frazier, 1979) or correctly diagnose the origin of the injuries of battered women (Stark and Flitcraft, 1988; Warshaw, 1993) despite the fact that a high percentage of women entering emergency rooms and other healthcare settings are battered (Goldberg and Tomlanovich, 1984; Hamberger at al, 1992; Helton, 1986; Stark and Flitcraft, 1982). According to a number of studies, battered women make up anywhere from 22-40% of all women who seek emergency room assistance (Flitcraft et al, 1992; Goldberg and Tomlanovich, 1984; Kurz and Stark, 1988; Stark et al, 1979).

To remedy this problem, the Surgeon General of the United States recommended in 1992 that physicians increase their awareness of domestic violence (Novello et al, 1992). Consequently, many hospitals instituted policy changes requiring physicians and medical personnel to participate in domestic violence trainings and to adhere to certain domestic violence protocol designed to identify and treat abuse. However, evaluation studies indicate that medical personnel do not routinely ask about domestic violence (Warshaw, 1993). According to Warshaw (1993), only 10% of physicians completed a psychosocial history or asked patients about a history of domestic violence. Studies of medical residents and physicians indicate that medical personnel routinely fail to detect signs of domestic violence (Chambliss et al, 1995; Saunders and Kinney, 1993). Indeed, several studies suggest that battered women regard the healthcare profession as the least helpful of all professions (Bowker and Mauer, 1987; Dobash, Dobash and Cavanaugh,

1985; Frieze et al, 1980; Lowe, 2001). By failing to detect domestic violence or adequately responding to it, healthcare professionals may unintentionally increase battered women's isolation (Lowe, 2001). However, when medical personnel respond to battered women with compassion and concern, they can begin to draw the woman out of her isolation, acknowledge that her suffering is real, express concern, and refer her to vital services (Lowe, 2001).

The Response of the Mental Health Care System

The effectiveness of social workers with regard to helping battered women is mixed according to extant studies. One of the few available studies found that there is a particularly high drop-out rate of battered women from therapy. This was found to be particularly true of those who were younger, unemployed or more socially isolated (Cantin & Rinfret-Raynor, 1993). And like healthcare professionals, social workers have been found to underestimate the existence of domestic violence among their clients (Johnson, 1985). Most therapists do not screen for domestic violence and they may not appreciate the seriousness of the problem (Barnett, 2001). Some do not even account for victims' most basic safety needs (Ackerman & Ackerman, 1996). For example, an early study in which case files were randomly reviewed found that social workers sometimes encouraged women to stay with their abusers "for the sake of the children" (Maynard, 1985).

Many therapists also lack specialized training in domestic violence (Campbell et al, 1999). Untrained therapists may fail to connect battering to women's psychological

symptoms (Browne, 1993), attribute women's compliance with their batterers as a form of codependency (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997), and lack cultural competence in dealing with battered women from diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds (Gondolf, 1998). Ideally, therapists attribute the battering problem to the batterer and not the victim or the family as a whole (Barnett, 2001).

The Response of Religious Institutions

Studies indicate that religious institutions are ambivalent about addressing domestic violence. "Religion and spirituality may serve either as a mechanism for achieving resilience in the face of domestic assault or as contributors to women's vulnerability." (Bell & Mathis, 2000: 528). Historically, responses to battered women by religious leaders have been largely unsupportive (Barnett, 2001). Many feminist domestic violence researchers argue that Judeo-Christian tenets support a patriarchal family structure as God's will (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Martin, 1979). Many religious leaders emphasize the sanctity of marriage (Marano, 1997; Whipple, 1987; Wood & McHugh, 1994) over considerations like safety (Adams, 1993). Some religious leaders may feel that some forms of abuse or male dominance are not adequate reasons for ending a marriage (Alsdurf & Alsdurf, 1988). All too often, battered women have been told by clergy that they should pray to God to end that abuse, remain with the abuser, or become more submissive to please their abusive partners (Alsdurf & Alsdurf, 1988; Horton et al, 1988; Whipple, 1987).

Interviews with battered women suggest that their satisfaction with religious leaders is mixed. While one study found that only 14% of religious women found their interactions with clergy helpful (Horton et al, 1988), another study suggests that religious leaders were helpful in referring battered women to outside services like counseling and shelter (Wood & McHugh, 1994). However, while religious institutions may not always be supportive of battered women, many battered women report the significance of their spiritual beliefs and religious faith to survive their ordeals (Humphreys et al, 1999).

For some racial/ethnic groups, religious institutions are particularly important institutions to which women can turn for support. In the case of African American community, "the Black church and spirituality are anchors of the African American cultural experience" (Hampton et al, 2003:551). However, the Black church often portrays male privilege as "divinely sanctioned" (West, 1999). In spite of this patriarchal orientation, black women often rely upon the faith community for support and to escape the isolation of domestic violence (Hampton et al, 2003).

Extralegal Responses to Abuse: Fighting Back and "Street Justice"

In the absence of effective institutional responses, some women may resort to extralegal responses to deal with the abuse (Moss et al, 1997; Saunders, 1986). For the purposes of this study, extralegal responses to abuse fits into one of two main categories[1]: fighting back includes acts of violence and forceful resistance that may or may not legally

[1] These categories are derived in part from prior definitions of retaliatory violence developed by Shotland (1976) that include four categories: 1) victims unleashing violence that is in excess of what the law permits under the self-defense doctrine; 2) avenging an earlier incident; 3) retaliatory actions carried out on behalf of friends or family; and 4) spontaneous mob actions in which a crowd responds to a victim's plea for help and gets carried away (Karmen, 2001:331).

constitute self-defense and may include acts of retaliation by the woman to avenge earlier incidents of abuse and *"street justice"* includes retaliatory actions carried out on behalf of victims by family members or close friends.

While there has been a significant amount of research on the issue of women's use of violence, the focus of this work has largely been on the "symmetry of violence" question: whether or not women commit as much intimate partner violence as men (Perilla et al, 2003). One major school of thought on this subject, the family systems perspective, suggests that women use violence as frequently as men (Steinmetz, 1981; Stets & Straus, 1990; Straus & Gelles, 1986; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). This research has been conducted utilizing the CTS (Conflict Tactics Scale) (Straus, 1979) or the revised CTS-2 (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). These scales ask respondents about the number of times they have used and/or been victims of intimate partner violence in the past twelve months (Perilla, 2003). These scales have been criticized by some researchers for disregarding the situational and cultural contexts of intimate partner violence (Renzetti, 1999; Dasgupta, 2002), and for not underscoring the fact that the outcome of violent acts differs by gender (Renzetti, 1999).

Feminist research, on the other hand, has tended to focus on women's *motivations* for using violence against their partners; the meaning that such violence holds for women, and the consequences of women's use of violence (Perilla, 2003). According to Renzetti (1999), men tend to use violence against their partners as a tactic of maintaining control in the relationship, whereas women tend to do so as a form of self-defense or to fight back when being attacked (Bograd, 1984; Jones, 1996; Kurz, 1989; Renzetti, 1999). However, the feminist analysis of women's use of violence has been critiqued on several

levels: this perspective does not adequately explain intimate partner violence in lesbian relationships (Perilla, 2003), nor does it address women's use of violence that is not entirely self-defensive.

There is a small, but growing literature suggesting that intimate partner violence takes many forms and that not every instance of intimate partner violence matches the prototypical model of the brutalizing husband/boyfriend and the docile, victimized wife/girlfriend. In fact, Johnson (1995, 2000) argues that women utilize violence for a wider range of motivations than simply self-defense. According to Johnson and Ferraro (2000), the four main patterns of couple abuse are: 1) common couple violence (CCV), 2) intimate terrorism (IT), 3) mutual violent control (MVC) and 4) violent resistance (VR), According to Johnson, the first type of partner violence, CCV, is the most widespread form of intimate partner abuse. Contrary to the feminist view of woman battering, CCV is *not* characterized by a pattern of power and control but rather by relatively infrequent mutual physical altercations resulting from specific conflicts. This pattern of couple abuse does not tend to escalate over time, is less likely to be severe, and is more likely to be mutual than other forms of intimate partner violence (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000). IT, on the other hand, is the pattern of abuse that feminists describe as "battering". The violence is motivated by the abuser's need to exert control over their partner. IT involves more frequent abuse than CCV, tends to escalate over time, is less likely to be mutual, and is more likely to involve serious injury. However, it is not merely the severity of abuse that distinguishes IT from CCV, it is the added controlling and isolating behaviors of abusers (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). Empirical evidence suggests that the vast majority of perpetrators of IT are men and women are

predominantly its victims (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). MVC is a third pattern of couple abuse that seems to be rare: it is when both partners use controlling and violent tactics to vie for power over the other (Johnson, 1999, Johnson and Ferraro, 2000).

The fourth pattern of abuse, according to Johnson and Ferraro (2000), is "violent resistance" and is most frequently committed by women (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000) but it is not synonymous with self-defense. The domestic violence literature reveals hardly any information on women who actively resist their abusers by fighting back although there is also some evidence suggesting that violent resistance by the woman is an indicator that the woman will soon leave her abusive partner (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). It is this type of violence—violent resistance-- with which this study is largely concerned. Very little has been written about women's "violent resistance" which on the one hand acknowledges the agency of women who fight back and at the same time recognizes its structural underpinnings. One of the few examples is bell hooks' description of women's violence as an example of "how violence in the home is closely linked to the sexism and male domination present in our society and acceptance of the use of coercive force by a more powerful individual to control others" (Perilla et al, 2003: 12).

Mounting evidence suggests that women of color, particularly black women, are more likely to use forceful resistance or retaliatory violence against their abusers (Fine and Weis, 1998; Fishman, 2000; Websdale, 1999) or use street justice (Dupont, unpublished manuscript, 2001). This is illustrated most markedly by the fact that black women kill their abusers at a disproportionately higher rate than women from other racial/ethnic groups (Websdale, 1999). This finding can be interpreted in a number of

ways. Some researchers argue that the relatively high rate of homicides committed by black women can be explained by the controversial "subculture of violence" theory which suggests that violence is more socially accepted in some racial, ethnic or subgroups than others (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967). On the other hand, some researchers suggest that the historical legacy of racist oppression, economic exploitation and sexual abuse suffered by black women during and since slavery has led to a convergence in male and female use of violence (Fishman, 2000). Websdale similarly argues that black women's greater involvement in intimate partner homicide can be explained by a combination of historical, structural, and cultural factors specific to the experience of blacks (Websdale, 1999).

However, one could also argue that the higher rate of intimate partner homicides by black women represents a failure on the part of helping agencies to effectively deal with domestic violence in poor, black communities. In the absence of effective alternatives within the criminal justice and social systems, marginalized battered women may feel that they have no choice but to take matters into their own hands by utilizing *extralegal* tactics, namely fighting back, using retaliatory violence or relying on street justice by third parties to deter their abusers from beating them. However, there are no studies to date testing this hypothesis.

Overview of Study

This study seeks to fill a void in the literature by studying the help-seeking behaviors of battered women who are predominantly low-income women of color.

Because low-income women are most at risk of severe and lethal domestic violence, it is important to learn about the help-seeking decisions of this population, as well as how criminal justice and social service responses are perceived by disadvantaged battered women. Studies suggest that when help-seeking are met with inadequate and ineffective responses by helping agents, battered women may be more likely to stay with the abuser and cope with the violence as best they can (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). By staying, battered women may be more at risk of being killed or of killing their abusers. They may also be more likely to "take matters into their own hands" and rely upon *extralegal* tactics like forceful resistance, retaliatory violence and "street justice" (Karmen, 2001; Shotland, 1976). Thus, the ineffectual response of help-seeking agencies—police, courts, and shelters—can have a powerful negative impact on battered women's subsequent help-seeking decisions. On the other hand, positive interactions with helping agencies can help battered women redefine the relationship as abusive (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988); confirm their grievances (Davies, 1971); and make resources available (Oberschall, 1973); and empower them in their process of finding safety (Browne, 1998; Gondolf and Fisher, 1988).

THEORY

This study is a theoretically guided research project about the help-seeking behaviors of battered women. As stated earlier, help-seeking is a crucial area of study because help-seeking presents an opportunity for both formal and informal sources of help to help battered women redefine their experiences as abusive, empower them to make positive changes, and provide tangible services to enable women and children to escape abusive relationships (if they decide to do so). Help-seeking can be a crucial step in the process of ending/leaving abusive relationships. And while leaving is *not always* the preferred or best way to deal with abusive relationships, it is often the best solution for many women.

There are two competing theoretical perspectives on help-seeking: "learned helplessness theory" and the "survivor theory". Both perspectives attempt to explain how battered women make decisions about help-seeking, and ultimately, ending abusive relationships. This study utilizes a modified version of the Survivor Theory as its theoretical framework.

Psychological Theories on Help-Seeking

Generally speaking, "learned helplessness" can be characterized as a psychological theory that addresses battered women's responses to ongoing victimization. In order to understand learned helplessness it is first necessary to explore the school of thought from which it derives. Psychological theories on battering tend to

trace the problem to the individual personality traits and psychological disorders of both the victim and batterer. However, feminist theorists have argued that psychological theories have tended to regard battered women as more severely pathological and troubled than the men who batter them (Schneider, 2000:23). Many of the psychological theories focusing on battered women have examined the provocative behaviors of battered women or their supposed masochistic traits or tendencies as explanations for their decisions to remain in abusive relationships (Schneider, 2000:23).

The question, "why don't battered women just leave?" has been the topic of many psychological studies which have subsequently been criticized by many feminist researchers as victim-blaming (Browne, 1995). Early examples of such perspectives include the application of Sigmund Freud's psychological concept that women are innately masochistic to battered women (Masson, 1984). Psychiatry, under the influence of Helene Deutsch, popularized the notion that battered women are masochists who provoke their husbands into to beating them (Schneider, 2000:20). A modern version of this theory by Shainess suggests that some battered women suffer from "masochistic personality" and seek out and exacerbate their own abuse (Shainess, 1984:127). In this formulation, however, "masochism is learned developmentally rather than predestined as the Freudians suggest" (Stahly, 1996:15). However, the contention that battered women seek out and perpetuate their own victimization has been seriously challenged (Campbell, 1990; Dutton et al, 1994; Holtzworth-Munroe, 1988; McDonald, 1989).

Family system theories, on the other hand, suggest that all family members play roles in maintaining the status quo even in violent and destructive relationships. The battered woman is seen as an equal participant in the violent relationship (Stahly, 1996).

According to another theory (based on alcoholic families) battered women may play a role in maintaining the dysfunctional relationship by "enabling" abusers or by becoming "codependent" on them (Stahly, 1996:293). While there appears to be no empirical evidence for such a generalization, it implies that battered women are addicted to abusive relationships and help to maintain them.

Another popular psychological theory that has been used to explain why some battered women do not leave is the Traumatic Bonding theory. According to this theory, as with hostages, battered women my develop positive feelings toward the abuser as a result of the traumatic bond that develops as a result of chronic, intermittent abusive relationships (Dutton and Painter, 1981). In order to survive, the battered woman tries to survive by "anticipating the abuser's needs and satisfying his wants, that is, by learning to think like the abuser" (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988).

For the purposes of this study, the psychological theory that most directly applies to the issue of battered women's responses to battering and in particular, their help-seeking behaviors, is the "learned helplessness theory" which was first developed by Martin Seligman (Seligman & Maier, 1968) and later popularized by Lenore Walker (Walker, 1977, 1979, 1989).

Learned Helplessness: A Psychological Theory on Help-Seeking

The theory of learned helplessness is based on Martin Seligman's studies of animal behavior indicating that when an abused animal is repeatedly prevented from escaping punishment it will eventually stop trying to escape and instead try to cope with

the abuse as best they can (Seligman and Maier, 1968). Seligman's dog studies involved the placement of dogs in cages and administration of electric shocks to them at random and variable times. (This intermittent shock treatment resembles the kind of repeated and unpredictable abuse that battered women experience). Seligman found that the dogs quickly learned that there was nothing they could do to predictably control the shocks. Eventually, dogs appeared to completely cease any attempts to escape. Furthermore, even when researchers tried to teach dogs to escape, they appeared passive, sometimes lying in their own excrement, refusing both to leave and to try to avoid the administered electric shocks. However, as Walker points out, the dogs were not truly passive. Upon closer examination, the researchers found that dogs had developed a coping mechanism for dealing with the unpredictable and repeated electric shocks. By lying in their own excrement in a part of the electrical grid receiving the least amount of electrical stimulation, they were able to insulate themselves, thus reducing the pain of the shocks (Walker, 1989:50).

Learned helplessness has been used to explain the behaviors of a wide variety of human populations caught in chronically abusive situations (i.e. concentration camp detainees, prisoners of war, and institutionalized patients). Dr. Lenore Walker was the first to apply this theory to battered women (Walker, 1977). Walker argued that battering follows the three-stage "Cycle of Violence" pattern and that the experience of repeated and unpredictable violence produces in battered women a condition of psychological paralysis. Similar to Seligman's dogs, battered women's motivations to respond to the abuse decrease. Battered women "don't attempt to leave the battering situation, even when it may seem to outsiders that escape is possible, because they cannot predict their

own safety; they believe that nothing they or anyone else does will alter their terrible circumstances" (Walker, 1989: 50). Their self-confidence diminishes and they are likely to suffer from anxiety and depression (Walker, 1979). Walker argues that battered women may develop psychological symptoms that continue to affect their ability to function long after the original trauma (Walker, 1989:48). As a result of their learned helplessness, they "will be more likely to respond to that situation with coping responses rather than by trying to escape" (Walker, 1989:50). Ultimately, "they may believe that they are essentially helpless, lacking power to change their situation" (Walker, 1989: 48).

Learned helplessness is a component of Lenore Walker's Cycle of Violence theory. The "Cycle of Violence" theory suggests that most—although not all-- abusive relationships are characterized by a pattern that has three distinct phases: the tension-building phase; the acute battering incident; and the tranquil, loving (or at least nonviolent) phase (Walker, 1989). During the tension-building phase, "minor battering incidents occur; slaps, pinches, controlled verbal abuse, and psychological warfare may all be part of this phase" (Walker, 1989: 42). Walker suggests that the woman generally attempts to placate the abuser in order to prevent the batterer's violence from increasing (Walker, 1989, 1989:43). However, over time, her attempts to placate the batterer become less effective. The abuse inevitably worsens and the tension between the woman and her abuser increases. According to Walker, the psychological anguish of this phase is its worst aspect. As a result, some battered women may provoke an incident simply to "get it over with" (Walker, 1989: 43). Ultimately, however, the battered woman withdraws emotionally due to the constant stress of trying to accommodate the batterer's unpredictable moods and behavior. "Angry at her emotional unavailability and, because

of that anger, less likely to be placated, the batterer becomes more oppressive and abusive. At some point and often not predictably, the violence spirals out of control and an acute battering incident takes place" (Walker, 1989:43).

The acute battering incident is characterized by severe acts of brutal, destructive and sometimes deadly physical violence. According to Walker, the acute battering incident is so unpredictable and out of control that the battered woman learns that she cannot reason with her abuse and that resistance is futile (Walker, 1989: 44). The final phase of the Cycle of Violence theory is the phase of loving/contrition (of simply relative tranquility). The batterer may exhibit remorse or express loving, nurturing behavior toward his partner. In this phase, the battered woman may join her partner in sustaining the illusion that the abuse was an aberration, that he will change and that it will never happen again (Walker, 1989: 45). The battered woman may also believe that they are the sole support of the batterer's emotional stability and sanity. Women's perceptions of batterers as unstable and dependent are supported by the fact that a significant percentage of batterers commit suicide when their partners leave them (Walker, 1989:44). Consequently, Walker regards the third phase as the most psychologically damaging one for women because it is during this period that the interdependency between batterers and battered women is cemented: "she for his caring behavior and he for her forgiveness" (Walker, 1989:45).

Walker argues that the apparent passivity of women throughout this Cycle of Violence is a logical reaction given a number of factors. Walker suggests that with repeated beatings, the battered woman gradually becomes psychologically paralyzed and loses her motivation to respond. This can be explained by the social learning theory of

"intermittent reinforcement" (Walker, 1989: 47). According to this theory, behavior that is intermittently reinforced is the most difficult behavior to stop. In the case of a battering relationship, the batterer upholds his/her power by using random and predictable violence. Consequently, the battered woman does not know what to expect from her partner at any given moment: sometimes he/she is indulgent and nurturing and at other times he/she displays physical and psychological cruelty. Because the relationship is sometimes pleasant or even loving, the battered woman may minimize the abuse and hope for better times.

Some researchers have reformulated learned helplessness from a theory that emphasizes behaviorist conditioning (i.e. that women learn submissiveness and learned helplessness) to one that acknowledges individual expectations and attributions in mediating learned helplessness (Janoff-Bulman and Frieze, 1983). Thus, one's perception of the environment is what influences one's reaction to it. Qualitative studies on battered women have found that women's assumptions about their social environment contribute to their reactions to the abuse (Frieze, 1979; Mills, 1985; Ferraro and Johnson, 1983). However, rather than confirming the learned helplessness theory, several studies on battered women challenge many of the assumptions of the learned helplessness theory.

Critiques of Learned Helplessness

The Learned Helplessness theory has been criticized by a number of researchers for a variety of reasons. Feminist researchers, in particular, have challenged learned helplessness based on two main criticisms: 1) the theory's psychological and largely

apolitical interpretation of battered women's responses to battering and 2) the lack of empirical support for its characterization of battered women as helpless.

Learned helplessness overemphasizes individual and psychological factors

There are two main theoretical perspectives that have been used to explain domestic violence: 1) Individual/Psychological Perspectives and 2) Societal/Sociological Perspectives. Individual/Psychological explanations tend to focus on the pathology of the abuser and sometimes the characteristics of victims (O'Leary, 1993). Mainstream societal/Sociological explanations are grounded in family-oriented and sociologically-based theories (Gelles, 1993) and tend to view domestic violence as an outcome of weakening family structures; lack of support structures for families (Steinmetz, 1980); the socialization of children to be violent (Finkelhor et al, 1988; Hotaling and Sugarman, 1990); and stresses that impact family life including unemployment, poverty, and occupational stress (Steinmetz, 1980).

Feminist domestic violence researchers are generally sociological in their approach: they examine domestic violence from a macro-level, social/structural level of analysis. However, feminists depart from mainstream sociological theorists by rejecting gender-neutral positions on battering. According to feminists, domestic violence is considered endemic to patriarchal cultures where women make up an underclass and where physical violence is but one form of violence against women (Jackson and Oates, 1998). Battering is seen as a problem of power and control and is understood "within the context of the larger dilemma of gender subordination which includes gender role

socialization; social and economic discrimination in education, the workplace, and home; and lack of access to childcare" (Schneider, 2000:21-22). Women are abused through economic deprivation, sexual exploitation and intimidation such as that achieved through stalking and isolation (Yllo, 1993). Feminist legal scholar Donna Coker links battering to the wider societal gender inequalities:

> Battering may be experienced as a personal violation, but it is an act facilitated and made possible by societal gender inequalities. The batterer does not, indeed could not, act alone. Social supports for battering include widespread denial of its frequency or harm, economic structures that render women vulnerable, and sexist ideology that holds women accountable for male violence and for the emotional lives of families, and that fosters deference to male familial control. Batterers often use the political and economic vulnerability of women to reinforce their power and dominance over particular women. (Schneider, 2000:12).

The Learned Helplessness theory is generally described as a psychological theory because of its emphasis on battered women's psychological functioning. And while it is important to note that when Walker first wrote about the learned helplessness theory she described it as a "psychosocial" theory because this phenomenon "was the product of interaction between the social and personality systems" (Bowker, 1993:154), she has since described the theory as purely psychological construct (Bowker, 1993:154).

Feminists critique psychological theories for their micro-level analyses of battering that fail to address the wider structural and institutional constraints battered women face when attempting to escape violent relationships. Feminist researchers have also argued vehemently against victim-blaming psychological explanations of why some

battered women remain in abusive relationships. They have argued that psychological approaches to woman battering tend to regard battered women as pathological and troubled (Schneider, 2000) and often focus on the provocative behaviors of battered women or their supposed masochistic traits or tendencies as explanations for their decisions to remain in abusive relationships (Schneider, 2000:23). As an alternative to these views, feminists underscore to the many social, institutional and structural obstacles to leaving and emphasize the many rational reasons why some battered women stay in abusive relationships.

It is important to note, however, that feminism as a theoretical perspective comprises several schools of thought which have a particular bearing on woman battering: 1) Radical feminism, 2) Socialist feminism and 3) Multicultural (or Race/Class/Gender analysis) feminism. Radical feminists were instrumental in first drawing attention to the prevalence and seriousness of sexual and domestic violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Schecter, 1982). In the 1970's, they were largely responsible for generating attention to the issue of violence against women and for founding the first battered women's shelters and rape crisis centers. They argued that patriarchal oppression is the most widespread and severe form of inequality (even more than class and race) and that eliminating women's subordination takes precedence over rooting out other forms of inequality. Socialist feminists, on the other hand, locate women's oppression both in patriarchy *and* class oppression. Radical and socialist feminists both believe that women are particularly vulnerable to male violence because of their unequal status in their homes and society. Under these circumstances, battered women are less

likely to have access to supportive networks, and in general have fewer social and personal options.

An emerging feminist theoretical perspective is the multicultural feminist theory (sometimes referred to as Third World feminism, Africana feminism, and Race/Class/Gender analysis) (see Collins, 1990; Davis, 1983; hooks, 1989; Mann & Grimes, 2001). Multicultural feminists are particularly concerned about the plight of marginalized women- women of color and poor women. They challenge the radical feminist view that gender inequality is the primary factor determining domestic violence. Multicultural approaches to domestic violence recognize that marginalized battered women's oppression is multiplied by their location in particular race, class, gender, and sexual orientation systems of discrimination. For such women, domestic violence is not the only or primary violence shaping family life. Based upon this theoretical perspective, battered women's help-seeking options and decisions are impacted by structural factors like poverty and racial discrimination as well as male domination,

While *all* feminists generally acknowledge the significant structural and institutional factors that shape and constrain battered women's choices with regard to help-seeking behavior, they reject the idea that battered women are helpless and lack agency (Collins, 1998; Mahoney, 1994; West, 1999). Feminist researchers increasingly adopt a more complicated vision of battered women is emerging which simultaneously recognizes victimization and strength (Browne, 1998; Maher, 1997; Schneider, 2000). One feminist theory that has emerged to counter the "learned helplessness" theory of battered women is the "Survivor Theory" (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988).

Learned helplessness lacks empirical support

Empirical data on battered women suggests that while escaping abusive relationships is difficult and often takes time, close examination of battered women's responses to battering suggests, contrary to the learned helplessness theory, that women actively seek help and attempt to leave their abusive relationships. This alternative perspective-- the Survivor Theory-- suggests that battered women actively seek help from a number of both formal and informal sources as the abuse escalates (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). The main element of the Survivor Theory is that battered women attempt to seek help in a logical fashion, to assure themselves and their children protection and therefore survival.

Domestic violence researchers increasingly characterize the act of getting safe/leaving abusive relationships as a *process* involving many stages through which battered women must pass before they are able to finally break free of their abusers (Landenburger, 1989; Mills, 1985; Moss et al, 1997; Wuest and Merritt-Gray, 1999). This characterization is significant since it allows for a more nuanced and realistic view of how abusive relationships end. Several qualitative studies have explored the process of "getting out" and found that battered women generally undergo a shift in their perception of themselves which allows them to seek help and detach from their abusers. This shift in perception requires that they begin to see themselves not as devoted and long-suffering mates, but as victims of undeserved abuse (Campbell et al, 1998; Chang, 1989; Ferraro and Johnson, 1983; Goetting, 1999; Ulrich, 1991). For example, as the abuse escalates, battered women generally feel that the self-blame associated with learned helplessness is

inappropriate" (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988: 16). While interviews with battered women suggest that they may initially blame themselves for the abuse (Frieze, 1980), as their attempts to change their behavior to avoid further abuse fails, they increasingly blame the batterer for the abuse and seek ways to change the abuser. When even this fails to stop the abuse, women seek more decisive interventions and means to establish their own safety (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). Similarly, Ferraro and Johnson (1983) argue that battered women initially rationalize the abuse, however, due to a number of catalysts-- an increase in the level of violence, change in the women's resources, change in the visibility of violence, despair, change in the quality of the relationship, and external definitions of the violence—they begin to reject these rationalizations (McDonald, 1989).

Studies of battered women indicate that despite all the obstacles, they do seek help to end their partner's violence. Using data from the 1985 National Family Violence Re-Survey (Straus and Gelles, 1986), Wauchope found that of the 3,665 women surveyed, 68% of those severely battered had sought help at least once (Wauchope, 1988). Another study of more than 6,000 women from fifty different shelters found that the women had made an average of six help-seeking efforts before entering the shelter (Gondolf, 1988). Other studies confirm the high rate of help-seeking efforts of battered women (Binney et al, 1981; Boker, 1983; Horton et al, 1987; Schulman, 1979). Even Walker's own sample of battered women reported that they increasingly sought help as the abuse escalated (Walker, 1984:27). In her study, 14% of the women sought help after the first violent incident, 22% after the second incident, 31% after the worst incident and 49% after the last incident. Also, nearly one-fourth of the women temporarily left the

abuser immediately after each violent incident (Walker, 1984). Other studies substantiate the active help-seeking behaviors of battered women (Bowker, 1983; Pagelow, 1981).

However, evidence suggests that there is a limit to the initiative of battered women. After repeated unsuccessful attempts to control the battering, some women may begin to give up and lessen their help-seeking efforts (Okum, 1986). This resignation is not due to psychological paralysis on the part of battered women but rather the "learned helplessness" of helping agencies (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). According to the Survivor Theory, agency personnel may suffer from insufficient resources, options, or authority to make a difference, and therefore become reluctant to take decisive action (Bass and Rice, 1979; McEvoy et al, 1983, McShane, 1979).

The Survivor Theory: An Alternative Model to Learned Helplessness

One feminist theory that has emerged to counter the "learned helplessness" theory of battered women is the "Survivor Theory" (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). This theory suggests that battered women actively seek help from a number of both formal and informal sources as the abuse escalates (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). The main element of the Survivor Theory is that battered women attempt to seek help in a logical fashion, to assure themselves and their children protection and therefore survival. "Their effort to survive transcends even fearsome danger, dependency, or guilt and economic constraints. It supercedes the "giving up and giving in" which occurs according to learned helplessness" (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988:18).

The "Survivor Theory" (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988) emphasizes battered women's strengths and help-seeking behaviors while simultaneously recognizing some of the barriers that can impede help-seeking. Contrary to the psychological explanation offered by the learned helplessness model, the Survivor Theory suggests that women's help-seeking is limited not by psychological paralysis but by a number of factors including resources available to the women, her level commitment to the relationship, the number of children she has, and the kinds of abuse she may have experienced as a child (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988).

One of the main obstacles that battered women face, according to this theory, is the insufficient and ineffective response of helping agents (i.e. the police, counselors, victim services agencies). The Survivor Theory suggests that battered women respond to abuse with help-seeking efforts that are largely unmet by helping agencies (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988:11). Gondolf has even gone so far as to suggest that it is the helpers of battered women that suffer from "learned helplessness": "the inadequacy of help sources may be attributed to a kind of learned helplessness experienced in many community services. Service providers feel too overwhelmed and limited in their resources to be effective and therefore do not try as hard as they might" (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988:12).

The Survivor Theory includes the following elements:

1) In the face of increased violence, battered women increase their help-seeking behaviors rather than decreasing help-seeking, as learned helplessness would suggest;

2) Help-seeking is likely to increase as wife abuse, child abuse and the batterer's antisocial behavior (i.e. substance abuse, general violence and arrests) increase;
3) This help-seeking may be mediated, as current research suggests, by a variety of factors including resources available to the woman; her level of commitment to the relationship; the number of children she has; and history of some forms of child abuse (particularly sexual abuse) (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988).

The Survivor Theory suggests that battered women's help-seeking generally progresses in a particular sequence. After the first incidents of abuse, the woman may blame herself for the abuse (Frieze, 1980). Thus, the woman may initially attempts to change her behavior in order to avoid further violence. She may also, at this point, seek advice from friends or family. If she fails to get sufficient support and proper advice, she may begin to doubt her own judgment (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). Then as the violence continues, the battered woman begins to realize that no matter what she does to please the abuser, the violence persists. She logically begins to attribute blame to the batterer and seeks to change him/her. She may participate in marital counseling or contact victim services agencies for help. But her attempts often fail to end the violence and the abuse generally escalates. However, her insights into the dynamics of the abuse continue to grow (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). With escalating abuse, the battered woman eventually realizes that the batterer is not likely to change. She seeks more decisive intervention through legal assistance and explores ways to live separate from the abuser. This often includes calling the police, getting an order of protection or contacting a domestic

violence shelter. *If these efforts fail, the battered woman may continue in the abusive relationship and cope with the abuse as best she can.* If the woman does receive appropriate support, she begins to accept herself as a "survivor" and continues the long process of help-seeking required to live safely on her own (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988:17).

The Modified Survivor Theory: A New Theoretical Approach to Help-seeking

This study applies a modified version of Gondolf's Survivor Theory (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988) to examine the help-seeking behaviors of battered women. This Modified Survivor Theory was specifically created for this study and incorporates new findings in the help-seeking literature on domestic violence while addressing many of the original Survivor theory's basic premises: that women seek assistance in proportion to the realization that they and their children are more and more in danger; that their help-seeking is constrained by a number of institutional obstacles (i.e. ineffective responses and interventions by the police or other helpers); and that inadequate responses from helpers can have serious consequences for battered women.

The Modified Survivor Theory suggests that in addition to the mediating factors of the original Survivor Theory—factors that may inhibit or empower women to try to leave abusive relationships--battered women encounter many other obstacles to help-seeking. Since the original Survivor Theory was developed, studies have identified a wider range of factors that can impede battered women's help-seeking behaviors. According to the Modified Survivor Theory, the barriers to help-seeking are not limited to institutional obstacles. There are three main types of obstacles to help-seeking: 1)

individual-level obstacles, and 2) institutional, and 3) structural obstacles. The following lists detail obstacles from each category (since structural and institutional obstacles are often interrelated, these categories are collapsed into one grouping).

Individual-level obstacles to help-seeking:

- Threats by the abuser to hurt the woman or her kids if she tried to leave (Browne, 1987; Campbell, 1992; Fleury, 2000; Stahly, 1996)
- Fear that abuser would fight for custody of the children if she tried to leave (Chesler, 1986; Stahly et al, 1988; Stahly, 1990)
- Fear that the abuser would kidnap the children if she tried to leave (Stahly et al, 1988; Stahly, 1990)
- Controlling and isolating behaviors of the abuser (Schecter, 1988; Stahly, 1996)
- A high level of commitment to the relationship/marriage (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988; Barnett, 2001)
- Hope that the abuser would change (Barnett & Lopez-Real, 1985; Moss et al, 1997)
- The woman did not perceive herself as a victim (Barnett, 2001)
- Depression and/or other psychological problems due to the trauma from the abuse (see Barnett, 2001, Walker, 1979)
- The woman thought the abuse was normal due to prior victimization (Barnett, 2001; Kalmuss, 1984; Owens & Straus, 1975; Richie, 1996)
- Desire to keep two-parent family intact (Barnett, 2001)
- Fear of being alone (Barnett, 2001)

• Love and/or sympathy for the abuser (Barnett & Lopez-Real, 1985; Jackals, 1997; Moss et al, 1997)

Institutional and Structural obstacles to help-seeking:

• Reluctance to involve the criminal justice system or social services because of the perception that they are ineffective (Erez and Belknap, 1998)

• Reluctance to seek help from the criminal justice system because of the perception that it is racist (Asbury, 1987; Asbury, 1993; Coley and Beckett, 1988; Hirschel and Hirschel, 1998; Joseph, 1997; Peterson-Lewis et al, 1988; Richie, 1996; Sorenson, 1996

• Reluctance to involve the criminal justice system because of own or abuser's drug/criminal involvement (Hampton et al, 2003; Richie, 1996)

• Inability to get into a domestic violence shelter due to lack of space (Davies et al, 1998; Hunt, 2001)

• Inability to get into a domestic violence shelter due to restrictive rules (Frye et al, 2001)

• Financial dependence on abuser/poverty (Aguirre, 1985; Brandwein, 1999; Cole, 2001; Eden & Lein, 1997; Gelles, 1976; Pagelow, 1981)

• Restrictive welfare policies like five-year time limits and workfare requirements (Brandwein, 1999)

• Lack of affordable, accessible and/or adequate childcare

• Fear of losing her home if she left (Browne, 1995)

• Having no where to go if she left/lack of affordable housing (Menard, 2001; Websdale and Johnson, 1997)

- Fear of being reported to child protective services and/or having children taken away by victim services agencies (Berliner, 1998; Roberts, 2003; Schneider, 2000)

The Modified Survivor Theory suggests that battered women are active help-seekers. However, their help-seeking is not limitless (Okun, 1986). The theory suggests that the many individual-level, institutional and structural obstacles to help-seeking may explain why some battered women remain in abusive relationships longer than they might. Similar to the original theory, the Modified Survivor Theory suggests that inadequate and insufficient institutional responses can have deleterious effects on battered women. "The failure of help sources to intervene in a comprehensive and decisive fashion allows the abuse to continue and escalate" (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988:12) and makes it harder for battered women to escape abusive relationships. Consequently, battered women may "continue in the relationship and personally cope with the abuse as best [they] can" (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988:17). The Modified Survivor Theory suggests that when help-seeking efforts are inadequate, women rely upon a variety of coping strategies that may or may not effectively address the violence.

In the absence of effective alternatives within the criminal justice and social systems, marginalized battered women may feel that they have no choice but to take matters into their own hands by taking matters into their own hands. This study examines the extent of battered women's use of two such *extralegal* coping strategies: 1) fighting back and 2) street justice. The Modified Survivor Theory suggests that women's reliance on such extralegal responses to battering suggests a sense of *hopelessness* but not helplessness. In other words, battered women remain active in their response to battering

even when they repeatedly experience ineffective responses by helping agents and see no way out of their circumstances. At the same time, the Modified Survivor Theory acknowledges the serious consequences of such coping mechanisms. While understandable, fighting back against physically abusive men or soliciting family and friends to do so can obviously have severe and deadly-if not serious legal- consequences for women and their loved ones. This study will examine the effectiveness and consequences of extralegal responses to battering.

The Modified Survivor Theory also suggests that leaving abusive relationships is a process involving a number of stages: 1) a shift in a perception of the relationship as abusive; 2) a realization that the relationship will not improve (despite efforts by women to alter their own behavior or to influence abusers); 3) some catalyst or turning point (i.e. severe injury); 4) the abandonment of the dream of an idealized relationship, family structure or marriage; and perhaps 5) the realization that the relationship may not end due to the shared custody of children (Barnett, 2000:345). According to the Modified Survivor Theory proposed in this study, effective responses by helping agents may guide battered women through this process and, ultimately, empower them to leave.

The Modified Survivor Theory includes the following elements:

1) Battered women actively seek help from a number of both formal and informal sources;
2) There are a number of individual-level, institutional and structural factors that present obstacles to help-seeking (and ultimately, leaving abusive relationships).

3) When helping agencies are unable or unwilling to provide effective assistance there may be several negative outcomes: women may remain in abusive relationships longer (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988); they may take matters into their own hands by physically fighting back against their abusers (Moss et al, 1997; Richie, 1996); or they may resort to street justice to try to end the abuse (Moss et al, 1997).
4) Leaving abusive relationships is a process involving a number of factors and is influenced by a number of factors. Effective institutional responses may guide battered women through this process and, ultimately, empower them to leave.

Utilizing the Modified Survivor Theory as a theoretical framework, this study will examine the extent of battered women's help-seeking behaviors while attempting to measure the impact of a wide range of obstacles to help-seeking including individual-level obstacles, structural obstacles and institutional obstacles. This study will also explore the possible negative consequences of ineffectual responses from helping sources. It will also explore how helping agents can positively influence women in their process of leaving. The study will emphasize the factors that encourage battered women to leave abusive relationships.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions and hypotheses are derived from the Modified Survivor Theory described above. Research questions # 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 address aspects of the original Survivor Theory, while research questions # 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 expand upon the original theory as well as raise additional questions that were not fully addressed in the original Survivor Theory. The hypotheses are based upon what the Survivor Theory and other findings in the domestic violence literature would predict.

Research Question 1: Do battered women seek help?

Hypothesis 1: Battered women are not passive in the face of abuse. The vast majority of battered women actively seek help from several sources.

Research Question 2: To what extent do battered women seek help?

Hypothesis 2: Battered women rely on a range of both formal and informal sources of help.

Research Question 3: How does the nature of battered women's help-seeking change over time?

Hypothesis 3: Battered women increase their help-seeking behaviors as the abuse escalates.

Research Question 4: How does the severity of abuse impact battered women's help-seeking?

Hypothesis 4: The more severe the abuse, the more sources of help battered women will use.

Research Question 5: How do battered women perceive various helping agencies?

Hypothesis 5: Battered women perceive helping agencies to be generally ineffective.

Research Question 6: How are battered women's ongoing help-seeking behaviors impacted by their perceptions of the effectiveness of helping agencies?

Hypothesis 6: Battered women who perceive the responses of helping agencies to be generally effective will be more likely to seek help from them again whereas battered women who consider them to be generally ineffective will be less likely to do so.

Research Question 7: Are battered women who perceive the responses of helping agencies to be generally ineffective more likely to stay longer with their abusers than battered women who perceive the responses of helping agencies to be effective?

Hypothesis 7: Battered women who perceive the responses of help-seeking agencies to be generally ineffective are more likely to stay longer with their abusers than women who perceive the responses of helping agencies to be generally effective.

Research Question 8: Are battered women who perceive the responses of helping agencies to be generally ineffective more likely to fight back against their abusers than battered women who perceive helping agencies to be effective?

Hypothesis 8: Battered women who perceive the responses of helping agencies to be generally ineffective are more likely to physically fight back against their abusers than women who perceive helping agencies to be effective.

Research Question 9: Are battered women who perceive helping agencies to be generally ineffective more likely to rely on street justice (getting others to threaten or harm their abuser) than women who perceive helping agencies to be effective?

Hypothesis 9: Battered women who perceive the responses of helping agencies to be generally ineffective are the most likely to rely on street justice to deal with the abuse.

Research Question 10: What barriers to help-seeking do battered women face?

Hypothesis 10: Battered women face a number of individual-level as well as structural and institutional obstacles to help-seeking/leaving.

Research Question 11: What types of barriers—individual-level, institutional, or structural-- pose the greatest obstacle to battered women's help-seeking/leaving?

Hypothesis 11: Institutional barriers will pose the greatest obstacle to battered women's help-seeking/leaving.

Research Question 12: What factors empower battered women to leave abusive relationships?

Hypothesis 12: A shift in battered women's perceptions of the relationship will encourage them to leave abusive relationships.

Research Question 13: How do the responses of helping agencies impact battered women's process of leaving?

Hypothesis 13: The positive responses of helping agencies will play an important role for many battered women leaving abusive relationships.

METHODOLOGY

The Recruitment of Participants

Initially, a family health clinic associated with a large hospital in the Bronx, New York was chosen as the exclusive site from which to recruit, select and interview participants for the study. This clinic was chosen because it serves an urban, predominantly low-income population. The clinic is an urban, academically affiliated family medicine site that served 14,400 patients in the year 2000. Of these patients 9,400 were female and of those, 5,089 were between the ages of 15 and 44 years old. The ethnic distribution of the women at the center is 36% African American/Black, 30% Hispanic/Latino, 16% White/European-American, and 6% Asian/Pacific Islander. Of these women, 1,036 had incomes below the poverty level (Zachary, 2001). The plan was to yield the desired number of participants for the study given the fact that the great majority of women who go to the family health clinic are low-income and based on former domestic violence studies on this population, a high percentage of the women report having been abused in the past (Zachary, 2001).

In order to meet the requirements of both the hospital and my graduate school, the City University of New York, applications were sent to the Institutional Review Boards of both institutions. Permission was granted by the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) of the hospital associated with the family clinic as well as the IRB at the author's doctoral program. Once IRB permission was granted, the author started to try to recruit women from the family health clinic to take part in the study. The author developed a working relationship with one of the physicians at the clinic (who helped apply to the hospital

IRB) as well as the Domestic Violence Coordinator at the clinic. There were initially three recruitment methods to be used in the study.

The first recruitment approach was for the Domestic Violence Coordinator (DVC) to refer clients to the author. The Domestic Violence Coordinator was assigned to meet with every patient at the clinic who was currently experiencing or had a history of domestic violence. The DVC would talk to patients who had a history of abuse about the study and anyone who expressed an interest in taking part would be given the name and phone number of the author. Another referral source was through medical students that were working under the supervision of a physician at the clinic. Medical students are trained to routinely screen their patients for past and current domestic violence using a protocol called the Domestic Violence Survey. This protocol defines "past abuse" any abuse by an intimate partner that was committed before one year ago. Thus, any woman who identified herself as having been abused in the past would be eligible to participate in this study. The medical students would refer any interested women by giving them the name and phone number of the author. A third recruitment process was for the author to join medical students on the days when they were conducting the Domestic Violence Survey so that women who expressed an interest in the study could be interviewed on that day.

However, after many months of attempting to recruit women through these three methods, it became clear that other recruitment methods were necessary. There were several unforeseeable problems with the aforementioned recruitment techniques. Most importantly, the staff at the clinic (the Domestic Violence Coordinator, physicians and medical students) was too busy to assist the author with the recruitment process.

Additionally, the clinic was undergoing construction at the time of the study, making it nearly impossible to find private rooms in which to conduct interviews with participants. Because of the sensitive nature of the study and its anonymity and confidentiality requirements, access to private interviewing rooms is a necessity for this study. For these reasons, alternative recruitment methods were necessary.

As an alternative approach, a range of community-based and social service agencies located in low-income neighborhoods in New York City were chosen to be recruitment sites. These agencies includes community centers, homeless shelters, needle-exchange programs, health clinics, prenatal care programs, congregate housing for people with AIDS, and welfare centers. The author developed working relationships with staff at each of these agencies. Staff members, in turn, told their clients about the purpose of the study, its eligibility criteria, possible risks and benefits of taking part in the study, and procedures protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. If women expressed an interest in taking part, they were given the name and cell phone number of the author. In order to ensure confidentiality, the message on the cell phone did not disclose any identifying information about the study.

One outreach worker at one of the needle-exchange programs became a "key informant" who helped to recruit additional women for the study. She identified other women who met the eligibility criteria of the study through "chains of referral" or informal networks. This method, also called snowball sampling, allows for the recruitment of subjects who have roughly the same demographics as the original participants (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). All participants were also encouraged to tell

friends and acquaintances about the study and were given cards with the name and phone number of the author.

Women who called the author to take part in the study had to first meet the eligibility criteria. Participants of this study had to be low-income, formerly battered women. For the purposes of this study, 'formerly battered' is defined as any adult woman (over the age 18) who was in a recurring physically abusive relationship but has been out of the relationship for at least one year. Any woman who was still living with their abuser, had an ongoing intimate relationship with him/her, or was being stalked by their abuser would be ineligible to take part in the study. If a woman met the eligibility criteria, the author would then set up a mutually convenient time to meet her to conduct the informed consent process and conduct the interview.

Description of Sample

Initially, 105 women were interviewed for the study. Of these, three women did not fit the eligibility criteria and two others did not complete the interview. The final sample is made up of 100 formerly battered, predominantly low-income women from New York City. A subgroup of the sample represents some of the most marginalized battered women in the city. 36% of the women had significant histories of alcohol and drug involvement (either as regular user, addicts or recovering addicts). In addition, 23% reported being either infected with HIV or having AIDS. And 15% of the sample admitted having resided in a homeless shelter for significant periods of time in the past in addition to the 13% of the sample who went to a domestic violence shelter at least once.

The sample is also largely made up of *low-income* women. This emphasis is purposeful given the fact that severe physical and lethal domestic violence occurs disproportionately among low-income women (Straus et al, 1980; Rennison and Welchans, 2000; Sorenson et al, 1996). In this sample, the majority of women (59%) met the 2001 federal poverty guidelines--the year the interviews were conducted-- and 66% of the women said they were currently receiving welfare--now referred to as TANF, or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families-- or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). SSI is a federally subsidized program for disabled or elderly people with no income. Table 1 outlines the yearly incomes of women in this sample (this includes any salaries, wages, or government benefits).

Table 1: The Socio-Economic Status of the Sample by Yearly Income (n=100)

Socio-economic status	Frequency	Percent
<$10,000 year	49	49.0
$10,000 - <$15,000 year	18	18.0
$15,000 - <$20,000 year	9	9.0
$20,000 - <$25,000 year	8	8.0
$25,000 - <$30,000 year	4	4.0
$30,000 and over	11	11.0
Missing data	1	1.0
Total	100	100.0

Low-income *women of color* are particularly at risk of severe and lethal domestic violence (Hampton and Gelles, 1994; Rennison and Welchans, 2000; Straus et al, 1980; Websdale, 1999). Given the heightened risk for domestic violence low-income women

face (particularly low-income women of color), researchers are justifiably concerned with the particular causes of the high rate of intimate partner violence among low-income populations as well as the many obstacles that impede poor women from leaving abusive relationships. In order to examine the particular difficulties that poor women of color face when attempting to end abusive relationships, as Table 2 indicates, this sample has a disproportionate number of women of color, particularly black/African-American women.

Table 2: The Racial/Ethnic Composition of the Sample (n=100)

Race/ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
White (non-Hispanic)	22	22.0
Black/African-American	62	62.0
Hispanic[2]	12	12.0
Other[3]	4	4.0
Total	100	100.0

The educational levels of the women in the sample were relatively high considering the marginalized status of the women. While one-quarter of the women did not graduate high school, over half of the women either completed college or at least attended some college. See Table 3 for a depiction of the educational levels of the women in this sample.

[2] Nine women self-identified Puerto Rican, two women were from the Dominican Republican, and one woman was Panamanian

[3] Two women referred to themselves as 'mixed', 1 woman self-identified as Asian, and one woman was Native American

Table 3: The Educational Levels of the Sample (n=100)

Education level	Frequency	Percent
Less than high school diploma	25	25.0
High school diploma/GED	20	20.0
Some college	31	31.0
College graduate	20	20.0
Other	4	4.0
Total	100	100.0

Three-quarters of the women in this sample had at least one child and a sizable portion (15%) of the women four or more children. Table 4 indicates the number of children of women in this sample.

Table 4: The Number of Children of Women in the Sample (n=100)

Number of children	Frequency	Percent
None	25	25.0
One	27	27.0
Two	22	22.0
Three	11	11.0
Four	10	10.0
Five or more	5	5.0
Total	100	100.0

In order to be eligible for this study, women had to self-identify as having been "*adult* survivors of domestic violence". While teen/dating violence is a social problem of considerable concern (Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2001), this study focuses on adult domestic violence for a number of reasons: 1) the difficulty of gaining permission from parents to interview their teen children about emotionally sensitive matters; 2) the dynamics of battering as well as help-seeking may be qualitatively different among teens. For these reasons, all participants in this study had to be at least 18 years old at the time of the study. Ages ranged from 18- 65 and the average age of women was 40. See Table 5 for a breakdown of the ages of study participants.

Table 5: The Age of Women in the Sample (n=100)

Age	Frequency	Percent
18-27	13	13.0
28-37	21	21.0
38-47	40	40.0
48-57	23	23.0
58 and over	3	3.0
Total	100	100.0

All of the women in the study were self-identified as being "formerly battered" (in a flyer used to recruit participants for the study, participants were required to be "adult survivors of domestic violence"). For the purposes of this study, "formerly battered" is defined as having been in a physically and emotionally abusive relationship in the past. All participants had to have been out of the abusive relationship for at least one year at the time of the study. "Being out of the abusive relationship" means that the woman was

no longer living with the abuser, had no current intimate relationship with the abuser, had no intention to re-establish the intimate relationship, and that any attempts by the abuser to keep the relationship going (including stalking behavior) had ended at the time of the study.

In order to be defined as a battered woman, she must have been the victim of repeat physical and non-physical forms of abuse within an intimate relationship in the past. In this study, there are three main types of abuse: severe, moderate and mild. The types of abuse are defined in the following manner[4]: 1) severe abuse includes at least three incidents of one or more of the following types of violent acts-- kicking, punching, choking, threats with a gun or knife, stabbing, shooting, burning, threats to kill in addition to a pattern of non-physical forms of abuse like threats to harm, attempts to control the woman, and emotional abuse like name calling; 2) moderate abuse includes at least three incidents of one or more of the following violent acts: pushing, shoving, slapping, throwing objects, and a pattern of non-physical forms of abuse like threats to harm, attempts to control the woman, and emotional abuse like name calling; and 3) mild abuse includes one or more act of moderate violence (listed above) and a pattern of non-physical forms of abuse like threats to harm, attempts to control the woman, and emotional abuse like name calling.

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[4] This scale of severity of abuse was developed specifically for this study but was based upon the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979). Violent acts on the CTS are reported in two ways: severe violence and total violence. Acts of severe violence are highly likely to result in physical injury and include kicking, biting, hitting, choking, beating up, threatening with a knife or gun and using a knife or gun. Total violence includes severe as well as less injurious physical acts such as throwing objects, shoving, pushing, grabbing, and slapping.

Admittedly, these artificial categorizations fail to adequately capture the true horror of being abused. In the case of women who experienced "moderate" or "mild" levels of abuse, these categorizations may minimize the terror or degradation they experienced. At the same time, the experiences of the "severely" battered women were so horrifying and brutal that drawing a distinction between them and women with less abusive circumstances is justified. In this sample, the great majority of women (77%) in the sample reported having experienced severe abuse whereas 19% experienced moderate abuse and 4% were victims of mild abuse. Table 6 illustrates the severity of abuse experienced by women in this sample.

Table 6: Percentage of Women Experiencing Severe Abuse (n=100)

Percent of women experiencing various forms of abuse at least once		
Type of abuse[5]	**Frequency**	**Percent** [6]
Choked	58	58.0
Sexual victimization	48	48.0
Threatened with a knife	27	27.0
Physically harmed during pregnancy	26	26.0
Threatened with a gun	16	16.0
Abuse resulting in miscarriage	7	7.0
Stabbed	7	7.0
Other severe acts[7]	5	5.0

[5] Occurring at least once

[6] Percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents could provide more than one response to questions

The women who were severely abused described savage acts of life-threatening violence. For example, seven percent of the women had been stabbed by their partners on at least one occasion (one woman was stabbed over forty times during one violent attack). One woman said that her abuser once swung a golf club at her head, nearly killing her: "He swung a golf club at me. If I hadn't ducked I wouldn't be here now" (#61). Women described being thrown out of two-story buildings and being beaten for using birth control. One woman said that she was once beaten so severely that she had amnesia for three days afterwards. The following quote poignantly describes some of the experiences and feelings of these women:

> He broke my legs...I had to get pins in my hip. He once broke my wrist, cut my stomach open and I had to get 21 stitches in my scalp. It was life-threatening. I asked the Lord to let me walk again and if I did I'd never go back to him" (#42).

In addition to acts of savage brutality and extreme force, women described acts of sadistic cruelty and torture. One woman's abuser routinely burned her with knives that he would heat on the stove. Several other women reported being held hostage, hung out of windows and being threatened with loaded guns.

Nearly half of the women were sexually assaulted. One woman described being choked during sex, another said that she lived in constant fear of being raped by her abuser: "He raped me several times. When he was raping me, I tried to fight back but I was afraid. I lived in fear. I was petrified" (#22). For some women, the sexual abuse was a daily ordeal. And sadly, nearly one-third of the women in this sample reported being abused during pregnancy: "I was 8 months pregnant. He dragged me by my hair

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[7] Includes four instances of being beaten by blunt objects including a hammer, bat and belt and one instance of being thrown out of a 2-story building

and locked me in my room. He beat the shit out of me for an hour" (#5). Shockingly, 7% of the women reported having miscarriages as a direct result of the abuse: "He stomped me right in the stomach when I was pregnant. I lost my baby because of him" (#51).

Limitations of Sample

Ideally, the study would be randomly selected. However, this was not possible due to the sensitive population being studied. There is also no cost-effective, efficient way of identifying and contacting women who have previously been in abusive relationships without encountering problems related to confidentiality and safety concerns. For example, it is inconceivable—because of confidentiality rules-- that domestic violence agencies would provide a researcher the names and contact information of all of the women throughout the city who had used their services during the preceding year. But even if it were possible to randomly select women from such a list, I would have had to contact the women (probably by calling them at their home) to see if they would be interested in taking part in the study. This would potentially expose women still in abusive relationships to danger (i.e. if the abuser were to answer the phone or overhear the conversation).

Besides these ethical considerations, relying only upon victim service agencies and domestic violence shelters to identify participants would have limited the sample to a particular subgroup of battered women. There are many battered women who do not ever seek help from victim services or stay at a domestic violence shelter: in the current

study, only 37% of the respondents used victim services and an even smaller portion of the women stayed at a domestic violence shelter (13%). Had I relied only upon victim service agencies and domestic violence shelters as recruitment sites, a substantial portion of formerly battered women would have been left out of the sample. The women in this sample were recruited from a wide range of community-based and social service agencies located in low-income neighborhoods in New York City including community centers, homeless shelters, needle-exchange programs, health clinics, prenatal care programs, congregate housing for People with AIDS, and welfare centers to recruit women for the study. By using these alternative recruitment sites to identify formerly battered women, the author was able to reach battered women from marginalized populations like substance abusers, criminally-involved women, homeless women, and physically and psychologically disabled women.

Another weakness of the study is that the sample is composed of a disproportionate number of women of color, particularly African American women. Ideally, the sample would include a more racially diverse population of battered women so that comparisons of help-seeking behaviors could be made between low-income women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. The overrepresentation of black women occurred because of the recruitment process that was used for this study. Since the focus of the study is to examine the help-seeking behaviors of *racially, economically and/or socially marginalized* women, participants were drawn from New York City neighborhoods that are predominantly low-income including Crown Heights, Flatbush, South Bronx, Red Hook, Lower East Side, Bushwick, and East New York. Due to the ethnic/racial make-up of most of these areas, the sample is predominantly African-

American/Black. However, this approach can be justified given the disproportionately high rate of severe and lethal domestic violence among poor African American women.

Due to the relatively small sample (n=100) and because of the recruitment process, the findings are not generalizable to all populations of battered women. This study is a small-scale study of formerly battered women from marginalized backgrounds in New York City who were recruited from a variety of community-based agencies (family health clinics, needles-exchange programs, congregate housing for people with AIDS, homeless shelters, prenatal care programs). As a result, the findings from this study may not be relevant to other subgroups of battered women. In addition, given the fact that this study is concerned with the help-seeking behaviors of battered women (as opposed to the learned helplessness of battered women) it important to acknowledge that the women who took part in this study were recruited from a variety of community-based agencies and that as a result they may, by definition, exhibit a greater degree of help-seeking than women who did not take part in any of these services. But it is also important to keep in mind that the women in this study were recruited at least one year after their abusive relationships had ended. Thus, their current participation in a community-based agency may or may not be an indication of their greater help-seeking in their past abusive relationship.

While the sample for this study is small, this study attempts to improve upon an existing theory (Survivor Theory) that has not previously been tested with a population of predominantly low-income battered women of color. Based on the findings from this study, the Modified Survivor Theory could be tested using a larger, representative sample.

Another limitation of the study was that there was no comparison group of women who did not leave abusive relationships. Such a comparison could potentially explain differences between battered women who decide to leave and those who do not For example; do battered women who remain in abusive relationships report more negative perceptions of helping agencies? Do women who stay in abusive relationships suffer from "learned helplessness" or do many actively choose to remain in the relationships for rational reasons?

There were ethical reasons for excluding battered women who are still in abusive relationships. Contacting women who are still embroiled in violent relationships to take part in a study on domestic violence could obviously be dangerous to the interviewer and participants alike. And women who are still in abusive relationships would arguably be more disturbed about discussing their abuse than women who are no longer in abusive relationships.

Consequently, all of the women in the study were "formerly battered". For the purposes of this study, "formerly battered" is defined as having been in a physically and emotionally abusive relationship in the past. All participants had to have been out of the abusive relationship for at least one year at the time of the study. And "being out of the abusive relationship" means that the woman was no longer living with the abuser, had no current intimate relationship with the abuser, had no intention to re-establish the intimate relationship, and that any attempts by the abuser to keep the relationship going (including stalking behavior) had ended at the time of the study. By focusing on *formerly battered* women it was possible to conduct a retrospective study with women who had

successfully exited abusive relationships to learn about their help-seeking behaviors and about the effectiveness of helpers in their process of leaving.

A final limitation of the study is that helpers--religious counselors, therapists, victim service agents, and workers in the criminal justice system and healthcare providers--were not interviewed for the study. This project focused entirely on battered women's perceptions of helping agents and the impact that interventions by them—positive or negative—had upon women. Given the fact that battered women are often unsatisfied with the treatment they receive from professionals (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988), it would be illuminating to learn more about what it is like for helpers to intervene with battered women.

Data Collection

This study entailed conducting one-time, semi-structured interviews with 100 formerly battered women. The author individually conducted all interviews. When a woman agreed to participate in the study, the author conducted the interview using the Interview Questionnaire (see Appendix: Interview Questionnaire), a survey that was specifically designed for the study by the author. The Interview Questionnaire includes the following general topic areas: 1) demographic and background data, 2) abuse history, 3) help-seeking behaviors, 4) institutional responses, 5) women's use of extralegal forms of justice, 6) obstacles to help-seeking/leaving and 7) the formal and informal interventions that helped the most and least in the process of getting safe/leaving. (The Interview Questionnaire was first pilot tested with a small group of formerly battered

women (n=5) who meet the eligibility criteria of the study. Based upon the findings of the pilot study, some alterations were made to the original questionnaire).

Meetings with participants either took place at one of the participating community-based agencies in a private room, or at the home of an outreach worker from one of the needle exchange programs in Bushwick, Brooklyn who agreed to help the author to identify eligible participants and provide a safe, private place to conduct interviews. Before conducting interviews, the author explained the study in detail including: 1) the purpose of the project, 2) eligibility criteria, 3) procedures to be followed, 4) time commitment required, 5) possible risks and benefits of taking part, 6) rules about anonymity and confidentiality, and 7) financial compensation for taking part. If a woman was interested in taking part in the study, she had to first go through the informed consent process described in the "Information Sheet" (see Appendix: Information Sheet).

The Information Sheet informed participants about the purposes of the study, time required to do the study, procedures to be followed, confidentiality and anonymity rules, and risks and benefits of the study. Participants were informed that interviews would last approximately 1-1.5 hours for which they would be compensated $20. Interviews were administered by asking questions and recording written responses on questionnaires. (Initially the author had planned to audiotape interviews with the permission of participants, however, the cost of transcribing the tapes turned out to be prohibitive). Women were told that they could refuse to answer any questions or end the interview at any time without being denied financial compensation. At the end of the interview, participants were asked if they knew of other women who might want to take part in this

study. If they were willing to identify other women for the study, they were given contact information with the author's name and cell phone number.

In order to protect confidentiality and anonymity, women were given identification numbers to be used in lieu of their real names. Women were told that any names or identifying descriptions of them would not be used in any written materials including interview questionnaires, notes, reports or subsequent published materials. To fully protect participants' anonymity, they did not have to sign a consent form but rather were given the Information Sheet to keep if they decided to take part in the study. To further protect participants, the names of the specific organizations where the women were initially identified and interviewed have been withheld from any reports or published materials. For example, instead of providing the specific name of a health center, it is referred to as "a health center in the Bronx".

Data Analysis Plan

This study yields both qualitative and quantitative data. Because of the relatively small sample (n=100), the quantitative data is limited to descriptive frequencies and simple statistics. In order to make sense of the qualitative data, content analysis was performed using cross-case analysis by searching for themes. Core themes were identified after the author read the interviews several times obtained a sense of intimate acquaintance and immersion in the material. Certain themes emerged across the interviews, which helped the author identify connections between the cases. This allowed the author to make some basic generalizations about the experiences of the

women in the sample, as well as the meanings they attached to these experiences (Seidman, 1991). These basic themes and generalizations were discussed with some of the women who were helping the author recruit participants so that the author was able to obtain feedback and verify her interpretations with them. Interpretations were also compared with findings from the domestic violence literature.

The data analysis is structured around the aforementioned research questions and hypotheses. The following description outlines how the data are analyzed for each research question and describes the statistical analyses that are performed.

Research Question 1: Do battered women seek help?

This question is answered with frequency distributions derived from question 21 in the Interview Questionnaire (see Appendix I), "Did you seek help from others?" (Yes/No)

Research Question 2: To what extent do battered women seek help?

This question is answered with frequency distributions derived from questions 25 through 34 in the Interview Questionnaire. Frequency distributions illustrate how many helping sources women relied upon for help and how frequently they did so (never/ rarely/ a few times/ several times/ frequently).

Research Question 3: How does the nature of battered women's help-seeking change over time?

Qualitative descriptive data provides a means of getting in-depth information about women's perceptions of the abuse over time, their objectives and motivations regarding

help-seeking decisions, and the nature of their decision-making process. A frequency distribution provides basic descriptive statistics on the pattern of women's help-seeking over time. These data are derived from question 22 in the Interview Questionnaire, "Over time, did you seek help... (More frequently/less frequently/the same amount throughout the relationship/did not seek help)."

Research Question 4: How does the severity of abuse impact battered women's help-seeking?

This question is answered using qualitative descriptive data as well as descriptive statistics based upon questions 15 and 16 in the Interview Questionnaire (addressing the severity of abuse) and questions 25 through 34 (addressing the frequency of help-seeking). A cross tabulation is performed to assess the relationship between the severity of abuse (severe/moderate/mild) and the number of sources women relied upon for assistance (i.e. friends/ family/ religious leaders/ counselors/ victim services agencies/ police/ courts/ healthcare practitioners/ others). This cross tabulation provides an understanding of how the extent of help-seeking is impacted by the severity of abuse.

Research Question 5: How do battered women perceive the effectiveness of various helping agents?

This question is answered with descriptive statistics based on questions 25c-34c in the Interview Questionnaire, "In general, how effective was their response? (generally effective/generally ineffective)"

Research Question 6: How are battered women's ongoing help-seeking behaviors impacted by their perceptions of the effectiveness of helping agencies?

a) A cross tabulation is performed separately for each source of help (friends/ family/ religious leaders/ counselors/ victim services agencies/ police/ courts/ healthcare practitioners/ others) to assess the relationship between women's perceptions of helping agencies (generally effective/generally ineffective) and women's decisions to seek further assistance (yes/no).

b) Qualitative data describes whether (and if so, how) women's ongoing help-seeking decisions were impacted by their perceptions of the effectiveness of helping agencies. These data are based upon questions 25c-34c and 25e-34e in the Interview Questionnaire.

Research Question 7: Are battered women who perceive the responses of helping agencies to be generally ineffective more likely to stay longer with their abusers than battered women who perceive the responses of helping agencies to be generally effective?

a) A cross tabulation is performed to express the relationship between women's overall perceptions of helping agents (generally effective/generally ineffective) and the length of time they remain in the abusive relationship once the physical abuse has started (less than year/ 1- <5 years/ 5- <10 years, 10-< 15 years/ 15+ years)

b) Qualitative data describes why women remained in the relationship after physical abuse had taken place. This data is based upon answers to Questions 17, 18 and 19 in the Interview Questionnaire.

Research Question 8: Are battered women who perceive the responses of helping agencies to be generally ineffective more likely to fight back against their abusers than battered women who perceive helping agencies to be generally effective?

a) A cross tabulation is performed to assess the relationship between women's perceptions of helping agencies (generally effective/ generally ineffective) and women's use of physical force against their abuser (yes/no).

b) Qualitative data help explain the motivations of women who used force against their abuser as well as the consequences of such a response. These data are derived from questions 36, 36a, and 36b in the Interview Questionnaire.

Research Question 9: Are battered women who perceive helping agencies to be ineffective more likely to rely on street justice (getting others to threaten or harm their abuser) than women who perceive helping agencies to be effective?

a) A cross tabulation is performed to assess the relationship between women's perception of helping agencies (generally effective/ generally ineffective) and women's use of street justice (having someone else threaten or harm the abuser as a way of dealing with the abuse)

b) Qualitative data help explain the motivations of women who used street justice against their abuser as well as the consequences of such a response. These data are derived from questions 37, 37a, and 37b in the Interview Questionnaire.

Research Question 10: What barriers to help-seeking do battered women face?

A frequency distribution that outlines the percentages of women impacted by a list of barriers to help-seeking is provided. These data are derived from Question 38 in the Interview Questionnaire.

Research Question 11: What barriers—individual-level; institutional, or structural-- pose the greatest obstacle to battered women's help-seeking?

A frequency distribution lists the percentage of women most affected by a wide range of individual-level; institutional; or structural obstacles. These data are based on Question 39 in the Interview Questionnaire, "What was the greatest obstacle to seeking help?" Qualitative descriptive data also describe why this particular obstacle presented the greatest barrier to seeking help/leaving (based on question 40 in the Interview Questionnaire)

Research Question 12: What factors empowered women to leave abusive relationships?

Qualitative data describe the factors that influenced battered women in their process of leaving. These data are based on replies from question 24 in the Interview Questionnaire (relating to the process of leaving).

Research Question 13: How do the responses by helping agents impact battered women's process of leaving?

Qualitative data describe how helping agents influenced battered women in their process of leaving. These data are based upon questions 24 (relating to the process of leaving) and 25c-34c (relating to the effectiveness of helping agents).

FINDINGS

This study is a theoretically guided research project about the help-seeking behaviors of battered women. As stated earlier, help-seeking is a crucial area of study because help-seeking presents an opportunity for both formal and informal sources of help to encourage battered women redefine their experiences as abusive, empower them to make positive changes, and provide tangible services to enable women and children to escape abusive relationships (if they decide to do so). Help-seeking can be a crucial step in the process of ending/leaving abusive relationships.

This study utilizes a modified version of the Survivor Theory as its theoretical framework. The Modified Survivor Theory (a theoretical perspective specifically adapted from Gondolf's original Survivor Theory (1988) for this study) suggests that women seek assistance in proportion to the realization that they and their children are increasingly in danger; that their help-seeking is limited by a wide range of obstacles; and that inadequate responses from helpers can have serious negative consequences for battered women.

The findings from this study are derived from semi-structured interviews with 100 formerly battered women about the nature and extent of their help-seeking, their perceptions of helpers, and the impact of institutional responses on their subsequent decisions to seek help or use alternative coping strategies including extralegal methods like fighting back and street justice. The findings in this section are arranged according to the 13 research questions described in the preceding chapter.

Do battered women seek help?

As expected, the women in this sample were not passive in the face of abuse. 98% of women sought help at least once from one or more of a range of formal and/or informal helping agents. In this study, "helping agents" comprise informal sources including friends and family members, as well as formal sources such as religious counselors, therapists, domestic violence agencies, the police, domestic violence shelters, prosecutors and judges and health care practitioners. Only two women in the sample never sought help from anyone for the abuse whereas 87% of the sample sought help from two or more sources at least once. This finding supports the main tenet of the Modified Survivor Theory: that battered women are active help-seekers.

To what extent do battered women seek help?

As Table 7 indicates, women relied upon a variety of both formal and informal helping sources. The most frequently relied upon source of assistance was the police (74% of the women contacted the police at least once), closely followed by friends (63%), family (60%), courts (49%), therapists/counselors (48%), healthcare practitioners (44%), victim services agencies (37%), religious leaders/counselors (26%), domestic violence shelters (13%), and other sources (7%).

Table 7: The Frequency of Help-Seeking by Women in the Sample (n=100)

Source of help used	Frequency of help-seeking (percentage) [8]									
	Never		1 time		2-3 times		4-5 times		6+ times	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Friend	37	37%	3	3%	8	8%	1	1%	51	51%
Family	40	40%	7	7%	10	10%	3	3%	40	40%
Religious Counselor	74	74%	2	2%	7	7%	1	1%	16	16%
Therapist/Counselor	52	52%	4	4%	7	7%	3	3%	34	34%
Victim Services	63	63%	7	7%	11	11%	5	5%	14	14%
Domestic Violence Shelter	87	87%	10	10%	3	3%	0	0%	0	0%
Police	26	26%	18	18%	19	19%	8	8%	29	29%
Courts	51	51%	24	24%	17	17%	2	2%	6	6%
Healthcare Practitioners	56	56%	23	23%	10	10%	1	1%	10	10%
Other sources	93	93%	3	3%	2	2%	0	0%	2	2%

The vast majority of women sought help from more than once source, as can be seen in the Table 8. For example, 59% of the women relied upon help from at least four sources of help at least once. This finding supports the Modified Survivor Theory's tenet that battered women actively seek help from a number of sources.

[8] Percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents could provide more than one response to questions

Table 8: The Number of Helping Sources Used by Women in the Sample (n=100)

Extent of help-seeking	Frequency	Percent
One source of help	11	11.0
Two sources of help	14	14.0
Three sources of help	14	14.0
Four sources of help	16	16.0
Five sources of help	11	11.0
Six sources of help	14	14.0
Seven sources of help	12	12.0
Eight sources of help	3	3.0
Nine sources of help	1	1.0
Did not seek help	2	2.0
Total	100	100.0

What is the nature of battered women's help-seeking over time?

The domestic violence literature suggests that there are several types of abusive relationships: 1) those where the abuse escalates over time, 2) those where the abuse comes and goes but does not escalate, and 3) those where the abuse de-escalates over time (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). For the vast majority of women in this sample (n=100), abuse escalated over time (82%), while for some (14%), the abuse remained constant and for a very small number (3%), the abuse lessened.

Similarly, over time, women's help-seeking tended to increase, rather than decrease. 69% of the women said that their pattern of help-seeking increased over time whereas only 5% decreased their help-seeking over time 24% said that their help-seeking

remained constant throughout the relationship. This finding supports the Modified Survivor Theory by suggesting that women seek more help, not less, as the abuse escalates and it supports the characterization of battered women as logical and rational agents who appreciate the increasing severity of the abuse and who are actively trying to change their circumstances by seeking help.

What is the impact of the severity of abuse on help-seeking?

Various factors seemed to be associated with greater levels of help-seeking. As expected, women who were being more severely abused tended to rely upon a greater number of sources of help than women with less severe abuse. 51% of women who experienced severe abuse relied upon four or more sources of help compared with 42% of moderately abused women. None of the mildly abused women sought help from four or more sources. Table 9 shows how many helping sources women with various levels of abuse utilized.

Table 9: The Number of Helping Sources Used by Women by Severity of Abuse (n=100)

Number of helping agents used	Severe abuse		Moderate abuse		Mild abuse		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
One source	4	5.2	5	26.3	2	50.0	11	11.0
Two sources	10	12.9	3	15.8	1	25.0	14	14.0
Three sources	12	15.6	3	15.8	1	25.0	14	14.0
Four sources	13	16.9	3	15.8	0	0	16	16.0
Five sources	9	11.7	2	10.5	0	0	11	11.0
Six sources	13	16.9	1	5.3	0	0	14	14.0
Seven sources	10	12.9	2	10.5	0	0	12	12.0
Eight sources	3	3.9	0	0	0	0	3	3.0
Nine sources	1	1.3	0	0	0	0	1	1.0
None	2	2.6	0	0	0	0	2	2.0
Total	77	99.9[9]	19	100.0	4	100.0	100	100.0

Women experiencing severe abuse were also more likely to rely upon formal sources of help, particularly the criminal justice system, than women with less severe forms of abuse. 82% of severely abused women utilized the police at least once compared with 53%of moderately abused women and 25% of mildly abused women. Severely abused women were also more likely to utilize the courts than moderately and mildly abused women: 55% of severely abused women used the courts at least once

[9] This percentage does not add up to 100.0 because the figures were rounded up to the nearest hundredth.

compared with 37% of moderately abused women and none of the mildly abused women. And while none of the mildly or moderately abused women went to a domestic violence shelter, 17% of the severely abused women did. These findings lend support to the Modified Survivor Theory, which states that the greater the severity of abuse, the more women will seek help from formal sources, particularly the criminal justice system.

What are women's perceptions of the effectiveness of helping agents?

Nearly half (46%) of women found helping agents to be "generally effective" whereas 52% said they were "generally ineffective" (2% sought no help). In this study, the definition of effectiveness is based upon women's subjective understanding of what "effectiveness" meant to them. Thus, these statistics provide a somewhat limited understanding of women's perceptions of helpers. Nonetheless, these figures provide a general overview of women's views of helpers (a more in-depth discussion of women's feelings about helpers follows).

In terms of overall effectiveness, women in this sample rated religious counselors and friends the most positively and the police the least favorably. Table 10 indicates whether women who sought help from various sources found them to be generally effective or generally ineffective.

Table 10: Battered Women's Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Helping Agents (n=100)

Source of help	Percentage of women who perceived sources of help as...[10]			
	generally effective		generally ineffective	
	N	%	N	%
Friends	65	65%	35	35%
Family	47	47%	53	53%
Religious counselor	68	68%	32	32%
Therapist/Counselor	60	60%	40	40%
Victim Services	53	53%	47	47%
Domestic Violence shelter	50	50%	50	50%
Police	40	40%	60	60%
Courts	54	54%	46	46%
Healthcare practitioner	42	42%	58	58%
Other sources	100	100%	0	0%

The most effective helping agents

To get a better sense of women's perceptions of the responses of helpers, women were asked what agency or individual was the *most* effective to them in their process of seeking help and/or leaving the abusive relationship. Table 11 outlines their responses.

[10] Percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents could provide more than one response to questions

Table 11: The Agency or Individual that was the Most Effective According to Women in the Sample (n=100)

Source	Frequency	Percentage
Friends	22	22.0
Family	25	25.0
Religious leaders/counselors	5	5.0
Therapists/counselors	12	12.0
Victim services agencies	6	6.0
Police	3	3.0
Prosecutors/Judges	2	2.0
Other	4	4.0
No one	21	21.0
Total	100	100.0

Nearly half (47%) of the women in this sample described either family or friends as the *most* effective individual or organization. This finding underscores the important role that *informal* sources like family and friends can play in battered women's process of help-seeking and leaving. Of the various *formal* sources included in this study, women regarded therapists and counselors as the most effective helping agent (12% of women chose them as the "most effective individual or agency"). Amazingly, slightly over one-fifth of the women said that "no one" was helpful to them in their process of help-seeking. Despite women's active help-seeking efforts--only 2% of the women in this study sought no help—21% were so dissatisfied with the responses of helping agents that they could not think of anyone who was the most helpful to them. This finding supports

the Modified Survivor Theory's assertion that helpers routinely provide inadequate and ineffective services to battered women.

The least effective sources of help

As Table 12 suggests, fully one-forth of the women rated the police as the least effective helping agent. This finding clearly has serious implications for battered women. The fact that such a large portion of the women in this sample regarded the police as the *least effective* helping agent is particularly distressing given the fact that the police are generally the first responders to battered women and are the only agency with the capacity and authority to go into peoples' homes and decisively respond to such emergencies on a 24-hour basis. This finding supports the Modified Survivor Theory in its assertion that it is not battered women who suffer form learned helplessness, but rather helpers who are unable to provide comprehensive and adequate services to battered women (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988).

Table 12: The Agency or Individual that was the Least Effective According to the Women in the Sample (n=100)

Source of help	Frequency	Percent
Friends	6	6.0
Family	20	20.0
Religious leaders/counselors	1	1.0
Therapists/counselors	2	2.0
Victim services agencies	1	1.0
Domestic violence shelters	3	3.0
Police	25	25.0
Prosecutors/Judges	2	2.0
Healthcare practitioners	2	2.0
Other	1	1.0
No person or agency	37	37.0
Total	100	100.0

What is the impact of institutional responses on ongoing help-seeking?

Women who sought help generally did so with persistence even when they perceived helping agents to be ineffective or inadequate. Table 13 suggests that Women usually sought help repeatedly regardless of their perceptions of the effectiveness of helpers.

Table 13: The Rate of Repeated Help-Seeking (n=100)

Source of help	Percentage of women who...		Of women who sought help at least once, what % did so again
	perceived source as "generally effective"	perceived source as "generally ineffective"	
Friends	65%	35%	82%
Family	47%	53%	65%
Religious counselor	68%	32%	76%
Therapist/Counselor	60%	40%	70%
Victim Services	53%	47%	61%
D.V. Shelter	50%	50%	16%
Police	40%	60%	63%
Courts	54%	46%	33%
Healthcare practitioner	42%	58%	34%
Other source	100%	0%[11]	66%[11]

Perhaps because friends were generally perceived to be effective--65% of women who turned to them for help said they were "generally effective"--women tended to repeatedly seek help from them (82% of women sought help from friends more than once). On the other hand, women also repeatedly sought help from the police at high rates even though 60% of them felt that the police response was "generally ineffective": 63% of the women who initially sought help from the police did so more than once.

That is not to say that ineffective responses by helpers do not have a negative impact upon women. For example, 58% of women who turned to healthcare practitioners

[11] Percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents could provide more than one response to questions

were generally unsatisfied with their treatment. Only 34% of the women who initially sought help form healthcare providers returned to them again for help. While it is not possible, based on these statistics, to determine the extent to which negative responses by helpers actually prevented women from seeking further help from these agencies, we can learn about the impact of ineffective responses on battered women by listening to their narratives.

Women discussed the implications of negative, inadequate or ineffective responses from helping agents. These comments are illustrative of the types of problems they faced when they sought help from both formal and informal sources. The most damning criticisms by women were directed at the police and victim service agencies; the agencies most directly responsible for protecting women from harm.

Inadequate Police Responses

Women's criticisms of the police arguably have the most serious implications for battered women given their role as first respondents and gatekeepers to the criminal justice process. Women often characterized police responses as inadequate, insensitive, and inefficient. Many felt that the police did not take the abuse seriously enough and that the police often failed to make arrests even when they felt it was appropriate to do so. Fully 74% of the women in this sample called the police for help at least once. Of these women, 28% said that their abuser was *never* arrested. This is problematic given the fact that New York City has a mandatory arrest policy in cases domestic violence and that the women in this sample generally suffered from severe violence (three-quarters of the

women in this sample were severely abused according to the scale used in this study). The following quote is an egregious example of the police refusing to make an arrest when it was clearly appropriate to do so: "I wanted him arrested when he broke my nose and dislocated my shoulder. But they told him to go for a walk around the corner. Then the cop asked me on a date" (#59). Some women felt that the police did not take the time or make an effort to conduct thorough investigations: "I wanted him arrested. He gave me 13 stitches in my face. They never caught him. He was never arrested. I told them where to look but I feel like they aren't even trying" (#2). Many women complained that the police often arrived late: "They were 2-3 hours late. I could have been dead by then" (#12). Sometimes, they never arrived at all or came so late that women lost faith in the police as the following quote suggests, "The last time he was arrested I called and called and called. The police finally showed up the next day to make the arrest. I don't trust the system anymore" (#64).

Many women spoke about insensitive responses and attitudes of police officers. One immigrant woman said, "They were horrible. They did not take it seriously. One officer told me that I should be grateful to be living in an apartment with heat and a little bit of light" (#33). Another woman described a similar experience with the police, "The cops are insensitive. They accused me of having another man in my apartment because he told them that. I said, 'what does that have to do with anything? He's not supposed to be here. I have a restraining order'" (#87). Racial prejudice was another problem voiced by many of the women of color: 19% of them described the police as racist or culturally insensitive.

In two cases, women said that the police refused to intervene on their behalf because their abusers were retired police officers. The following comment illustrates the experiences of these women: "He was an ex-cop so I didn't get any help from them. They just talked to him and since it was his apartment they told me to leave and let him cool off" (#82). In another case, the police did not adequately respond because of the abuser's social status as a physician: "Once it was established that my husband was a doctor, they just said, 'you two should get along'" (#77).

A few women criticized the police for arresting them—or threatening to do so—under inappropriate circumstances. Three women were arrested as "primary aggressors" while one woman was arrested along with her abuser and her son. These women's narratives suggest that the police used arrests as a punitive response when they made repeat calls for help. The following quote describes the experience of one women in the sample: "They would save me 2-3 days of abuse by locking him up but then he would be out again and it would start up all over again. After a while, the police said, "if we have to come here one more time and you have bruises on you we're gonna lock up both of you" (#4).

All of the women who were arrested felt that the arrest was unjustified. The following quote illustrates an extreme example of a wrongful arrest: "When I was stabbed, they tried to take me away like I was crazy... They restrained me in the ambulance. Someone must have thought I stabbed myself. Only one counselor was aware that I was telling the truth. One of police officers later apologized" (#21). While several women reported that police officers made threats to mutually arrest the abuser and the victim, only one woman in this sample was actually arrested along with her

abuser. She said that her son tried to defend her from the abuser during an especially vicious assault; the woman was arrested along with her son. She said that this experience made her lose faith in the criminal justice system: "Because of this, I don't trust the police. I would never call them again" (#20). The following quote illustrates a similar case where a woman felt she was unfairly arrested with her abuser: "He was never arrested until the very end when he sexually attacked my daughter. They initially arrested me along with him because they said I had aided and abetted him in my daughter's molestation" (#83). While the charges against her were soon dropped, the trauma associated with being wrongfully accused of such a horrible crime had lasting effects.

Problems getting into domestic violence shelters

In addition to inadequate and ineffective police responses, women complained about the limited availability of domestic violence shelter space. Twenty-five percent of the women in this sample sought help at a domestic violence shelter. However, fully one-third of these women were turned away due to lack of space. As a result, most of these women stayed in regular homeless shelters instead. Many of these women said they felt unsafe at homeless shelters due to the lax security and because the location of homeless shelters are universally known to outsiders (whereas the location of domestic violence shelters is closely guarded for safety reasons). While staying in a homeless shelter is arguably preferable to being homeless, it is clearly not as safe as staying in shelters specifically designed and operated to protect battered women from abusers who

are determined to cause them harm. Consequently, the lack of domestic violence shelter space presents a serious threat to battered women's safety.

Of the twenty-five women who sought shelter, only thirteen actually stayed in a domestic violence shelter. One-third of the women who ultimately stayed in a domestic violence shelter said that it took weeks, and sometimes even months to get a space. One woman became temporarily homeless while waiting for a space to open up: "I had to wait two months to even get into the domestic violence shelter. I was on the street for two months" (#78).

Sixteen percent of the women who sought space at a domestic violence shelter space could not gain access due to restrictive shelter rules. Some shelters do not allow women to bring their teenage sons: "I wanted to get into a shelter when I left but my son was 12 and they don't permit any boys over the age of ten into the domestic violence shelter" (#14). For women *without children*, gaining access to a domestic violence shelter was almost impossible. Domestic violence shelters give preference to women with children. As a result, women without children were given the option to wait for a space (which could take weeks), or to go to a homeless shelter (which were routinely described by women as unsafe and dirty).

Women who were able to get into the domestic violence shelters often described them as substandard, inhospitable, and even unsafe. Shockingly, several women said that they felt unsafe when they were residing at domestic violence shelters. One woman said that her abuser somehow gained access to her room, while another woman complained about the lack of security: "There was no real protection at the shelter. At the other shelters they had a security guard out front but at this one they didn't. If someone

followed me and wanted to hurt me they could have" (#15). Others criticized shelter workers for being incompetent. One woman bitterly complained that they didn't even know how to help her find housing: "They were garbage. They don't know what they are doing. They didn't file for my housing until my time at the shelter had run out. So they were going to throw me out without having anywhere to go" (#78).

Inadequate responses by victim services agencies

Nearly half of the women who sought help from victim service agencies (47%) voiced dissatisfaction about the treatment they received. Many felt that workers were sometimes insulting and insensitive. One woman said, "I remember one counselor said, 'well you must really like to be beaten because you're still with him'" (#45). Another woman reported a similar response by a worker at a victim service agency: "A counselor at the victim services agency tried to get me prosecuted because she said *I* belonged in jail. But I said, 'I'm the victim here. I have a book of police reports against him'" (#66). Such victim-blaming attitudes are clearly problematic for an agency designed to assist battered women.

In some extreme cases, workers at victim service agencies actually made matters worse for the battered women. One woman said that she could not get into a shelter because " they didn't do the interview correctly the first time so I didn't fit the criteria for a domestic violence shelter" (#48). Another woman said that a victim service counselor betrayed her trust by calling child protective services and initiated an investigation against her for failing to protect her children from her abuser: "Victim services called

child protective services because I said I had children and that there had been domestic violence... They ended up sending my kids to be with their father. I have charges of child neglect against me" (#64).

Ineffective Responses by the Courts

Women complained bitterly that even when abusers were arrested, they were rarely incarcerated and few served any substantial jail time. Forty-eight percent of the women in this sample reported that their abusers were arrested at least once. However, of these, only 10% of these abusers served any jail time and sentences ranged from a few days to a few months. The following quote illustrates the experiences of many women in this sample, "The last incident where he cracked my head open, broke my ribs, broke my jaw, and broke my eye socket and left me for dead he only got a week in jail" (#84). As one woman said, "It had to get really out of hand before they did anything. He'd be taken away but he never did any real time for anything he did except for the last time he violated the order of protection. He'd come back even worse than before" (#18).

Nearly half (49%) of the women in this sample sought an order of protection. In a few cases (6%) women said that they were unable to get orders of protection for a number of reasons. One woman was told that she could not get a renewal for her order of protection because the abuse "wasn't so bad" (#9). Another woman said that she was denied an order of protection because she was arrested along with her abuser (#20). Another woman was told that she was not eligible for an order of protection because her abuser had never been arrested, although she had suffered severe injuries (#82).

Ineffective Responses by Mental Health Providers

Most of the women who relied upon therapists for assistance generally had positive experiences. However one woman said that her therapist lacked compassion and "didn't want to hear about the domestic violence" (#17). Some women who sought help from psychiatrists felt that they minimized the significance of the abuse or completely disregarded the abuse: "I was hospitalized for a mental breakdown- once when I tried to defend myself against him with a knife and another time when I was suicidal. The doctors never made the connection between the abuse and my mental breakdowns" (#88).

Insensitive Responses by Religious Counselors/Leaders

While women often felt supported and validated by their congregations and religious communities, women who turned to religious leaders or counselors for help often said that they were told to "pray on it" (#17) or that it was "my cross to bear" (#73). One woman said that when she spoke to her pastor about the domestic violence in her intimate relationship, "he said we shouldn't live in sin. That's all they cared about" (#27).

Ineffective responses from healthcare practitioners

Most women who sought help from healthcare providers felt that they were generally insensitive to their plight and often ignored obvious signs of abuse because they didn't want to deal with the issue. The following quote summarizes the views of many women: "I tried to tell them about the abuse but they didn't want to deal with it. They ignored it. They just want to patch you up" (#59).

The preceding comments underscore the negative implications of inadequate or ineffective responses from helping agents. These comments are illustrative of the types of problems they faced when they sought help from a variety of sources. The most damning criticisms by women were directed at the police and victim service agencies; the agencies most directly responsible for protecting women from harm.

What is the impact of ineffective institutional responses on the length of time women remain in the abusive relationship?

One question this study sought to answer is, do women remain in abusive relationships longer if they perceive helping agents to be ineffective? Gondolf (1988) suggests that battered women will be more likely to remain in abusive relationships to cope as best they can if they do not receive proper institutional help. However, in this study, as Table 14 suggests, women who felt that helpers were "generally ineffective" were no more likely to remain longer in the abusive relationship than those who found them to be "generally effective".

Table 14: The Effects of Battered Women's Perceptions of Helpers on the Length of Time Women Stayed in the Abusive Relationship (n=100)

Women's overall perception of helpers	Percent of women remaining for various lengths of time past the first physically violent incident					Total
	<1 year	1 to < 5 years	5 to < 10 years	10 to < 15 years	15 + years	
Generally ineffective	13%	22%	11%	3%	3%	52%
Generally effective	13%	19%	6%	3%	5%	46%
Not applicable	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	2%
Total	27%	41%	18%	6%	8%	100%

The finding that battered women who experienced helping agents to be ineffective did not necessarily remain in their abusive relationships longer runs counter to one of the tenets of the Modified Survivor Theory. This theory argues that when help-seeking efforts fail to adequately meet battered women's needs, women are more likely to remain in the abusive relationship and cope with the violence as best they can (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). However, it is clear from women's narratives that there were many other reasons why they remained in their relationships. The section below outlines some of women's reasons for remaining in the abusive relationship past the first physically violent incident.

Why Women Stayed

Whereas the Modified Survivor Theory predicts that battered women remain in abusive relationships longer when they receive inadequate or ineffective assistance from helping agents, women in this study did not describe "ineffective responses by helpers" as a primary reason for remaining in their abusive relationships past the first physically violent incident. However, it is clear from the narratives below that there were many other rational explanations for their decision to remain in abusive relationships.

Hopes that the abuser would change

Many women said that they hoped their partner would change or that they could change him. One woman said that she was stunned by the abuse, "I was shocked. I didn't really believe it was happening. I cried a lot and he said it wouldn't happen again. Then it wouldn't happen for three weeks" (#3). Because the abuse was not constant, some women convinced themselves that things would "get better": "I didn't know what was causing his behavior and I thought we could work it out and talk about it" (#46). They wanted to believe their partners when they promised to change: "I know he loved me and he was always so sorry and he promised he would never do it again" (#20). Some women thought that they could change their partners: "I tried to change him and help him, trying to be his everything and feeling burdened about being his everything. My family has a "stand by your man" attitude which they embedded in me" (#71).

Wanting to keep their family intact

Many women with children voiced a strong desire to keep their families together, even when there was abuse. The following quote summarizes the feelings of many women: "He had a good job. He had a bad side but he had a good side too. I wanted to stay and keep the family in tact. I really sacrificed my own needs because I had three kids and self-esteem was a big issue. I didn't want to go on welfare. I had my pride" (#9). The belief that children required a father was prominent among Black women in this sample. One woman said that she didn't want to be like so many other mothers in her community who were raising their children alone: "I believe in keeping my family together. You see a lot of girls without their baby fathers. My mother always told me to work it out no matter what" (#52). For a few, divorce was not a socially acceptable option: "Divorce would have been a sign of failure. We had children together. There didn't seem to be a legitimate reason to leave. But I withdrew my heart from him." #99

In a few cases, women stayed because their abuser was a "good father". One woman said that she was grateful to her abuser because he parented her children even though they "weren't his": "I loved him because he loved my babies and they weren't his. He was so good to me. He was supportive of me. I went back to school and he took care of the children when I was going to school. He'd cook, he'd clean, he took me places. It was his drug use that made him abusive" (42).

"Why should *I* leave? It's *my* house!"

Many women in this sample voiced outrage over the fact that they were required to leave their homes in order to find safety. Most of the women in this sample had their own apartments through public housing ("Section 8" housing) and were reluctant to give up these scarce spaces. The following quotes sums up how most of these women felt: "It was my apartment so why should I have to go?" (#21). Many women tried, with little success, to get the abuser to leave: "I couldn't get rid of him. I'd throw him out and he'd come right back. The cops came so many times it was like a joke" (#78).

"I had nowhere to go"

Other women were willing to leave, but had nowhere to go. Most of these women were alienated from friends or family members because of the isolating tactics of their abusers. Drug-addicted women often had nowhere else to turn: "Every time I would use (drugs), he would come looking for me. I'd be missing for three days. I'd go back with him. I had nowhere else to go" (#56).

Many could not get into a domestic violence shelter or feared going to homeless shelters for safety reasons. In several cases, women were being stalked by their abusers and therefore could not stay with friends or family: "I couldn't leave because I just had a newborn baby and he was busting my grandmother's windows and doors off the hinges if I went to stay with her. I couldn't live on the street. So I went back to him" (#4).

"He took care of me"

Some women remained in the abusive relationship because their abusers were also breadwinners and caretakers. For most of the women, their dependency on abusers was financial: they provided women with essentials like rent and food. In a few cases, women remained with abusers who could provide them with a better life: "He was making $65,000 in construction and he provided for me and my children. I felt safe because I lived in a dangerous neighborhood" (#70).

Certain subgroups of women felt particularly dependant on their partners because of their special needs. This was particularly the case for mentally and physically disabled women: "Because I have mental problems and I can't take care of myself. He took care of a lot of things I needed" (#72).

Drug-addicted women described having a different kind of dependency on their partners: "I used to stay out all the time. A lot of that stuff played a big part. I was on crack, cocaine, reefer, I did it all. He supplied me with drugs. Where was I gonna go? I was living in his place and he took care of me. That man bathed and fed me when I couldn't take care of myself" (#11). Women whose abusers were drug dealers offered low-income women a lifestyle that was otherwise unattainable.

What is the impact of ineffective institutional responses on women's decision to fight back against their abusers?

According to Table 15, women who regarded helpers as ineffective were slightly more likely to fight back against their abusers than those who found them to be effective. These statistics lend support to the Modified Survivor Theory: women who receive ineffective assistance from formal helping agents are more likely to cope with the abuse as best they can and to "take matters into their own hands".

Table 15: The Effect of Women's Perceptions of Helping Agents on Use of Violence

Fought back (Yes/No)	Women's overall perceptions of helpers			Total
	Generally ineffective	Generally effective	N/A[12]	
Yes	45%	37%	2%	84%
No	7%	9%	0%	16%
Total	52%	46%	2%	100%

In this study, fully 84% of the women physically fought back, in one form or another, against their abuser at some point in the relationship. While a minority of the women said they fought back from the very beginning of the abusive relationship, most did so only after months or even years of abuse. Women's motivations for fighting back

[12] Two women in this sample (2%) did not seek help.

differed. Self-defense, retaliation, and the cumulative effect of life-long abusive relationships were the most common reasons given for fighting back.

Many women tried to defend themselves against dangerous and sometimes life-threatening circumstances: "I tried to bite him. I tried to leave a mark or something. I wanted him to remember I was there. And I was really frightened for my life. He was trying to kill me" (#59). The following comment summarizes the desperate circumstances of these women: "Once he took a crowbar to my door. I had three locks to keep him out. I got scared and took my .38 out. I shot the first shot through the door through the peep hole and then two more shots" (#66). Several women said they fought back to protect their children: "I fought back to protect myself and to get him away from my children...it was mostly me getting hurt" (#13). Sadly, many women reported having been abused while pregnant (fully one-third of the women in this sample were abused during pregnancy). Some women fought back during this vulnerable time to try to protect their fetuses from harm: "Once I fought back...I was 7 months pregnant. I was trying to protect the baby" (#5).

In some cases, women described a process where their long-term victimization had driven them to finally fight back. In these cases, women had reached a psychological breaking point and were retaliating against their abusers for past wrongs against them and their children. In some cases, the women's acts of violence were severe. Some mentioned that the abuse they sustained had made them "crazy", "aggressive", or "just like him". One woman even described herself as "the aggressor": "I was becoming the aggressor. I knocked his tooth out. I almost knocked him out. I was becoming like him.

I was at the point that I was really gonna kill him. I said, "I never been to jail but baby you're worth it." He begged and pleaded for his life" (#12).

However it is necessary to interpret women's so-called "mutual violence" cautiously. It is clear from the women's narratives below that their violence was generally a reaction to sustained, often brutal victimization: "Once he dragged me up the stairs by my hair. It pulled my hair out by the roots... I took the mirror and busted it in the back of his head...I got knives. He made me real crazy. I never used to be this kinda woman. My hits was nothing compared to his so I would pick up a weight or a bat, something he could feel" (#4). Women did not generally initiate the violence, but rather retaliated against their abuser when there was an opportunity to do so: "One night I fought him back...he'd been doing coke and had lost a lot of weight. I knew he was weak. My counselor encouraged me to fight back so I did" (#25). Even when women initiated violence, they did so in anticipation of an inevitable beating by their abusers: "In the last three years, I'd hit him back or shove him before he'd go out drinking because I knew he'd come home drunk and beat me so I figured I'd get my hits in early" (#37).

Some women fought back largely because of the cumulative psychological effect of having been abused as children, young women, and now, as adults. Richie describes this psychological process as "projection and association" (Richie, 1996). Women who used violence against their partners due to projection and association did so in a "symbolic or projected retaliation for past abuse" (Richie, 1996:110). The quotes below are illustrative of this psychological process: "I fought back because when I was younger I was beaten terribly by a man so I decided I was not gonna tolerate being beaten down

by a man. I vowed that I'd never let a man do that to me again" (#8) Similarly, another woman said, "I been through it all before as a child, I been raped and abused before and I can't take it anymore...I have a stab wound in my stomach and a gunshot in my shoulder from past relationships...I don't allow no man to put their hands on me. I panic and I snap...That's why the knife is there and I also have a hammer near my bed. I been hurt before and I'm not going to go through it again" (#17).

Of the women who fought back, 49% said that doing so made the situation worse, while 22% said it made the situation better, and 13% said that fighting back made no difference in the level of abuse directed at them. Some women tried to fight back in the beginning but quickly learned that doing so only made their abusers more aggressive: "I fought back. In the beginning I tried to stab him to let him know not to mess with me. But instead he took it from me and stabbed my finger" (#95). Another woman had a similar experience when she tried to fight off her abuser: "I tried to keep him off of me. One time he tried to rape me and he had his hand on my neck. I kicked him but it just made him angrier" (# 87). Some abusers used brutal tactics to prevent women from defending themselves: "I used to fight back. That's why he'd tie me up so I couldn't defend myself" (#58). A few women said that fighting back only landed them in jail, but the abuse never stopped: "I always fought back. That's why I kept getting arrested. I went to jail 6 or 7 times because of him. I hit him to keep from getting hurt but it didn't work" (#38). "One woman felt that if she hadn't fought back, "maybe it wouldn't have been so bad" (#49).

On the other hand, some of the women felt that fighting back offered them some semblance of self-respect if not necessarily some measure of safety. The following

woman's comment summarizes the feelings of many women who felt that fighting back restored some of their dignity after having been abused and degraded for so long: "I learned, don't let no man put fear in your heart. If someone's gonna hit me, I'm gonna hit back...I felt better about myself because I didn't let no man override me" (#7). However, it was generally only when women resorted to using weapons that their abusers took notice: "Once I had a knife. I said, "you ain't gettin' no hit off me...he saw that I wasn't taking so much from him and he backed off" (#6). In some cases, women's use of violence was so severe or shocking to the abuser that it had a significant deterrent effect: "Once I stabbed him with an icepick—he hit me so hard I fell to the floor and I saw the icepick and I stabbed him. He didn't press charges on me. After that he never hit me again." Some abusers were so surprised by their partner's use of violence that it made a powerful impression: "the last time he just brushed my shoulder and I almost ripped his face off because I never wanted him to touch me again. That was the last incident" (#14).

However, it is important to note that fighting back was generally perceived by women as a last resort and that the women generally did so out of a sense of profound despair, frustration and fatalism. The following comment describes the feelings of many of these women: "After a while even a scared person gets tired so you fight back anyway" (#66). Another woman voiced a similar attitude about fighting back: "I didn't want to be beaten up anymore...I knew he could kill me in my sleep at any time, so why not fight back? " (#24).

The women who *did not* fight back had several reasons for not doing so. Many felt that it would place them in greater risk: "I was in a state of shock because he was in a

rage. I thought if I fought back he would kill me" (#22). Others felt that the criminal justice system would penalize them if they fought back: "My feeling was that if I got into a fight I'd be the one who'd get prosecuted because I'm a poor black woman. I didn't want to be incarcerated" (#41).

What is the impact of ineffective institutional responses on the use of street justice?

According to Table 16, women who regarded helpers as ineffective were no more likely to use street justice (retaliatory actions carried out on behalf of victims by family members or close friends) than those who found them to be effective. These statistics suggest that factors other than or in addition to women's frustrations with helping agencies can explain their use of street justice.

Table 16: The Effect of Women's Perceptions of Helpers on Use of "Street Justice"

Use of street justice (Yes/No)	Women's overall perceptions of helpers			Total
	Generally ineffective	Generally effective	N/A[13]	
Yes	16%	17%	0%	33%
No	36%	29%	2%	67%
Total	52%	46%	2%	100%

[13] Two women in this sample (2%) did not seek help.

One-third of the women reported using street justice. For the purposes of this study, street justice is relying on friends and family to threaten or use retaliatory violence to punish abusers and to deter them from continuing their abuse. In this study, street justice consisted of anything from intimidation to threats and physical assaults. Physical assaults by male family members were the most common form of street justice: "My brother beat him up after he'd given me a bloody nose. He beat him with a stick and he had to get 10 stitches. I felt better" (#45). Sometimes relatives brandished weapons to try to intimidate abusers: "My father threatened him with a gun. He said, Mister, this is not working. He stayed away from me for a while" (#59). In one case, a woman's family members supplied her with a weapon so that she could defend herself: "They didn't fight him, but they gave me a .38" (#66). In another unusual case, a woman said that the police used street justice to punish a woman's abuser: "They (the police) smacked him up the way he smacked me up...It made me feel good because they made him scream the way he made me scream...They gave him a couple of smacks in the face, they roughed him up somewhat" (#4).

Women claimed that interventions by family members and friends had mixed results. Some women felt that the interventions by friends and family sent a message to the abuser that they were "not to be messed with". Others said that street justice had a short-term deterrent effect: "His brother fought him when he was about to fight me. It took his mind off me for a while" (#61). In one case, the street justice effectively removed the abuser from the woman's home, at least for a while: "My two brothers and mother beat him. He just ran away. He was gone for a couple of days" (#58). One

woman said she was "protected" by her son: "My son tried to protect me once. I don't know what would've happened if he hadn't" (#20).

But a considerable number of women also said that interventions by friends and family made no difference in their circumstance or even made matters worse. The following quotes illustrate some of the ways friends and family intervened to help women, with mixed success: "My uncle was gonna kill him. My father went after him with a gun...but it made it worse because he took it out on me" (#73). In some cases, street justice presented a significant danger to those intervening on the behalf of women: "My friend intervened but he [the abuser] stabbed him" (#84).

Two-thirds (67%) of the women did not have family or friends intervene on their behalf for a number of reasons. Most were concerned that their loved ones would become embroiled in a dangerous situation or that "someone would wind up in jail": "My brothers are crazy, they would have gone to jail for life" (#44). One woman voiced a similar concern: "I told my brother about it. They wanted to kill him but I told them not to do it. I was afraid of losing a brother 'cause I had already lost one brother over stupid shit" (#64). This fear kept a significant number of women from even telling their families about the abuse, thereby further contributing to their sense of isolation and limiting their options for help-seeking.

Other women said that they had nobody to intervene on their behalf. Some women had no family to protect them: "I wish I had a brother that could fuck him up the way he did me but all I had was my aunt" (#5). Others lost touch with their loved ones because of the abuser's isolating tactics: "I didn't have anybody. He cut me off from all my friends and family" (#18). Several women said that no one would intervene on their

behalf because their abuser was "too crazy" or "too violent: "I didn't know anyone as big as him. He's crazy. Who's gonna want to push him? He starts fights in clubs just to get his frustrations out" (#24). Several of the women in this sample were involved with men who had substantial violent criminal records: "Nobody would have fought him. He had a manslaughter conviction and he was a Vietnam veteran" (#70).

Others simply felt that it was no one else's business or that they had to deal with the problem by themselves. In a few cases, family members offered to help, but the woman refused. One woman said, "My son offered to fight him after I was in the hospital but I said no. He couldn't understand why I wouldn't let him. We didn't talk for a while after that" (#42).

What are some of the barriers to help-seeking and/or leaving abusive relationships?

Women in this sample faced a great many obstacles to seeking help and/or leaving abusive relationships. They fall into three general categories: individual-level obstacles, structural, and institutional obstacles. Since institutional and structural obstacles are often interrelated and overlapping, these obstacles have been collapsed into one grouping. Tables 17 and 18 indicate the percentage of women who experienced individual-level and structural/institutional obstacles to help-seeking respectively.

Table 17: Percentage[14] of Women Experiencing Individual-Level Obstacles (n=100)

Individual-level Obstacles	Percentage*
Hope that the abuser would change	79%
Depression made it difficult to seek help	70%
High level of commitment to the relationship/marriage	65%
Threats by abuser to hurt the woman or her kids	61%
Isolating behaviors of abuser	52%
Woman thought the abuse was normal because of prior victimization	22%
Abuser threatened to fight for custody of the children	17%
Woman did not perceive herself as a victim	14%
Woman loved/had sympathy for the abuser	14%
Abuser threatened to kidnap the children	10%
Desire to keep two-parent family intact	9%
Fear of being alone	6%

[14] Percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents could provide more than one response to questions

Table 18: Percentage[15] of Women Experiencing Various Structural and Institutional Obstacles (n=100)

Structural or Institutional Obstacles to help-seeking	Percent*
Reluctance to involve helpers due to the belief that they are ineffective	50%
Financial dependence on the abuser	46%
Having no where to go if she left	42%
Reluctance to seek help due to own or abuser's drug/criminal involvement	23%
Reluctance to seek help because of the perception of helping agencies as racist	17%
Lack of affordable, accessible and/or adequate childcare	9%
Fear of losing her home if she left	8%
Inability to get into a domestic violence shelter due to lack of space	8%
Fear of being reported to child protective services by helpers	7%
Inability to get into a domestic violence shelter due to restrictive rules	4%

The tables above support a major tenet of the Modified Survivor Theory: that battered women encounter a wide range of individual-level, structural and institutional

[15] Percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents could provide more than one response to questions

obstacles which limited their help-seeking efforts and in many cases made leaving more difficult.

The Table 19 indicates that the majority of women in this sample encountered many of these obstacles to help-seeking and leaving. Fully 60% of the women said that they overcame at least six obstacles in their process of leaving the abusive relationship.

Table 19: The Number of Obstacles to Help-Seeking and/or Leaving Abusive Relationships (n=100)

Number of obstacles	Frequency	Percent
None	1	1.0
One	3	3.0
Two	3	3.0
Three	8	8.0
Four	13	13.0
Five	12	12.0
Six	25	25.0
Seven	17	17.0
Eight	7	7.0
Nine	5	5.0
Ten or more	6	6.0
Total	100	100.0

What are the greatest obstacles to help-seeking and/or leaving abusive relationships?

Women's greatest obstacles to help-seeking were generally a combination of individual-level and structural obstacles: threats by the abuser (13%); having love/sympathy for abuser (13%); being financially dependent on the abuser (12%); and having nowhere to go (11%). However some women did describe institutional obstacles as their greatest barriers to getting help. For example, five percent of the women did not seek help from victim service agencies because of they feared that they would be perceived as "unfit mothers" and might therefore lose custody of their children. The finding that individual-level and structural obstacles posed the greatest limitations on women's help-seeking supports the Modified Survivor Theory's tenet that battered women's help-seeking is constrained not only by the ineffectual responses of helpers and other institutional obstacles, but also by a number of structural and individual-level barriers.

Poor women of color faced particular obstacles to help-seeking and subsequently leaving, abusive relationships. The greatest obstacles of black women were threats by abuser (14.5% of black women), financial dependency (13% of black women), nowhere to go (13% of black women), wanted to keep two-parent family (11% of black women), and loved/had sympathy for abuser (11%). For white women, the greatest obstacles were: had sympathy for abuser (18%), financial dependency (14%). Hispanic women listed threats by abuser (17%), hopes that abuser would change (17%), having nowhere to go (17%), and threats by abuser to call child protective services (17%) as barriers.

Notably, the desire to keep the family intact was a particular consideration of black women when deciding whether to end the abusive relationship.

Black and Hispanic women were also more likely to mention their own drug or criminal involvement as a reason for not seeking help from the criminal justice system. And while only one African American woman reported racism within the criminal justice and social service systems as the "greatest obstacle" to further help-seeking, fully 19% of the women of color in this sample perceived helpers (most notably the police) to be racist. Women of color in this sample were also more worried about housing than the white women in the sample. 21% of the women of color mentioned either "having nowhere to go" or the "fear of losing their home" as the greatest obstacles to leaving their abusive relationships.

Oddly, for women experiencing severe abuse, the greatest obstacle to help-seeking and/or leaving the abusive relationship was "having sympathy for the abuser" (16%), closely followed by "threats of harm by the abuser"(14%). It is not clear why women suffering from the most severe abuse said that "having sympathy for their abuser" was the greatest obstacle to leaving the relationship more frequently than women with lesser forms of abuse. See Table 20 below for a complete breakdown of women's greatest obstacles to help-seeking/leaving.

Table 20: The Greatest Obstacles to Help-Seeking/Leaving (n=100)

Greatest obstacle	Frequency	Percent
Threats by abuser	13	13.0
Love/sympathy	13	13.0
Financial dependence	12	12.0
Nowhere to go	11	11.0
Fear of losing home	8	8.0
Hope that abuser will change	8	8.0
Wanting two-parent family	7	7.0
Fear of losing children[16]	5	5.0
Fear of being alone	5	5.0
Fear of police[17]	4	4.0
Commitment to relationship	3	3.0
Too depressed to act	2	2.0
Belief that she's not a victim	2	2.0
Perception of police as racist	1	1.0
Lack of decent child care	1	1.0
Other barriers	4	4.0
Missing data	1	1.0
Total	100	100.0

What factors contributed to women leaving their abusive relationships?

The Modified Survivor Theory suggests that leaving abusive relationships is a process involving a number of stages during which help-seeking can play an important

[16] Women feared losing their children if they reported the abuse to victim service agencies because they thought that the counselors would report them to Child Protective Agencies.

[17] Women's fear of the police was related to their own criminal or drug involvement.

part. The domestic violence literature suggests that there are a number of factors that may encourage battered women to leave abusive relationships: 1) a shift in the woman's perception of the relationship as abusive; 2) a realization that the relationship will not improve (despite efforts by women to alter their own behavior or to influence abusers); 3) some catalyst or turning point (i.e. severe injury); 4) the abandonment of the dream of an idealized relationship, family structure or marriage; and perhaps 5) the realization that the relationship may not end due to the shared custody of children (Barnett, 2000:345).

According to women's narratives in this study, helpers did not play as significant a role as predicted. In this sample, 71% of the women described various catalysts or turning points as the main factors that empowered them to leave. Of these, only 7% of the women in this sample mentioned the "positive influence of others" as a catalyst that helped them decide to leave the abusive relationship. The main turning point for women in this sample was a particularly violent incident (25%). Another 25% of the women decided to leave when their perception of the relationship or their partner changed while 4% of the women left when their resources changed. Table 21 provides a complete breakdown of the various factors that were associated with women's decisions to leave their abusive relationships or for the relationship to end.

Table 21: Factors Associated with Leaving/Ending Abusive Relationships

Factor associated with leaving/ending abusive relationships	Frequency	Percentage
Particularly violent incident	25	25.0
Realized abuse wouldn't end	14	14.0
Particularly disrespectful incident	10	10.0%
Realized abuser wouldn't change	8	8.0%
Positive influence of others	7	7.0%
Abuser was incarcerated	7	7.0%
Abuser started to harm children	7	7.0%
Woman met someone else	5	5.0%
Woman's health failed due to abuse	3	3.0%
Abuser left	3	3.0%
Abuser died	3	3.0%
Feared harming/killing abuser and ending up in jail	3	3.0%
Woman got the financial resources to leave	3	3.0%
Abuser stopped providing for the family	1	1.0%
Woman shot abuser	1	1.0%
Total	100	100.0%

As the table above indicates, women left their abusers for three main reasons: 1) a major turning point or catalyst; 2) a shift in their perception of the abuser or the relationships; and 3) a change in the women's financial resources. The narratives below provide in-depth descriptions of women's reasons for finally ending the relationship.

Major catalysts and turning points

A particularly violent incident

Women were the most likely to cite a particularly violent incident as their main reason for leaving the abusive relationship. One woman said she "had had enough" when her abuser beat her for three straight days (#71). Another woman said she finally left her abuser when he set the house on fire with her in it (#63). Usually this particular episode represented a substantial escalation of abuse. In other cases, the incident included actions that women regarded as particularly exceptionable: "When he bit me in my face I was finished with him. He broke my skin." #13

A Particularly egregious/ disrespectful incident

For others, the turning point had to do with a particularly embarrassing or degrading event. Some women were humiliated to learn that their partners were involved with other women: "He started seeing another woman. I went to see him on my birthday and I heard another woman laughing. I came back and left my key and never went back" (#45). In a few extreme cases, women were mortified to discover that their partners had fathered a child with another woman: "The turning point for me was that he had a baby with another woman" (#9). Other kinds of betrayal led some women to make the final break from their abusers. One woman said that when her abuser reported her to child protective services, "that was it" (#23).

When their partners abdicated their responsibilities, many women decided it was over: "He stopped paying rent, he started staying out all night and he started to see other women" (#91).

The incarceration of the abuser

The incarceration of the abuser marked the end of the relationship for a few of the women in this sample. However, in most of these cases, the abuser was jailed for offenses unrelated to the domestic violence, usually drug-related offenses: "He got locked up for drugs. We don't know how much time he's gonna do. I care for him but it can't be the same no more 'cause I'm tired of it. I got the kids and I don't got no time for nonsense. He needs help and I can't give him that" (#19). Very few women reported that their abusers were imprisoned for a considerable length of time specifically for domestic violence: "He got locked up for 12 years for what he did to me. He tried to kill me. He said if I can't have you, no one can" (#96).

The positive influence of others/helpers

Only 7% of the women in this study said that others—loved ones or helpers—played a significant role in their decision to leave the abusive relationship. Informal sources like friends and family played the important role of providing emotional support and motivation. For some, the love of their children compelled them to leave: "I had my kids to live for. I wasn't gonna let this man put me in the hospital" (#6). Others were positively influenced by friends who made them feel that it was possible to leave:

"By talking to my friend about how she got out of an abusive relationship, I felt like I could get out too. I went to my aunt's house and from there I went to the shelter" (#23). One woman said that she was motivated to leave by a "church elder" who listened to her and made her feel that she did not deserve to be abused (#14).

Formal sources of help were also influential in few women's process of leaving. Several women talked about the support they received from counselors and other participants when they entered drug treatment: "I went into treatment and I started learning from the other women there. They [the program] invited us to a graduation ceremony and I heard about all of the women's experiences of domestic violence. But even then I kept things to myself. I didn't share the abuse with my counselor. But my counselor pushed me to talk and I finally did" (#25). Sometimes, consciousness-raising efforts by victim service agencies had a dramatic impact on women: "The ads in the subways about domestic violence really helped. It made me feel like it was possible to get a divorce. I decided to get a job and I wanted my own room. One day he wanted to have sex with me and he choked me. I went to the police and filed a report and got an order of protection" (#94).

The abuser started to harm the children

The discovery that their partners were also abusing their children marked the end of the relationship for some women. The following quote illustrates the most dramatic example of this scenario: "It ended really ugly. I found out that he had hit my daughter. We got into a huge fight because he thought I didn't discipline her properly so he beat her

and then he beat me. My daughter later told me he had touched her [sexually]" (#83). In some cases, women tolerated severe acts of violence against themselves, but as soon as their children were harmed, they decided it was over: "He was angry one day and he smacked my son, real hard. That was *it*. I had never called the cops until then" (#52).

Shifts in woman's perception of the abuser or relationship

Realizing that the abuse wouldn't end/abuser wouldn't change

Over time, it became clear to many of these women that the abuse would never end. One woman voiced this view succinctly: "It just got to a point where I just felt it was enough. I knew it wouldn't change" (#67). Some women had to finally accept that their partners would never change: "I really cared for the guy and I kept saying to myself that he'd change. I blamed myself in the beginning and tried to do better but nothing changed. So one day I finally just left. My heart was beatin' fast, I was out and decided to never go back" (#85).

Fear of killing him and going to jail

Some women were increasingly afraid that one day either they or their abusers would get killed. One woman said that she realized that things were never going to improve and that if she stayed in the relationship "he was gonna kill me or I was gonna kill him" (#11). Echoing this concern, another woman said, "I left, I just decided that I wasn't gonna wait for me to go to jail because the last time he tried to cut me I cut him.

So I left because I didn't want to go to jail for killing him. When blood starts drawing, it's time to go" (#57).

Change in woman's resources

A final factor that empowered a small portion of women to leave was a change in their resources. Most of these women had decided to leave the relationship some time before, but needed to make arrangements for a new place to live or save their money for their move. One woman's new job allowed her to get away from her abuser: "I had started to get myself together and was planning to move to my cousin's. But I just got fed up. My job helped me get out because I am a home health aide and I had to stay with patients overnight."

How do the responses of helping agents impact battered women's process of leaving?

According to the Modified Survivor Theory, effective responses by helping agents may guide battered women through this process and, ultimately, empower them to leave (Browne, 1998; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988). However, the women in this study rarely reported helping agents as the *primary* factors influencing them to leave abusive partners. In fact, when asked about the most effective person or agency that helped them in their process of leaving/ending abusive relationships, 21% said that "no one" was particularly helpful. On the other hand, many women were positively affected by the responses of a wide range of both informal and formal sources of help. Although the women may not

have regarded institutional responses as the *primary* factors allowing them to leave abusive relationships, comments below strongly suggest the vital role that helpers sometimes played by empowering women to leave and providing tangible resources and services necessary to do so.

Empowering women, providing emotional support and offering helpful information

Women said that a wide range of informal and formal sources were helpful in their process of leaving. Many of the women said that counselors and therapists were particularly influential in their process of getting free from their abusers. According to the women, they generally provided compassion, support, empowerment, and validation. While they used different approaches, women generally said they had positive experiences with their therapists. In some cases, they challenged women to take charge of their lives: "I started to take responsibility for myself and to work on my self-esteem" (#59). Others encouraged women to draw connections between their childhood experiences and the current abuse: "My therapist made me look at how I was repeating childhood patterns. I started to question my choices of men, like why would I accept men with problems and make excuses for them" (#70). One woman said that her counselor encouraged her to write poetry about her experiences as a way of dealing with her feelings: "My counselor used to read to me and I'd sit there and write poetry about what I was going through. She didn't just say 'get out' because that doesn't help. I got to perform my poetry at a college. It raised my self-esteem" (#19)

Religious leaders and counselors also played an important role in helping women leave abusive relationships. By talking to a church elder, one woman felt validated and supported: "He [church elder] acted in a caring way. He wasn't shocked. He just listened and counseled me. He said, "you don't need to let him do that to you" (#14). Another woman had a similarly positive experience with a reverend from her church: "I saw this lady from my church and also a reverend. He used to tell me that I didn't get this far in life to be abused. They made me feel like they loved me anyway and I could talk honestly and I didn't fear that they'd call ACS [child protective services] (#64).

Providing tangible services and resources

Women said that a number of helpers were influential in providing them with the tangible services and resources need to leave their abusive relationships. Women described a wide range of essential services provided by helpers. The police sometimes helped women safely retrieve their belongings when they left; victim service agencies changed women's locks for free, helped women file for orders of protection and child support, helped them get into domestic violence shelters, and referred them to free lawyers; judges sometimes spoke harshly to abusers and made sure that they followed up on cases; healthcare practitioners occasionally referred women to shelters; and friends and family often provided temporary shelter to women and children.

Sometimes individuals went out of their way to help battered women. One woman said that her congregation helped her rent a house when she decided to leave.

Another women said that her counselor from the D.A.'s office helped her apply for public assistance and other essential services in addition to working on her criminal case. A few women called upon their local legislators to help them receive various services: "He [my representative] called the courts to make sure my paperwork was taken care of. He also helped me keep my apartment" (#91). One woman's lawyer helped her with her divorce: "She helped me introduce the domestic violence in the divorce case ....I got to testify and say my piece in front of the world and in front of him and he couldn't say anything, leave or hit me" (#99).

CASE STUDIES

The following case studies are included to provide a fuller understanding of the kinds of abuse women in this sample endured, as well as the difficulties women faced when trying to end their abusive relationship. The women highlighted in this section are generally representative of the larger study sample: most are severely marginalized racially, economically and socially and they generally endured severe abuse. Their stories provide additional context and meaning to the findings of this study: women sought help, often repeatedly, from a wide range of sources; many received inadequate help from helpers, particularly from victim service agencies and criminal justice workers; for some of these women, ineffective responses had serious negative consequences; most of these women had to overcome a great many individual-level, structural and institutional obstacles in their process of ending abusive relationships (individual-level obstacles in particular); and for these women, leaving was a process involving several stages during which helpers were sometimes—albeit too rarely—instrumental.

Tanya is a 25 year old from the Dominican Republic. She has a fulltime job that supports her and her only son. She has almost completed her college degree. Tanya's story is a clear illustration of how leaving an abusive relationship generally constitutes an extended process of help-seeking during which the woman's perception of her abuser and the relationship gradually changes-- often due to some pivotal event-- resulting in the decision to make a final break from the abuser.

"He was bringing my son back one day and my son yelled, 'I hate you. I want to kill you if you don't stop beating my mom.' I decided this has to stop."

Tanya reported severe abuse in her past relationship with her long-time boyfriend who was the father of her only child. Tanya said that her abuser was extremely intimidating and emotionally abusive. He made threats every so often about killing her, her son, or himself if she were to leave him. The physical abuse took place several times a week. Pushing, slapping, kicking and punching were common. He choked her once when she tried to break up with him. He beat her up during her pregnancy and threatened her with a knife when she was seven and a half months pregnant. The abuse only got worse over time.

The relationship lasted four and a half years and the abuse started six months into the relationship. When asked why she stayed past the first violent incident, Tanya said, "I come from a family of four and my mother is accustomed to standing by her man. I was not able to love myself enough. I also felt I could help him."

Tanya started seeking help two years into the relationship but even before then she had reached out to friends about her problems with her boyfriend. Her mother was not helpful. She told Tanya "this is what having a husband is like". Her mother told her to "stand by your man" and reminded Tanya that they had a child together. Tanya couldn't understand her mother's reaction, "I thought she'd be angry and protective, but she wasn't".

Tanya's experience with professionals in various helping institutions was generally not very positive, although some of them expressed concern about her situation. Her boss at the time convinced her to go into therapy but when she left her job, the location of her therapist was inconvenient so she stopped going. When she went to a victim services agency she said, "the lady had to go to lunch and made me wait for an

hour in the hall with my abuser. I was scared." During her pregnancy, she decided to go to a domestic violence shelter but she didn't feel protected, "at other shelters they have a security guard out front but they didn't have that here. If someone followed me and wanted to hurt me, they could have." The police were mostly unhelpful. "The police in the Bronx were not helpful. They told me *I* had to deliver the order of protection myself but they were wrong. I fought them and made a formal complaint." Tanya had 7 orders of protection against her abuser and only the seventh time did she follow through with it. "The man that was taking the information the last time I filed for an order of protection said, 'you're playing with your life, you've dropped the order so many times. I'm saying this because I care." Tanya never confided with healthcare professionals about her injuries even when asked. She said, "I was afraid of legal repercussions for my boyfriend, so I never confided in the doctor."

Tanya fought back toward the end because she felt "tired of being abused, feeling helpless and feeling afraid." But fighting back made it worse, "he fought me even harder. He said, 'so you wanna be a tough bitch now?" Her best friend's godfather threatened him to try to put a stop to the abuse, but it just made matters worse. Nothing seemed to make any difference.

Tanya faced many obstacles to leaving. At first, she hoped he would change and she was committed to keeping her family together. But over time, it was fear that kept her with him. Her boyfriend was particularly controlling and threatening. He threatened to kill her, her son and himself if she tried to leave. He also threatened to kidnap her son or file for custody if she left him. She felt like the criminal justice system was ineffective and at the same time she was ambivalent about having the father of her child arrested.

Because of her strained relationship with her mother (she had been molested at the age of eight and felt very unsupported by her mother), she felt she had nowhere to go if she left. And over time, she had become depressed about her situation, making it hard for her to figure out what to do.

The turning point for Tanya took place one day when "he was bringing my son back one day and my son yelled, 'I hate you. I want to kill you if you don't stop beating my mom.' I decided this has to stop. I called the cops and I followed through on the order of protection." She has been out of the relationship for two years and her abuser no longer threatens or stalks her.

Sharice is a 25-year-old African-American woman with five children. Sharice dropped out of high school in the 11th grade, is on public assistance and is currently living in a homeless shelter. This case study describes the experiences of half of the women in this sample who regarded helpers as ineffective. In Sharice's case, as with so many of the other women in this study, the responses of helpers from the criminal justice system and homeless shelters were uniformly ineffective. Her account is also representative of the 13% of the women in this sample who did not consider themselves as victims because they physically fought back against their abusers (even as in Sharice's case when the abuse they suffered was severe and life-threatening).

"Cops need to do their jobs regardless of if you're married... Don't walk away knowing that a woman's been battered because you don't want to do more paperwork."

Sharice was severely abused in a relationship with her husband in a marriage lasting three years. In the beginning it was mostly pushing and shoving and pulling her hair, but over time it escalated to kicking, punching and severe beatings. He choked her

three times and said he would "get a gun". Twice he put a knife on the stove and burned her with it. She was often forced to perform sexual acts against her will. He threatened to kill her if she tried to leave. Once the violence escalated, the physical abuse took place every other day.

The abuse started twelve months into the relationship when she was pregnant with her second daughter. "It was more than he expected. He didn't think marriage would be that way." Sharice said that every time she tried to leave it would get worse. "Every time I tried to seek help he would find out and it would get worse, so I kept it to myself."

Sharice's experience when she tried seeking help was uniformly negative. Her friends betrayed her by telling her husband that she had talked to them and her parents believed him over her. It was a waste of time." The domestic violence counselor in the homeless shelter treated them as a couple. Sharice said that her abuser was able to manipulate the counselor and lie about the abuse. Even when she was sent to a woman's shelter to get away from him, he broke into her room even though she had an order of protection against him. The police would never arrest "unless it got really out of hand". "He never did any time for anything he did except for the last time when he violated an order of protection." Sharice fought back from the beginning even though it made things worse. She said she didn't have anyone else to defend her because of the isolation of the abusive relationship ("he cut me off from all my friends and family").

Sharice had to overcome many obstacles to leaving. At first, she did not consider herself a victim because she fought back. He was threatening and had kidnapped her daughter as a way of keeping her from leaving. He stole all of her and the children's identification cards so she wouldn't be able to receive any public assistance or services if

she left. She also knew from personal experience that the criminal justice system was ineffective.

Ending the relationship took several stages. "I went to a homeless shelter. At that point I was still with him. I went to talk to a domestic violence counselor at the shelter and told her I needed to get out of there immediately. I was sent to a domestic violence shelter but he broke in. He was incarcerated for that. I was then sent to a safe house in Virginia." She has been out of the abusive relationship for one year.

Sharice strongly felt that the police response has to be improved in order to help battered women. "Cops need to do their jobs regardless if you're married. It's not a game; they need to take it more seriously. Getting away isn't always so easy. Don't walk away knowing that a woman's been battered because you don't want to do more paperwork."

Toni is a 46-year-old African-American woman. She dropped out of high school in the 11th grade and is receiving Supplemental Security Income benefits (SSI). Her story mirrors the experiences of three-quarters of the women in this sample: the abuse she experienced was severe and included acts of sadistic brutality, intimidation and rape. Her case clearly details the process by which so many women ultimately decide to end their abusive relationships—after a particularly vicious attack.

"I don't trust nobody today...Every time I have a relationship with a man I feel dirty. I am not clean from what these men have done to me. I will never get over that shit."

Toni was severely abused by her partner during a one-year relationship. The violence consisted primarily of forced sexual activity and rape. She described him as very

emotionally abusive and intimidating. "He was always slamming doors. If you look at him the wrong way, he'll intimidate you." He threatened to kill her if she left. He told her, "If I can't have you, no one will." The sexual abuse she endured was in many ways a repeat of her experience as a child, which made it even more traumatic for her. She was raped by her father between the ages of 7 and 15. (Her father impregnated her and later the child died.)

The abuse began after four months of dating when she learned that her partner was cheating on her with his ex-girlfriend. There were also problems related to his drug abuse. In fact, the "last straw" was when she found out that he had been using drugs again. When she told him that it was over, he viciously raped her. "He was in a rage, I thought he would kill me."

Toni's experience with helping institutions was mixed. Her main criticism was of the criminal justice system. "When I call the police, they always get there too late, 'cause he's already gone. They keep a record of it but it doesn't do much good. He *did* get arrested for the rape but they released him. The day he was released, he came right to my apartment and I called the police, but they never came." One of her best experiences with a helper was a victim services agency that helped her get an order of protection and changed her locks. She felt they were "very helpful". When she went to the hospital for a rape kit [a medical examination to collect evidence of the rape] Toni said that the staff "were very supportive but I still felt like shit. The counselor took her time getting there. I wanted to kill myself." The most consistently helpful person was her therapist. "She gives me feedback, I cry and boo-hoo and after that I feel better."

Her main obstacle to leaving her abuser was that she was financially dependent on him. However, the rape changed everything. "I decided it was over after that." But getting away from him was not easy because he continually harassed her. She decided to move out of her apartment to get away from him, the one thing she did not want to do, "I should not have to give up my apartment for nobody or no one. Why should I let that man run me out of my apartment?" But her fear of retaliation by him changed her mind.

Toni has been out of the abusive relationship for over a year but the trauma remains with her today. She says she cleans her apartment obsessively and takes several showers a day to cope with her feelings. "I don't trust nobody today...Every time I have a relationship with a man I feel dirty. I am not clean from what these men have done to me. I will never get over that shit."

Lisa is a 48-year-old white woman with two children. She completed some college. Lisa is receiving Supplemental Security Income benefits (SSI) and living in congregate housing for people with AIDS. Lisa's story illustrates the degree of social, economic and racial marginalization of many of the women in this sample. In her case, Lisa is a recovering drug addict and former prostitute with a long history of childhood sexual abuse and neglect. Like most of the women in this sample, she was severely victimized by her abuser. While her story mirrors the experiences of many other women in this study—her abuse was severe and often life-threatening—she was one of two women who never sought help from anyone.

"I was afraid of being alone for the rest of my life because my family had completely cut me off."

Lisa, like many of the women in this sample, had a substantial history of childhood abuse: her father and brother sexually abused her as a child. Worse yet, her mother did not believe her when she told her about the molestation. Lisa got into drugs to deal with the pain of the abuse. As a result, she was sent to a group home. She eventually got involved with a series of men who abused her. She would go from the street back to abusive men who "took care of her". She was "shooting dope and coke and prostituted" to survive.

Her most recent abusive relationship involved a relationship lasting two and a half years with a man who severely beat and occasionally threatened her with knives. The abuse started six months into the relationship when he started using crack. Lisa said she stayed because she didn't want to be alone. "I was afraid of being alone for the rest of my life because my family had completely cut me off." She felt ashamed of the abuse because she felt she was somehow to blame, "normal people don't let their men do these things to them". Lisa is one of the very few women in the sample who did not seek help from anyone. She said her shame prevented her from even telling friends, "I thought they would judge me" and she had no family to whom she could turn. She said that she didn't want to deal with her drug problem and felt that victim services would have forced her to do so.

Her main obstacle to ending the relationship was her hope that her abuser would change. Lisa was very depressed about her situation but did not know how to improve her circumstances, given her severe drug addiction and lack of social support. The relationship finally ended when he left her. "He had left. I was turning tricks again and using crack. I went to stay with a friend for a year. I gained weight, went to programs

and I ended up at a residential program. I became more human." She has been out of the abusive relationship for two years and is in recovery and living in congregate housing for people with AIDS.

Susanna is a 40-year-old Mexican-American woman. She lost three children to the child protective services because of her drug use. She is currently receiving public assistance and renting a room in a house. She has completed three years of college. Susanna's story details the extreme cruelty and sadistic acts that characterized most of these women's relationships. Her story is also illustrative of the many individual-level obstacles that make it so difficult for them to seek help. In her case, her drug dependency both allowed her to tolerate the abuse for longer and made her feel less worthy of help.

"The drugs made the situation tolerable."

Susanna's husband of ten years became extremely physically abusive eight years into the marriage. Things deteriorated, according to Susanna, because she was no longer able to financially support the household. They both started using drugs, which kept her entangled in the abusive relationship longer because "the drugs made the situation tolerable". Awful acts of cruelty by her husband characterized the relationship. Her husband threatened her with knives on several occasions and once hung her out over a rooftop. Another time he stabbed her with her brother's hypodermic needle [he was HIV+].

Susanna said she felt sorry for him at first: he was a three-time felon who had been imprisoned for drug-related offenses and armed robbery. She was reluctant to get him into trouble again. But as time went on, and the abuse escalated, she became

terrified of him. Susanna's self-esteem had also been broken down from years of cruel put-downs. "He called me names, said I was ugly, made fun of my race and my scoliosis. It was a daily thing…I felt really embarrassed that I chose someone who turned out like that. He separated me from my friends and was menacing to everyone". Susanna did not think to seek help from counselors or victim service agencies because she was "in the grips of drug dependency". She feared violent retaliation by him if she called the police. He often threatened to kill her if she left. She felt completely isolated.

The relationship finally ended when Susanna was arrested for drug possession. "Child protective services took my children because of the drugs and I was forced to go into recovery. I started to see things more clearly. I finally ended it with him. I had to read a lot about abuse to get out of denial. He was also imprisoned for violating parole". It has been over a year since the relationship ended. Her abuser is now out of prison and has custody of the children.

Alex is a 44-year-old African-American college graduate with two grown children. She is currently receiving public assistance. Again, Alex's case underscores the severe nature of the abuse most women in this sample survived. Her process of leaving required her to overcome mixed feelings for her abuser and several other individual-level obstacles.

"He broke my legs...I had to get pins in my hip. He once broke my wrist, cut my stomach open and I had to get 21 stitches in my scalp. It was life-threatening. I asked the Lord to let me walk again and if I did I'd never go back to him."

Alex was severely abused by her long-time husband of 14 years. The abuse began five years into the relationship when he was dishonorably discharged from the army for drug use. Despite the abuse, Alex described her husband as a very good father and husband in the early years of their marriage. "I loved him because he loved my babies and they weren't even his. He was so good to me. He was supportive of me when I went back to school- the took care of the children when I was at school. He cooked and cleaned. He cared for us."

Alex described the abuse as life threatening. "He broke my legs. I had to have pins put in my hip. He broke my wrist, cut my stomach open, once I had 21 stitches in my scalp. I lost my baby when I was 7 months pregnant because of the beatings."

Her friends and family knew about the abuse but they never offered to take her in. She felt too ashamed and proud to go to a victim service agency. She called the police many times but Alex had mixed feelings about pressing charges against her husband. "I loved him and I thought he'd change." She blamed herself for his drug addiction and subsequent violent behavior. "I thought it was my fault because I was using drugs with him in the beginning and I could stop, but he couldn't." The first couple of times, Alex said the police came immediately but they grew frustrated with her unwillingness to press charges. She said, "When they saw my injuries, they wanted to kill him but when I refused to press charges they were reluctant to come anymore. They arrived later and later each time after that." She said her husband threatened to kill her if she left and that he would sometimes lock her inside the house when he was gone to keep her from leaving.

Alex finally ended the relationship after a violent incident leaving her with both her legs broken. "I asked the Lord to let me walk again and if I did, I would never go back to him…I ran away from him all the way to New York (from Georgia). He kept trying to get in touch with me through my relatives in New York. They were afraid, so I moved to another part of the city where no one can find me. No one knows me here." When asked about the biggest obstacle to leaving her husband, Alex said it was "leaving my home, my roots, my family and friends. I have no one here. I am completely alone."

Susan is a 39-year-old white woman. She works part-time and has no children. Susan's story is another clear illustration of the leaving process. In her case, Susan finally made the break form her abuser after a particularly violent incident.

"He was my mother, father and brother. He was my family; even though he hit me he was there for me."

Susan was in a five-year relationship with a man who regularly physically and sexually abused her. He was at times menacing and intimidating and at others contrite and seemingly caring. He encouraged her to cut herself off from her family because she had a difficult relationship with them anyway. This isolation made her even more emotionally vulnerable to his manipulation: "he was my mother, father and brother. He was my family; even though he hit me he was there for me." Susan tried counseling but it didn't make any difference. She recalls, "I knew I was in a crazy relationship and I had to get out of it. I wanted to get well but I didn't know what to do."

It wasn't until the worst violent episode that Susan knew she had to get away. "We got into a really big fight. I thought he was going to kill me. He threw me into cold

showers. He said he'd kill me. He threw me out of the apartment half naked. My face was all bloody and I went to my girlfriend's and I never went back."

Gloria is a 38-year-old African-American woman with two grown children. She lives on public assistance and has a high school diploma. Her story is an account, like so many of the other women in this sample, of brutal and sadistic acts of violence committed against her by her abuser. Like the majority of women in this study, the main obstacle she faced in leaving her abuser was at the individual-level-- the isolation and controlling behaviors of her abuser.

"I didn't think anyone else went through what I was going through. I felt I had to handle it by myself."

Gloria was in an abusive relationship that lasted seven years. The physical abuse started about three years into the relationship. Her abuser was particularly sadistic- he threatened her with guns and beat with her with a bat on a regular basis. He threatened her with knives and once held a gun to her head to keep her from leaving. She once had a miscarriage after he pushed her down a flight of stairs when she was six months pregnant with twins. From her experience of his violent rages, Gloria believed that he was intent on killing her if she left. He kept her from seeing friends and family and only went out when he let her.

Because of her isolation from others, she felt like she had to deal with the abuse the best she could: "I didn't think anyone else went through what I was going through. I felt I had to handle it by myself." When he beat her, he tied a rag in her mouth to prevent her from screaming so the neighbors wouldn't call the police. Gloria was only able to get

away from him because one time when he savagely abused her, fracturing both her legs, he left the apartment long enough for her to call an ambulance. At the hospital, the police were called and he was arrested. Amazingly, they only kept him in jail for seven days. When he got out, he tried to see her at the hospital even though she had gotten an order of protection against him. She was "scared to death" but the medical staff kept him away from her. Until then, she said no one had ever successfully protected her from her abuser.

When Gloria left the hospital she went to stay with her mother. But he kept stalking her and occasionally grabbed her kids and tried to kidnap them. In order to get him away from her, she said she "snitched on him and had him sent to a drug program." She has been free of her abuser for the last two years but is still living with significant health problems from the abuse she endured.

Sylvia is a 39 year-old African-American woman with three grown children. She completed a couple of years of college and is currently receiving public assistance. Sylvia's narrative is similar to so many of the other women in this study in the sense that her abuse was severe and ultimately life-threatening. Her story is particularly tragic because of the long-lasting health problems that she suffers from as a direct result of the abuse. She tried to seek help several times but her abuser threatened to kill her if she continued to press charges.

"He was always there. He'd check to see who I was talking to on the phone. He wouldn't let me see my family or friends."

Sylvia was severely abused in an abusive relationship lasting three and a half years. Over the course of the relationship, Sylvia was hospitalized at least six times because of the abuse. She sustained serious injuries including a fractured arm, a broken nose, having her teeth knocked out, and needing several stitches in her head. He threatened her with a gun several times and once beat her with a gun. Her abuser is currently serving a twelve-year sentence for attempting to kill her. He was extremely controlling. "He was always there. He'd check to see who I was talking to on the phone. He wouldn't let me see my family or friends."

Her main obstacle to leaving was her hope that he would change. She said she thought she loved him and was committed to the relationship. At the same time, she was genuinely afraid of what her abuser would do if she tried to leave. He threatened to kill her if she left. Over time, she became terribly depressed about her situation. Despite her hopelessness, Sylvia did seek help. She often talked to her girlfriend about what was going on in her relationship. Her friend encouraged her to leave. And while she thought about telling her family, she was afraid that her brothers would "do something to him and get into trouble". She called the police twice and started to press charges but dropped them after he threatened to kill her. And while she did seek medical help, they never asked her about the nature of her injuries.

Sylvia's worst fears were confirmed when her abuser at last tried to kill her. She was attempting to end the relationship but he said, "If I can't have you, no one can". This time, he was arrested and because he was on parole, was sentenced to twelve years in prison. However, she will never be safe from harm: he infected her with HIV (she

claims that he knew he had it and exposed her to it anyway). She now has full-blown AIDS.

Galina is a 43 year-old Russian immigrant with two children. She is a college graduate and works full-time. Because of her immigrant status, language barriers, and financial and emotional dependence on her abuser she was reluctant to end her marriage. She faced structural obstacles as well as pressure from friends and family (in Russia) to stay in the marriage. Despite the considerable obstacles, she gradually made the decision to leave and sought help from a number of sources. Her case illustrates the positive impact that helpers can have on women who are in the process of leaving abusive relationships.

"The ads about domestic violence in the subways had a big impact on me, it made me feel like it was possible to get a divorce".

Galina was abused by her husband of seventeen years. The abuse was frequent and, at times, severe. He choked her once and often made terrifying threats of killing her and their children. "He said he would put my kids in the car and crash the car and leave me to suffer." All the walls and doors had holes in them from his violent outbursts. She said she never thought to divorce him while they were living in Russia because domestic violence was not considered an appropriate reason for ending a marriage. But when she came to the United States, she started to see things differently.

Because of her immigrant status, Galina felt vulnerable and alone. Her friends and family pushed her to stay with her husband despite the abuse. "They said I was crazy for wanting a divorce because I had no one in New York, I was completely alone." She called the police on a weekly basis, and they arrested him over and over again only so

that he could be set free soon after. She got two orders of protection but never followed through on them. Galina was afraid of facing life on her own in a new country with two small children. But she also increasingly felt that a new life was possible for her. She said that the ads about domestic violence in the subways had a big impact on her, "it made me feel like it was possible to get a divorce".

Galina's process of leaving was gradual. Galina first decided to get a job and told her husband she wanted her own room. One day when he pressured her for sex, she refused. He responded by beating and choking her. She went to the police and filed a report and got an order of protection. Despite her husband's promises to stay away, this time, she refused to drop the charges. She went to a victim services agency where they helped her with the divorce and taught her how to file for child support. They also put her on a waiting list for a free lawyer. She is now divorced, and is successfully supporting her two children. She has plans to start an organization to help immigrant battered women like herself overcome some of the barriers to leaving their abusive husbands.

Terry is a 32 year-old white woman with one child. She is working full-time and has completed several years of college. Terry's case illustrates the fact that for many battered women, the abuse does not end when the woman leaves the abuser. Like so many woman in this study, her main obstacle to seeking help and leaving was her abuser's isolating and controlling tactics. And while she sought help repeatedly from the police, she perceived them to be generally ineffective in stemming the ongoing violence and stalking by her abuser.

"It got to the point where I had no friends because he'd beat them up for spending time with me- even my girlfriends. He even stabbed one of my friends once."

Terry was severely abused by her boyfriend in a relationship that lasted about a year. He started getting really abusive nine months into the relationship when his father passed away. From that point on, the abuse escalated to the point where she sustained serious injuries. Her boyfriend completely isolated her from her friends and family. He would threaten to hurt her family is she were to leave. "It got to the point where I had no friends because he'd beat them up for spending time with me- even my girlfriends. He even stabbed one of my friends once." And while her family told her to leave him, they refused to let her stay with them because of his threats against them. She didn't know where to go to be safe from him. She refused to go to a shelter because they felt "dirty, unsafe, and depressing".

Terry said she must have called the police forty times and he was arrested at least a dozen times because he always carried weapons on him. But he was never held for very long and she did not follow through with the charges. She finally decided to leave him after he beat her so savagely that she sustained severe injuries including three broken ribs, a broken jaw, a broken eye socket, and a head injury. This incident was the last straw for Terry: "I picked myself up after the most severe incident where he basically left me for dead. I pulled myself up and called the cops." For this life-threatening assault, he received only a week in jail.

Terry got an order of protection and due to the severity of the abuse directed toward her as well as her family and friends and because of his violent criminal record;

her case was viewed as particularly life threatening. She was given an electronic bracelet with a button so she can contact the police anytime she sees him. And while the physical abuse ended two years ago, Terry still fears for her safety to this day.

Ana is a 40 year-old Puerto Rican woman with one child. She is a college graduate and works full-time. Her case is an extreme example of how the criminal justice system is often ineffectual in dealing with domestic violence despite repeated attempts by the woman to seek help. This narrative is also a clear illustration that leaving is a process that often involves a turning point—in this case, the discovery that her abuser was molesting her daughter led her to take decisive action and end the relationship.

"The police would take him away and he'd be back the next day... They didn't take it seriously until he molested my daughter."

Ana's marriage fell apart after she discovered that her husband had been sexually abusing her daughter. The marriage lasted a total of four years but the physical abuse began one year into the relationship. By her own account, he treated her like a queen in the beginning of the relationship but over time he became controlling and isolated her from her friends. She said that he would not let her use the phone or see her friends. Her only contact with others was when she went to school. She said, "I totally put myself into it. I was a 4.0 student but no one knew about the abuse. I covered it up with make-up and no one ever knew." Ana also had no family to turn to: her parents and her brother were all deceased.

Ana was terrified of her husband: "he was twice my size" and brutally abused her. The violence resulted in several injuries including broken ribs, torn ligaments, and

multiple bruises. He choked her innumerable times and held a gun to her head on half a dozen occasions. After a miscarriage, he repeatedly raped her. As a result, she is no longer able to conceive. He threatened to kill her and her daughter if she ended the relationship and he kept all of the money she earned. Ana was overwhelmed by her seemingly hopeless circumstances and was, at times, suicidal.

Ana's experience with the police was uniformly negative. When she called the police, nothing much ever came of it. "The police would take him away and he'd be back the next day." Once when the police arrived, she said she had drywall in her hair and there was a huge hole in the wall where he had slammed her head. Instead of questioning her separately about the event, the police asked her what had happened with him standing right next to her. They never took it seriously until the very end of the relationship when it was discovered that he had sexually abused her daughter. The police initially arrested Ana along with her husband because they claimed that she had aided and abetted him in her daughter's molestation. The charges against her were quickly dropped.

Ana described the final event that ended the relationship as follows. "It ended really ugly. I found out that he had hit my daughter. We got into a huge fight because he thought I didn't discipline her properly, so he beat her and then he beat me. My daughter later told me he had touched her sexually. I wouldn't allow my daughter back in the house. I called the police and went home to wait for them to come. In the meantime, he raped me by gunpoint. He was arrested and is doing 17 years in prison. Even from prison he was sending people to harass me so we moved from California to New York."

She and her daughter are safely living in New York but the trauma from the abuse has had long-lasting effects on both of them.

Lilly is a 33-year-old white woman with four children. She has completed several years of college and is currently unemployed. She, like the vast majority of women in this sample, sought help from the police but was generally unsatisfied with their response. And like several other women in this study, she was afraid to contact a victim services agency because she feared that they would regard her as an unfit parent and try to take her kids away.

"My boyfriend followed me and tried to run me over with the car. My new boyfriend threatened him and said, "She's with me now."

By her own account, Lilly grew up homeless. Her father was an alcoholic who had abused her mother. "He threw her down the stairs when she was seven months pregnant with me." Lilly said she got married young in order to change her situation. When her husband eventually abandoned her, she was emotionally vulnerable and regarded her next boyfriend as her "knight in shining armor. In fact, he became her tormentor. Looking back, Lilly admits that he was controlling from the very beginning, but the physical abuse didn't start until 7 months into the relationship. Once it escalated, the abuse was brutal: he cracked her ribs, threatened her with guns, and sexually attacked her on a regular basis. When she tried to leave, he put a gun to her head and said she wasn't going anywhere.

Lilly drank to numb the pain of the abuse. She stayed because she was afraid of losing everything. "He had me believing that without him I was nothing. Even though I

worked he took all my earnings. I had no self-esteem." Lilly tried to call the police but they never arrested him because he was a retired police officer. "They just swept it under the rug". She was scared of telling victim services about the abuse because she was afraid they would take her children from her. Her childhood experiences of being homeless made her wary of social services and felt that they would be unable or unwilling to assist her.

The relationship ended the same way it had begun, by meeting another man. "I had met my fiancé who I am with now. He was a peace officer at my college… I told my boyfriend that I had to go to work but I went to the new guy's house instead. My boyfriend followed me and tried to run me over with the car. My new boyfriend threatened him and said, "She's with me now."

Mary is a 45 year-old Puerto Rican woman with two children. She has completed a few years of college and is currently receiving public assistance. Mary's story is unusual in the sense that she remained in the abusive relationship for so long—18 years. However, during this time she sought help from a variety of sources a number of times. Her perception of helpers was generally negative, particularly of the police and the shelter system. However, her main obstacle to ultimately leaving was her religious beliefs.

"I always believed in the saying, 'what God has drawn together let no man tear asunder...I though it [the abuse] was my lot in life."

Mary was in a severely abusive marriage lasting 18 years. Mary describes her ex-husband as charismatic and troubled. The abuse started about one year into the relationship when his drug problem worsened. She said that he stole from her to pay for

his drug addiction, "he stole my stereo, everything. He took my money. He worked on and off but I always worked." Once the physical abuse began, it happened on an almost daily basis. Mary sustained severe injuries including broken ribs, a broken nose, broken jaw, and 2nd degree burns all over her body. One beating left her with amnesia for three days.

Mary tried to get help from a number of places but she was ambivalent about ending the marriage. "I felt violated but I was so in love with this man. He apologized to me and told me that he was jealous because I was so beautiful." Her parents were consistently helpful and provided her a safe, supportive environment when she needed it. "My parents tried to help me so many times. They helped me move out, I stayed with them, and they helped me with the rent." But she ultimately always returned to her husband. When she went to her pastor about the abuse he said it was "[her] cross to bear and to just keep praying". Marital counseling was a complete failure: she claims that he got worse after the counseling and said that the abuse was "all her fault". She stayed in a domestic violence shelter on two occasions but found them to be dirty and unpleasant.

When the police were called they would generally just tell him to go for a walk. He was arrested twice but she dropped the charges both times. "I was afraid he'd kill me if I went through with it." She got two orders of protection but never followed through with either of them because he threatened to kill the kids and the dog if she had him arrested.

The most severe incident was the last one: "he took the cords from the drapes and wrapped them around my neck. I fell unconscious. He thought I was dead. He just left

me for dead. My daughter was the one who found me…I later heard that he had gone to Colorado and met another woman."

Looking back on her abusive marriage she largely blames her religious upbringing for keeping her in it for so many years. "I always believed the saying, 'what God has drawn together let no man tear asunder…I thought it was my lot in life."

Julia is a 38 year-old woman with one child. She is working part-time and is currently working on a Master's degree in Education. Like several of the women in this study, Julia believed that she allowed herself to stay in her abusive relationship in part due to the trauma of childhood abuse. One of her main obstacles to seeking help from victim services agencies was her negative perception of being a "victim". As a result, she tried to deal with the abuse in her own way, including through the use of both the criminal justice system and extralegal methods like street justice.

"I said to myself, who is the victim here, I'm volunteering for this craziness."

Julia was with her abuser for a year and a half. The physical abuse was serious and resulted in several injuries. "He busted my nose and dislocated my shoulder. One time he raped me…I ended up getting the virus from him [HIV]." She describes her continued involvement with him as being the result of her low-self esteem originating from her emotionally abusive childhood. She said that her father who was a priest, never publicly acknowledged her as his child.

Like so many other abusers, he kept her from turning to friends. 'He said, 'you better not tell anybody." Her family tried to intervene, but it only made matters worse for

her. My stepfather threatened him with a gun, but it didn't deter him at all. He just stayed away for a few days."

Julia went to A.A. (Alcoholics Anonymous) meetings, which she said were helpful because "they encouraged [her] to start taking responsibility for [her]self". On the other hand, they made the word, "victim" a bad word. As a result, she felt uncomfortable going to a victim services agency. "I said to myself, who is the victim here, I'm volunteering for this craziness." Julia thinks that if they changed victim services to a more empowering name, she would have been more comfortable going to support groups and counseling. And although she was ambivalent about calling the police, Julia did so about a dozen times. She said that sometimes she "just wanted someone bigger to beat him up for me" but when he seriously injured her, she wanted him arrested. Unfortunately, he was always gone by the time the police showed up.

Eventually, Julia decided it was over. She got an order of protection and followed through with it. "I finally adhered to my order of protection. Every time he came after me, I called 911. The police were really receptive- they came. But he was retarded. It took him a year to get it. Eventually he stopped calling me." She carries resentment over how the criminal justice system deals with battered women: "The court system sucks. *I* had to lose time from work to deal with him even though *he* was harassing *me*.

Rita is a 49-year-old African-American woman with two children. She has a ninth-grade education and is currently receiving Supplemental Security Income benefits (SSI). Rita, like almost all of the women in this study, repeatedly sought help from a wide range of helpers but her perception of their responses were uniformly negative. And like many of the women in this study, she ultimately fought back against her abuser out of frustration and anger.

"I knocked his tooth out, I almost knocked him out. I was really gonna kill him. I said to him, I never been to jail, but baby, you're worth it. He begged and pleaded for his life."

Rita was in a two-year relationship with a man who was menacing and physically abusive almost from the beginning of the relationship. The worst element of the abuse for her was that he constantly threatened to get a gun and kill her. When asked why she remained in the relationship despite the abuse, she explained that she was financially dependent on him. She explained, "he would bring me money and buy me clothes…he knew I was broke." Even though it was her home and she never gave him a key to the apartment, he would come by and "force his way back in".

Her abuser had a substantial criminal history during which he utilized a number of aliases, making it difficult for the police to track him down when Rita called the police for help. She said she wanted the police to help her get him out of her house. She called the police over ten times but he was always gone by the time they showed up (which, by her account, was often two or three hours later). She said, "By the time they got there, I could have been dead". Everyone from her friends, family and religious community said that she should "just leave" him but doing so was not so easy given her financial situation and the fact that she was determined to keep her apartment. Rita decided to enter a support group at a victim services agency but she said, "It only made me mad because it brought up old issues in my past. It made me start to fight back."

Rita said she fought back against her abuser to "defend my honor as a woman" because he had been "insulting me as a woman and saying filthy things". She said over

time, she became the aggressor. "I knocked his tooth out, I almost knocked him out. I was really gonna kill him. I said to him, I never been to jail, but baby, you're worth it. He begged and pleaded for his life."

What finally ended the relationship was that her abuser was deported to his home country, Jamaica, for his criminal involvement (although not for the domestic violence).

Sally is a 35 year-old African-American woman who has two children and survives on public assistance. She has a GED (General Equivalency Diploma). Sally's story is a clear illustration of the gradual process that leaving an abusive relationship encompasses. And like other women in the sample, she felt that her childhood abuse somehow played a role in keeping her in the abusive relationship longer than she might have had she not been abused.

"I felt abandoned by God because it [abuse] had happened to me twice."

Sally was in a severely abusive relationship with a man who was an alcoholic and a crack addict. She said that the abuse started when she stopped using drugs with him. The violence she endured was constant and unrelenting. He used to drag her on the floor by her hair and beat her savagely. The abuse was so severe and caused so much physical and emotional trauma that at one point Sally miscarried at five months.

Sally stayed in the relationship initially because she hoped he would change, and later on out of fear of retaliation if she left. She grew up in an abusive home environment, which seemed to increase her tolerance for abusive relationships with men. She said, "My mom was abused by my dad. I looked for a man with my father's traits. I had two relationships back to back that were abusive." When Sally turned to her mother

for help she said her mother was in denial: "it was just like when I told her I was molested as a child. She refused to deal with it." Sally had no trust in any religious institutions because she felt "abandoned by God" because "it had happened to me twice". She did not rely on victim services because she worried about getting him arrested. Looking back, Sally was protective of him because of his drug use. She felt sorry for him and "didn't want to put his parents through the agony of seeing him arrested."

Her attitude changed, however, when he started becoming abusive toward her daughter. "He yelled at my daughter and that was a first. So when I saw that I called the police. He was arrested. They locked him up but then let him go. It was during 9/11 and every case was dismissed. He came home and beat me. I called the police again. They came and got him. This time he got 30 days jail time because he broke the order of protection." Sally decided that the relationship was over.

Sheila is a 44-year-old African-American woman with two children. She has two years of college completed and is currently living on public assistance. Her case is an extreme example of the kinds of negative responses that many women experience from helpers.

"When I was stabbed, they tried to take me away like I was crazy... They restrained me in the ambulance. Someone must have thought I stabbed myself. Only one counselor was aware that I was telling the truth. One of police officers later apologized."

Sheila was in a two-year relationship with an explosive, abusive partner. Although the abuse was intermittent and generally relatively mild, he ultimately ended up stabbing her forty times when she tried to get him to leave her apartment. She said that

she tried to get him to leave several times before, but she felt sorry for him and took him back because he had emotional problems and he had no where to go.

When she was stabbed, the police came but she said that she was treated like she was crazy. She said, "they restrained me in the ambulance. Someone must have thought that I stabbed myself. Only one counselor at the hospital thought I was telling the truth. One police officer later contacted me to apologize for how they treated me. It was horrible." Even after this ordeal, the case was not handled well, according to Sheila: "The D.A. had a hard time getting him because he had several aliases (he had a substantial criminal record). The D.A. mishandled the case so I just dropped it. After that he left me alone."

The preceding case studies give voice to women who are most often silenced, made invisible or made into stereotypes due to their marginal status. They also provide a greater context for study findings and can help explain the process of leaving abusive relationships far batter than statistics or brief quotations. The women's stories highlighted in this section were chosen partly because the women are generally representative of the larger study sample, but also because their stories were particularly poignant.

The women in these case studies were generally severely marginalized due to their socio-economic status, race, drug addiction, criminal involvement, mental or physical disability and/or HIV status and they endured severe abuse. They were almost uniformly active help-seekers; they had to overcome a great many individual-level, structural and institutional obstacles in the process of ending their abusive relationships;

they described individual-level obstacles as their greatest barriers to help-seeking and leaving; they generally perceived helpers, particularly the police and victim services agents, to be ineffective; and they described the negative consequences of ineffective institutional responses in terms of greater reliance on extralegal ways of dealing with the abuse (including street justice and fighting back). But probably the most useful aspect of these case studies is their ability to convey to the reader that leaving is a gradual process that generally involves several stages. As these cases illustrate, and as the Modified Survivor Theory suggests, battered women usually decide to leave abusive relationships over time, as the abuse escalates, and once their perception of the relationship has changed or after a particularly violent incident (or some other turning point).

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The help-seeking literature recognizes that despite the many individual-level, structural, and institutional barriers that battered women face when trying to leave abusive relationships, they are not passive (Bowker, 1983; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Pagelow, 1981). Much of the literature now indicates that most battered women actively seek help as the abuse escalates (Abraham, 2000; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Waits, 1998). Contradicting the earlier theoretical model of "learned helplessness" (Walker, 1979, 1986), the Modified Survivor Theory--modeled after Gondolf's Survivor Theory, 1988--suggests that battered women become increasingly actively engaged in help-seeking as the abuse worsens. The Modified Survivor Theory is an alternative theoretical perspective of battered women that emphasizes their strengths instead of their deficiencies. This survivor/empowerment approach of the Modified Survivor Theory "assumes strength even in the most devastated survivor or the most troubled current victim of violence, oppression or degradation" (Browne, 1998).

The findings from this study largely support this new paradigm. The battered women in this sample exerted a diversity of coping strategies and help-seeking behaviors in response to abuse and acted according to the options available to them. The women in this study resisted the violence in their lives in a variety of ways: by seeking help from others, engaging in acts of resistance and defiance, involving the criminal justice system, fighting back, using street justice, and ultimately, leaving. Fully 98% of the women sought help from at least one source and 87% of women did so from two or more sources. The most frequently used resource was the police (74% of women sought help from the

police at least once) closely followed by friends (63%) and family (60%). Women repeatedly sought help from a wide range of formal and informal resources even when helpers provided inadequate or ineffective assistance. For example, women repeatedly turned to the police for help even though 60% of them said they were "generally ineffective". Women's continued reliance upon the police suggests the extent to which women were determined to actively address the abuse in their lives; it does not suggest the passivity of the learned helplessness model.

As the Modified Survivor Theory predicts, women's help-seeking increased as the abuse escalated. Fully 69% of the women reported that their help-seeking increased over time, 24% said it remained constant throughout, while only 5% said that their attempts to get help decreased over time. As expected, the *severity* of abuse was also associated with greater help-seeking. Half of the women who experienced severe abuse (51%) sought help from four or more sources, compared with 42% of moderately abused women and none of the mildly abused women. As expected, the severity of abuse was also associated with a higher degree of help-seeking from formal sources (as opposed to informal sources like friends and family). 82% of severely abused women sought help from the police at least once compared with 53% of moderately abused women and 25% of mildly abused women. Similarly, women who were severely abused were more likely than moderately abused women and mildly abused women to file for an order of protection. And only severely abused women ever stayed in a domestic violence shelter. These findings strongly support the view of battered women as rational, logical agents who take stronger action as the abuse worsens.

Gondolf argues that it is not battered women who suffer from learned helplessness

but rather helping agents who are ill-equipped to provide adequate and comprehensive assistance to battered women (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988). The women's narratives lend some support to this position. When asked how women perceived helping agents (all of the sources from which they sought help) just over half (52%) found them to be "generally ineffective". Women rated the police as the least effective resource (60% found them to be "generally ineffective"), closely followed by healthcare providers (58% said they were "generally ineffective"). Discouragingly, organizations specifically designed to assist battered women including victim service agencies and domestic violence shelters received relatively low ratings as well (47% of women said victim service agencies were "generally ineffective" and 50% of respondents found shelters to be "generally ineffective"). Women's criticisms of the police were the most serious and disturbing, however. Women said that the police did not always take the abuse seriously, sometimes arriving late or never at all, and sometimes arresting the woman when it was seemingly inappropriate to do so. One-fifth of the women of color (19%) condemned the police for being culturally insensitive or downright racist.

Domestic violence shelters were routinely characterized by women as unclean, uncomfortable, and most alarmingly, unsafe. Women were disturbed to find that workers at domestic violence shelters and victim service agencies were no more likely to treat them with compassion than anyone else. Some women reported being treated insensitively in these agencies. Many said that helpers treated them like they were "criminals" or "unfit mothers". Not being able to get into domestic violence shelters was also a criticism voiced by many women. Considering the severity of the abuse that the women in this sample experienced, it is distressing that the one resource that is supposed

to protect battered women is often not accessible. Women without children, substance abusers, women with teenage sons, physically or psychologically disabled women, and women with pets reported having particular difficulty accessing domestic violence shelters. A significant number of women also voiced concern that contacting a domestic violence agency would trigger an investigation by Child Protective Services and that their children might be taken away as a result. Whether or not this fear is founded, this widespread belief prevented many women from seeking help at victim service agencies and shelters.

As predicted, women faced a wide range of individual-level, structural and institutional barriers to both help-seeking and leaving their abusive relationships. Interestingly, institutional barriers were not the greatest barriers to help-seeking/leaving. Threats of retaliation by the abuser and having sympathy for the abuser were the two obstacles most frequently mentioned by women, closely followed by financial dependence, having no where to go, fear of losing one's home, hoping that the abuser would change, and the desire to keep one's family in tact. Women of color, particularly black women, were especially concerned with maintaining a two-parent family and worried about how they would secure housing if they left their abusers.

However, despite the obstacles, almost all of the women in this sample eventually ended the abusive relationship by leaving their partners (other abusive relationships ended with the arrest and incarceration of the abuser or death of the abuser). As predicted by the Modified Survivor Theory, leaving was a process involving several stages. There were several factors that empowered women to end the abusive relationship: 1) a major turning point/significant event; 2) a shift in woman's perception

of the relationship/abuser; and 3) a change in the woman's resources. In this study, most women decided to end the relationship after a particularly violent or humiliating incident. Others realized over times that their partners would never change. Interestingly, only 7% of the women in this sample mentioned "the positive influence of helpers" as a primary influence in their process of ending the relationship. However, it is clear from women's narratives that helpers--including friends, family, criminal justice workers and social service professionals--sometimes made a significant impact either in terms of providing emotional support and/or tangible services and resources.

An unexpected finding was that a substantial number of women (14%) did not consider themselves to be "victims" and that this prevented them from seeking help from victim service agencies. That is not to say that they were not being victimized, or that they were unaware of the fact that they were in a bad situation, however, they did not accept the totalizing identity of "victim". Some even argued that they were abusive at times and said things like, "I got him just as good as he got me". While this may be true in some cases, according to their own accounts, one cannot reasonably conclude that these women's acts of violence were comparable in severity or consequence to that of their partners. On the other hand, the possibility that some women are mutually violent or even primary aggressors cannot be ruled out and deserves more scholarly attention.

Given the severity of the abuse that most of these women survived (77% of the women in this sample suffered from severe abuse) in addition to their subjugated social status as marginalized women based on their race and/or socio-economic status, one could argue that they are operating out of denial when they refuse to characterize themselves as victims. However, what is important for the purpose of this study is the

meaning that the rejection of this label has to the women themselves. As labeling theorists suggest, individuals and groups who are less valued and/or less powerful (i.e. women of color, poor women, drug addicts, women with AIDS) are more likely to be the object of negative social and public reaction (Schecter, 1982; Schur, 1984). As Pat Hill Collins argues, oppressed people cannot afford to feel powerless because they are already so marginalized. "While identifying patterns of victimization remains important, because it strips African American women of agency, focusing on victimization can function as a mechanism of control" (Collins, 1998). Consequently, by rejecting the negative label of victim, the women in this study were arguably engaged in a powerful act of resistance.

At the same time, women's refusal to acknowledge their own victimization, paralleled by feminist scholarly work that increasingly rejects the representation of battered women as helpless and lacking agency, may place victims in an unrealistic position. As Mahoney argues, "In our society, agency and victimization are each known by the absence of the other: you are an agent if you are not a victim, and you are a victim if you are in no way an agent" (Mahoney, 1994:64). The goal is to simultaneously acknowledge the existence of victimization and agency among all battered women and how they may play themselves out differently depending upon social and historical circumstances.

Some women actively resisted becoming a "victim" by physically fighting back to try to deal with the abuse in their relationship. Fully 84% of the women in this sample fought back against their abuser at one point or another. Women gave three reasons for fighting back: 1) self-defense, 2) retaliation, and 3) the cumulative psychological effect of having been abused since childhood. These women's use of violence should not be

viewed as comparable to that of their partners, nor should these women be viewed sentimentally as heroic, tough warrior-women. This is particularly the case for black battered women. Popular images of African American women as aggressive, resilient and immune to the effects of violence (Ammons, 1995) can prevent black women from receiving sympathetic treatment in the criminal justice system and obscures the real suffering that many African American women experience. As Traci West argues, African American battered women are more accurately described as "anguished survivors" who suffer not just from domestic violence but other forms of institutional violence and oppression: "Under the existing conditions of white supremacy and male dominance some degree of victim status is a constant for African American women" (West, 1999).

For most of these women, fighting back was seen as a last resort and arose out of a profound sense of despair, frustration and fatalism. Some women said that they fought back to regain some sense of dignity and self-respect after having been abused and degraded by their partners for so long. A small portion of women fought back from the very beginning because they were determined to resist, even when they knew it would only make matters worse. However, regardless of the outcome, women's fighting back indicates that they are *not* passive, even under the most desperate circumstances.

Fully one-third of the women in this study relied upon "street justice" to deal with the abuse. For the purpose of this study, street justice is getting others to beat up or threaten to harm the abuser instead of calling the police or seeking other forms of formal assistance. The domestic violence literature suggests that many women of color, particularly black women are ambivalent about relying upon the police to deal with

domestic violence (Rasche, 1995; Richie, 1996; Hampton et al, 2003). Richie argues that the over-reliance on law enforcement in poor communities of color has had several unintended negative consequences: increased use of force, mass incarceration of young men of color, and police brutality (Richie, 2000). As Fine and Weis (1998:173) argue, "central to poor African American women's collective wisdom is a deep suspicion of these systems...Police do not come, restraining orders expire, court appointments are not kept. So women, their families and their friends take things into their own hands. They leave and they fight back. The whole affair becomes quite public." Based on the women's narratives in the current study, the use of street justice was perceived largely as a last option in the absence of other effective alternatives.

While this study supports the view that women are not merely "passive victims of oppressive social structures, relations and substances or some combination thereof" (Maher, 1997:1), the acknowledgment of the strengths and resilience of battered women, particularly battered women who are marginalized due to racism, poverty, drug addiction, and physical or mental disability, should not minimize the significant obstacles they face. Given the lack of affordable housing, jobs with living wages, universal healthcare, decent and affordable child-care and just welfare policies, poor battered women are placed in the unreasonable position of having to choose between basic survival needs and physical safety. Separation violence is another reason why battered women remain in abusive relationships: as the women in this study feared, and the domestic violence literature suggests, leaving is the most dangerous time for battered women and their children, it is when they are the most likely to be killed by their abusers (Campbell et al, 1998; Jones, 1980; Martin, 1976). In addition to these structural and institutional obstacles, women

must also cut emotional attachments to their partners. For many women, leaving their abusers means abandoning dreams of an enduring marriage or an intact family. Women who are addicts or are living with a partner who is an addict or a drug dealer often fear contacting the police because of their own drug-involvement or the dangerous lifestyles of their abusers. Absent effective and adequate assistance from helping agents, some women inevitably feel that they have no choice but to deal with the violence on their own, without formal support, by fighting back or using street justice.

Many of the women in this sample *did* exhibit symptoms that could be confused with learned helplessness: many women described having had severe low self-esteem, guilt, self-blame, depression, vulnerability and futility. However, as Gondolf suggests, these symptoms may in fact be part of the "adjustment to active help-seeking" (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988:21):

> They may represent traumatic shock from the abuse, a sense of commitment to the batterer, or separation anxiety amidst an unresponsive community. All of these are quite natural and healthy responses but not entirely acceptable ones in a patriarchal (or male-dominated) society that values cool detachment. Not to respond with some doubts, anxiety or depression would suggest emotional superficiality and denial of the real difficulties faced in help-seeking (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988:21).

The findings of this study support this characterization of battered women: they are "anguished survivors" who actively seek help and exert a diversity of coping strategies in response to brutal abuse and act according to the limited and inadequate options available to them.

IMPLICATIONS: THEORY AND POLICY

Theoretical Implications

This study utilized a new theoretical model—the Modified Survivor Theory--to examine the extent of battered women's help-seeking behaviors and the impact of a wide range of obstacles to help-seeking including individual-level obstacles, structural obstacles and institutional obstacles. This study also explored how helping agents can both positively and negatively influence women in their process of leaving.

The Modified Survivor Theory is a theoretical perspective that was derived specifically for this study from Gondolf's Survivor Theory (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). The original Survivor Theory is one of two key theoretical frameworks on help-seeking; the other being Walker's "learned helplessness theory" . Both perspectives attempt to explain how battered women make decisions about help-seeking, and ultimately, ending abusive relationships.

Gondolf's Survivor Theory suggests that battered women actively seek help from a number of both formal and informal sources as the abuse escalates (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). The main element of the Survivor Theory is that battered women attempt to seek help in a logical fashion, to assure themselves and their children protection and therefore survival. The "Survivor Theory" (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988) emphasizes battered women's strengths and help-seeking behaviors while simultaneously recognizing some of the barriers that can impede help-seeking. Contrary to the psychological explanation offered by the learned helplessness model, the Survivor Theory suggests that women's help-seeking is limited not by psychological paralysis but by a number of factors

including resources available to the woman, her level commitment to the relationship, the number of children she has, and the kinds of abuse she may have experienced as a child (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988).

One of the main obstacles that battered women face, according to this theory, is the insufficient and ineffective response of helping agents (i.e. the police, counselors, victim services agencies). The Survivor Theory suggests that battered women respond to abuse with help-seeking efforts that are largely unmet by helping agencies (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988:11).

The *Modified* Survivor Theory incorporates new findings in the help-seeking literature on domestic violence while addressing many of the original theory's basic premises: that women seek assistance in proportion to the realization that they and their children are increasingly in danger; that their help-seeking is limited by a number of factors (obstacles); and that inadequate responses from helpers can have serious consequences for battered women.

The Modified Survivor Theory improves upon the original theory by expanding upon the number and range of barriers that can hinder women's help-seeking. Since the original Survivor Theory was developed, studies have identified a wide range of factors that can impede battered women's help-seeking behaviors. While the original theory focused primarily on the institutional obstacles to help-seeking, the Modified Survivor Theory recognizes the significant role that individual-level and structural obstacles also play in constraining and shaping women's choices. The many individual-level, institutional and structural obstacles to help-seeking may explain why some battered

women remain in abusive relationships longer than they might if these conditions did not exist.

Similar to the original theory, the Modified Survivor Theory suggests that inadequate and insufficient institutional responses can have deleterious effects on battered women. "The failure of help sources to intervene in a comprehensive and decisive fashion allows the abuse to continue and escalate" (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988:12) and makes it harder for battered women to escape abusive relationships. Consequently, battered women may "continue in the relationship and personally cope with the abuse as best [they] can" (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988:17). The Modified Survivor Theory suggests that when help-seeking efforts are inadequate, women sometimes rely upon a variety of *extralegal* coping strategies that may or may not effectively address the violence.

Fighting back against their abusers and the reliance upon "street justice" are two such methods. The Modified Survivor Theory suggests that women's reliance on such extralegal responses to battering suggests, perhaps, a sense of *hopelessness* but not helplessness. In other words, battered women remain active in their response to battering even when they repeatedly experience ineffective responses by helping agents and see no good way out of their circumstances. At the same time, the Modified Survivor Theory acknowledges the serious consequences of such coping mechanisms. While understandable, fighting back against physically abusive men or soliciting family and friends to do so can obviously have severe and deadly-if not serious legal- consequences for women and their loved ones.

The Modified Survivor Theory also suggests that leaving abusive relationships is a process involving a number of stages: 1) a shift in a perception of the relationship as abusive; 2) a realization that the relationship will not improve (despite efforts by women to alter their own behavior or to influence abusers); 3) some catalyst or turning point (i.e. severe injury); 4) the abandonment of the dream of an idealized relationship, family structure or marriage; and perhaps 5) the realization that the relationship may not end due to the shared custody of children (Barnett, 2000:345). According to the Modified Survivor Theory, effective responses by helping agents may guide battered women through this process and, ultimately, empower them to leave (Browne, 1998; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988).

Thus, the Modified Survivor Theory recognizes that leaving an abusive relationship is a gradual process consisting of several stages involving, among other things, a shift in the woman's perception of the abuser or the relationship and an abandonment of the hope that things will get better. Helpers can play a vital role in guiding women through this process and ultimately empowering them to leave. On the other hand, if helpers are unable or unwilling to provide effective assistance to battered women, there may be serious negative outcomes. She may remain in the abusive relationship longer (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988) or evade the criminal justice system and take matters into her own hands by physically fighting back (Moss et al, 1997; Richie, 1996) or relying upon street justice to try to end the abuse (Moss et al, 1997).

Policy Implications

The women in this study were asked to express their opinions about how institutional responses to battered women could be improved as well as how the problem of domestic violence should be addressed. More than a quarter of the women in this sample felt that there should be more programs to empower, support, and mentor battered women. The following quote illustrates the feelings of these women: "Women need to be empowered to stand on their own two feet and to be able to take care of themselves. You have to be independent and not to look at a relationship to be complete" (#75).

Women preferred being helped by "women who have been through it" over professionals. They felt that workers, particularly in victim service agencies and domestic violence shelters, have become desensitized to the feelings and needs of battered women. "We need people who've been where I've been—an experienced person. Not a person with book smarts. We need to help each other with the pain" (#13).

The principle that women should help other women by providing safe havens and emotional support was the guiding principle of the first shelters and safe houses in the beginning of the battered women's movement in the 1970's (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). These women's narratives suggest that the subsequent professionalism of services for battered women that has taken place in the last four decades has had some unintended negative consequences. While this change has arguably led to an increase in the variety and amount of services, additional funding for victim services, and a greater recognition of the problem of domestic violence, it may also have resulted in a "social service" orientation rather than an ethic of care in which women are empowered to make positive

changes in their lives. Several women felt that victim service agencies "keep women as victims" instead of encouraging them to become self-sufficient: "I am not a victim. Do not call me a survivor. I am here to be a doer. Don't keep these women as victims. Don't keep them down. There's not enough empowerment of women in these programs" (#41).

Additional and adequate housing and shelter was the second most frequently mentioned policy recommendation. Women routinely described domestic violence shelters as inaccessible, inadequate and inhospitable. One woman summarized the feeling of many women in the following quote: "We need places that are warm and loving, not sterile, because leaving is hard enough" (#79). Many women were unable to gain access to a shelter while others had to wait for weeks to get into one: "For women without family, housing is a real problem. Shelter space is an absolute necessity. But I was a woman alone and shelters don't provide enough space for adult single women. I didn't want to go to a homeless shelter" (#89). Worst of all, some women reported being unsafe in the domestic violence shelters. Two women said that their abusers broke into their rooms at the shelter and another woman said that there was no security guard protecting the entrance to the shelter: "At the other shelters, they had a security guard out front, but they didn't have that at my shelter. If someone followed me and wanted to hurt me, they could have" (#15).

Nearly one-fifth of the women (18%) called for more public education campaigns and prevention programs to teach about the signs of abusive relationships and services available to battered women. As one woman said, "if they don't know it's a problem and that there are places to go, some people won't see themselves as victims" (#24). A

Russian immigrant woman said that public education campaigns encouraged her to finally seek help and to divorce her husband: "The posters on the subway [on domestic violence] are really great because they validate that getting help is ok. Public encouragement and messages are really good" (#93). One woman emphasized the need for these campaigns to be tailored specifically toward marginalized communities: "There need to be more ads about abuse in low-income neighborhoods... You can't put a white woman in diamonds on t.v. for an ad on abuse. We just can't relate" (#11).

Women felt that prevention programs should be aimed largely at girls to teach them about the signs of abusive relationships and to strengthen their sense of self. Many women thought that these programs should take place in schools and should be facilitated by people who have "been through it themselves": "During school they should have a 30 minute class to deal with the abuse issue. It should be done separately for the boys and girls. They need to have young people to talk who have been through it, not to talk down to them" (#65). One woman even suggested that every couple should undergo a class on domestic violence when applying for a marriage license: "It should be required before marriage to take a 1 week training class on abuse and parenting issues, like a driver's license" (#8).

Interestingly only 18% of women said that there should be a stronger criminal justice response to domestic violence. Of these, most wanted the police to take the abuse more seriously and for the police to remove abusers from the home. These women felt strongly that instead of forcing women to flee their homes and go to shelters, abusers should be removed instead. Women were frequently dismayed that even when their abusers were arrested, they hardly ever served any substantial jail time for their offenses.

The quote below illustrates one woman's frustration with the criminal justice system's handling of her case: "The system should hold people accountable for their crimes. Sentences need to be harsher. The first time he was arrested he was kept for only two days and was sent to counseling and given a stay away order. He just came back to me and it started all over again...why is the criminal justice system so tough on drug offenders and not on people who hurt women and children?" (83).

Interestingly, women in this sample generally agreed with mandatory arrest and "no drop" prosecution policies—approaches that essentially limit women's capacity to decide how their own cases should be handled by removing their authority to determine if arrests should be made or whether prosecutions should go forward. One woman's comment summed up how several women felt about this approach: "I agree with no drop policies. The woman doesn't always know best" (#73). The idea that battered women "do not always know best" runs counter to the feminist principle that battered women have a unique understanding of their own circumstances and that women's wishes should be respected and honored no matter what. Some feminists argue that no-drop prosecution and mandatory arrest policies disempower women by essentially stripping them of their authority to make their own decisions, thus simulating the abusive dynamic from which they are trying to escape.

Some women made specific recommendations for improving the criminal justice response. One suggestion involved the greater use of electronic surveillance to track abusers for women with orders of protection: "Battered women should be given a bracelet to wear with a button that immediately alerts the police so they can show up *before* he kills them" (#28).

In sharp contrast to the law and order approach advocated by many of the women in this sample, a small portion of women preferred a therapeutic response to battering. Some felt that our society is unnecessarily punitive and should instead rely on counseling and treatment to rehabilitate abusers: "There should be some alternative to prisons. We have a punishment attitude. Instead of trying to help people, they just want to punish. Perhaps we need more programs for abusers" (#49). A few women felt that *women* also need to go to counseling in order to identify the underlying dynamics contributing to abuse and consider their own role in the abusive relationship. "I think that when a man and a woman is an abusive relationship and the police get involved, they should both be mandated to get individual help *and* counseling together. There should be follow-up. You need to find out where the problem is coming from in order to fix it" (#20).

Several women felt that the root causes of abuse must be addressed in order to deal with domestic violence. Most of these women felt that child abuse--of themselves and their partners--played a significant role in causing and perpetuating the abuse in their adult lives while a few others felt that substance abuse was a major contributing factor to the abuse. The notion that violence is intergenerational is supported by considerable evidence (Rosenbaum & O'Leary, 1981; Widom, 1989). However, the nature of this transmission is still unclear. While one respondent felt that women "repeat patterns which need to be addressed in therapy" (#37), the idea that women play a role- whether active or passive- in repeating these patterns is controversial. The nature of the role that childhood abuse plays in adult abusive relationships is one that requires further research.

Interestingly, only one woman said that *abusers* are responsible for changing their behavior in order to end domestic violence. On the other hand, many women (14%)

spoke about the need for *women* to alter their behavior, get out of abusive relationships sooner, or to not get into them in the first place. This view was perfectly captured by several women who said, when referring to their abuse, "I wasn't a victim, I was a volunteer". One such woman describes her feelings about women's roles in ending the abuse: "Women have to have some self worth. When you respect yourself, others won't treat you that way. I don't see my abuser as the problem, I see him as the symptom. These women have to ask themselves why they let these men do this to them...Women are volunteers, not victims" (#70).

Such an orientation suggests that many women have internalized the common victim-blaming perspective that *women* are ultimately responsible for ending domestic violence, not abusive men. At the same time, these women's reluctance to see themselves as "victims" can also be regarded as an understandable need to appropriate the personal power and dignity that they may have lost in the process of being abused. However, there is a downside to this "personal responsibility" approach: according to this perspective, the solution to domestic violence is viewed as entirely individual, not societal or structural. It is clear from the women's own accounts that this problem requires a multi-pronged approach including individual-level interventions like comprehensive and long-term counseling; structural solutions such as access to affordable and decent housing and shelters; *and* improved institutional responses by the police, victim service agencies, and other formal helpers.

Several women in this sample often felt stigmatized and judged by service providers and criminal justice workers. They said they were made to feel like "statistics", "mental cases", and even "criminals" by the very people meant to assist them. The

following quote illustrates the feelings of several respondents: "We are treated like people who did something wrong, not victims. I felt blamed. The judge in my case was friends with my abuser's lawyer and he got a very mild sentence because of it. I felt like *I* was the one put on trial" (#84).

Many women were particularly concerned about being labeled an "unfit mother" if they sought help, particularly from victim service agencies. The domestic violence literature suggests that children who witness violence at home exhibit a host of behavioral and emotional problems (Edleson, 1997) and considerable evidence suggests that in anywhere between thirty and sixty percent of domestic violence cases, men who abuse their partners also abuse their children (Appel & Holden, 1999; Edleson, 1999). The acknowledgement of the co-occurrence of woman abuse and child abuse and its potential serious consequences has resulted in stronger responses to domestic violence cases where children are involved. Such responses include the passage of legislation enhancing criminal penalties for domestic assaults committed in the presence of a child and, in a few states, redefining domestic violence in the presence of a child as child abuse (Kaufman Kantor, 2001).

There has also been a growing tendency within Child Protective Services to hold battered women accountable for failing to protect their children from either direct or indirect harm (Kaufman Kantor & Little, 2003). In some cases, albeit rarely, battered women have lost custody of their children on the grounds that they failed to protect their children from their abusive partners. The fear of being reported to Child Protective Services kept some women from reporting their abuse to victim service agencies or even from going to domestic violence shelters. One woman in this study said that she lost

custody of her children because she discussed the abuse with her domestic violence counselor. She spoke of the need to find a way to protect children without punishing battered women: "They should allow women to be totally honest about what's going on and not make them feel like they're criminals. They make us feel like we're unfit mothers because we are being abused. They need to go about this in a different way, protect the kids, but don't punish the women." #64

Women in this sample universally voiced outrage over what they considered to be an overly punitive policy directed at battered mothers. The quote below describes the feelings of these women: "Battered women with children are afraid to call victim service agencies and shelters because they might take their kids away...We need to ensure women that they won't lose their kids if they go for help" (#47). One woman suggested that, rather than punish battered women who are unable to protect their children from their abusers, they should be given parenting classes: "Make sure that ACS (child protective services) doesn't come in and take her children away. Take her to parenting classes. Don't punish women for being beaten." #44

Women from marginalized communities—immigrant women, women with physical and psychological disabilities and drug-addicted women—voiced concerns about the treatment they received at the hands of criminal justice and social service agencies. The problem of accessing victim services and shelters is exacerbated for drug-addicted women. In New York City, only one shelter serves women who are substance abusers (Frye et al, 2001). The lack of victim services for this population is particularly disturbing because these women are disproportionately at risk of severe and lethal domestic *and* street violence (Sterk, 1999). Women with substance abuse problems also

criticized drug-treatment programs and Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) for not acknowledging the centrality of domestic violence and abuse to their addictions: "A lot of women are addicted because of domestic violence. We find peace in drugs. A.A. doesn't address the abuse. They should have groups just for women so they can talk about the abuse." #27

Similarly, immigrant women often lack domestic violence services in their communities. While some community-based women's organizations are increasingly addressing concerns of such populations, immigrant women in this study were generally not aware of their existence. "Immigrant women face special problems. Getting a divorce is a big deal. Some cultures are very against this. I didn't know any organizations that helped Russian immigrant women. Domestic violence is not discussed on Russian t.v. or in the Russian newspaper or anywhere that I know of. I didn't have anyone to rely on when I decided to divorce" (#94).

Women with psychological and physical disabilities were particularly conflicted about how to deal with the abuse from their partners: often their caretakers were also their abusers. Not knowing how to deal with this problem, organizations working with disabled women tended to simply avoid the issue. One physically disabled woman said that these agencies must actively address this problem: "Home visits for disabled women would be helpful to get you to talk about what might be happening... Organizations dealing with the disabled need to be educated about how to identify abuse so they can help" (#34).

Finally, a small, but sizable number of women felt that there was nothing that could be done to help battered women. According to them, women need to make up their

own minds about what to do. Nonetheless, these women felt that it was important for helpers to be nonjudgmental and to provide both emotional support and tangible services so that women *could* leave if they decided to do so. The quote below illustrates the fatalistic view of some women in the sample: "There's nothing you can do when they're in that situation. You need to raise women's self-esteem, give them love. Most women in these situations don't want help because they're not in their right mind. But when they're ready, help them get an apartment, get a therapist, support group. Don't judge her" (#54). Another woman essentially agreed with this view but added the need for preventive programs for girls: "I think they need to want to help themselves. You can't do anything unless the woman is ready to get out. But I think there might be things we can do to prevent girls from getting into abusive relationships." #82

Thus, several important policy implications can be drawn from the women's responses to the question, "what should be done to help battered women?" The most frequent suggestion was to create more programs to empower, support and mentor battered women who are attempting to leave abusive relationships. The second most common response was to significantly increase the number of available domestic violence shelters and build more affordable housing for low-income people. One-fifth of the women said that there should be more prevention programs to raise the self-esteem of girls so that they can identify the signs of abusive relationships and get out of them quickly. Another one-fifth of the women favored a stronger criminal justice response to battering noting that their abusers were rarely, if ever, incarcerated for their crimes. A much smaller portion of the women said that they preferred a therapeutic response to battering that included rehabilitation for the abuser and counseling for the victim. Many

women in this sample expressed concern about the lack of services for marginalized populations of battered women (i.e. drug addicts, immigrants, the physically and mentally disabled). Finally, many women talked about the need for sensitivity training for helpers in the criminal justice and social service sectors. Many women in this sample feared contacting victim services agencies because of their perception that they would be treated as "unfit mothers" and that their children might be taken from them. This perception prevented some battered women from seeking help and should be actively addressed in public relations campaigns.

FUTURE RESEARCH NEEDS

One limitation of this study, in addition to the limitations of the sample mentioned in the Methodology chapter, is that helpers-- religious counselors, therapists, victim service agents, and workers in the criminal justice system and healthcare providers-- were not interviewed for the study. This study focused entirely on battered women's perceptions of helping agents and the impact that interventions by them—positive or negative—had upon women's subsequent help-seeking decisions and coping strategies. According to the women in this sample, slightly over half were generally unsatisfied with the treatment they received by helpers. This was particularly true of women who utilized the police, victim services, and healthcare workers.

One can only speculate why these front-line responders were the least effective (according to the women). It is possible that the workers who have the most direct contact with battered women may become desensitized to their plight. Psychological studies suggest that first respondents can be traumatized by being repeatedly exposed to acts of severe and recurring violence (Figley, 1995; Stamm, 1995). Given the fact that battered women rarely leave abusers after the first violence incident (Campbell et al, 1994; Follingstad et al, 1992; Henderson et al, 1997; Herbert et al, 1991) and generally leave and return to their abusers many times before finally ending the relationship (Okun, 1986), being a witness to this process can be emotionally taxing for even the most compassionate helpers. While secondary trauma may not entirely explain the negative attitudes and behaviors of helping professionals toward battered women, additional research is needed to examine the extent and consequences of burn-out and secondary

trauma among workers responding to domestic violence, most notably the police and victim service counselors. This information could hopefully be used to eliminate the kinds of insensitive and unprofessional responses described by battered women in this study.

Another area that needs more research is the quality and quantity of domestic violence shelters. Although domestic violence shelters are one of the most useful services for battered women, available shelter space is limited (Davies, Lyon and Monti-Catania, 1998; Hunt, K.L., 2001). The limited number of shelter spaces is particularly serious for low-income women who disproportionately rely on them for refuge (Gondolf and Fisher, 1988). Many women in this study complained of the lack of safe, clean, comfortable shelter space. Given the fact that shelters may be the one resource that can actually save a battered woman's life, it is unacceptable that so many women are routinely turned away, referred to unprotected homeless shelters, or put on waiting lists that are weeks long. A comprehensive study on shelter space availability compared with the level of need would demonstrate the true scope of the problem and could be used to justify additional funding for such facilities.

In this study, several women complained that they were treated like "unfit mothers" by victim service agencies. A few women (5%) were reluctant to even seek help from domestic violence shelters or victim service agencies because they feared that staff would report them to child protective services. When children are involved, helpers are justifiably concerned about the welfare of children who are abused and/or witness domestic violence: the domestic violence literature suggests that children who witness violence at home exhibit a host of behavioral and emotional problems (Edleson, 1997)

and considerable evidence suggests that in anywhere between thirty and sixty percent of domestic violence cases, men who abuse their partners also abuse their children (Appel & Holden, 1999; Edleson, 1999). At the same time, removing children on the grounds that battered women failed to protect their children from abusive partners can be viewed as victim-blaming, overly punitive and even sexist. As Kaufman Kantor argues (2001) when Child Protective Services workers assume that battered women can "just leave" and that women who do not are failing to protect their children, they are minimizing the complexity and impact of domestic violence on women. It is also noteworthy that fathers are not likely to be charged with failure to protect their children in cases where the mother is an abuser (Kaufman Kantor, 2001).

While Child Protective Services and domestic violence agencies must take the safety and well-being of children seriously, researchers increasingly question the need to remove children from their mothers when co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse exists (Kaufman Kantor, 2001; Edleson, 1999). While traditionally child protective services and victim service agencies have had different missions-- protecting the interests of children and ensuring the safety of battered women, respectively-- and have worked separately, and sometimes at odds, to meet their goals (Saunders, 2003), these organizations increasingly recognize the need for collaboration to deal with the complicated problems of abusive households. Evaluation studies should be conducted to determine how child protective agencies and domestic violence organizations are separately and jointly addressing these problems. One woman in this study suggested that a public relations campaign was needed to convey to battered women that they could, with confidence, seek help from victim service agencies without fear of having their

children taken away. Before this is done, it is necessary to evaluate the extent to which domestic violence agencies involve Child Protective Services or help to initiate child abuse investigations against their clients.

More research needs to be conducted on the intersection of drug addiction and domestic violence. There is very little in the domestic violence literature on the many ways substance abuse is connected to woman abuse (Rogers et al, 2003). However, it is apparent from the narratives of many women in this study that this connection was real and substantial for the women themselves. Several drug-addicted women in this sample said that it was nearly impossible for substance abusers to get a space in a domestic violence shelter. There is currently only one domestic violence shelter that serves women on methadone in New York City (Frye et al, 2001).

At the same time, women said that drug treatment programs do not adequately address women's victimization. For example, conflicting philosophies between domestic violence shelters and drug treatment programs prevent women who are both chemically addicted and being abused by their partners from receiving comprehensive treatment. Domestic violence shelters tend to view battered women simply as victims of abuse, while drug treatment programs often believe that women must deal with issues of "codependency" to abusers (Rogers et al, 2003). Because the domestic violence literature suggests that drug-addicted women are particularly at risk of severe and lethal domestic violence (Maher, 1997; Richie, 1994; Sterk, 1999), and that they tend to lack informal support from friends and family (Maher, 1997: Richie, 1994), it is distressing that these women do not have access to comprehensive services and shelter. The availability of

services for highly marginalized populations, including drug-addicted battered women is an area that requires more research.

Criminally-involved women are also alienated from many helping agencies. Because of their involvement in the drug trade, active drug use or prostitution some women in this study were understandably reluctant to avail themselves of help from formal sources of help, particularly the criminal justice system. In addition drug-addicted women often alienate themselves from friends and family, thus limiting their support system further. Women who are simultaneously victims of domestic violence and criminally-involved clearly present a dilemma to the criminal justice system: which offense should take precedence. It is not clear from the current domestic violence literature how criminally-involved battered women are treated by the criminal justice system. However, evidence from this study suggests that these women generally do not feel safe to turn the police for help.

Some battered women in the study whose partners were criminally involved were also reluctant to involve the police because they feared retaliation by their partners or dangerous associates. It is clear from women's narratives that even very severe instances of battering were not treated as harshly by the criminal justice system as were drug cases. Ironically, the very criminal justice system that was often unable or unwilling to protect drug-involved battered women in poor communities of color from their abusers, often incarcerated their abusers for unrelated drug or gun charges. In some cases, batterers were deported for drug charges. In fact, despite the severe domestic violence that most of the women in this study endured, very few women reported that their abuser had been incarcerated beyond a couple of days on a domestic violence charge. As one woman in

the study aptly wondered, "why does the criminal justice system treat drug-related crime more seriously than violence against women and children?" This is a question that needs to be explored with further scholarly research.

More studies are also needed to evaluate the extent of arrests of battered women. In this study, a few women who called the police complained that they were wrongfully arrested along with their abusers, or police threatened to arrest them. According to the women's narratives, these threats were in retaliation for not cooperating with police or for calling the police repeatedly. The domestic violence literature suggests that dual arrests have increased with the implementation of "pro-arrest" or "mandatory arrest policies" (Goldberg, 1999). Because of the complex nature of domestic violence, it is not always easy for police officers to determine which person should be arrested. Both parties may have injuries, although the domestic violence literature clearly states that women's injuries are more severe. Some jurisdictions have passed "primary physical aggressor laws" in order to provide law enforcement officers guidelines so that they can arrest only the main perpetrator. However, according to many women in this study, the wrongful arrest of battered women occurs nonetheless. Some egregious examples of wrongful arrests were described by women in this study and can, in part, explain the high level of mistrust that many of them felt toward the police.

It is not clear how many women who are arrested for domestic violence are actually aggressors or are simply defending themselves. More research needs to be done to measure the extent, nature and consequences of the arrests of battered women. The increasing tendency to arrest women along with men in domestic violence incidents is symptomatic of a growing trend to view women as "just as violent as men" (Straus &

Gelles, 1986; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980). This gender-neutral approach to domestic violence has been criticized by feminists for a number of reasons: 1) it does not take into account women's different motivations and intentions for using violence; 2) it does not acknowledge the generally less severe consequences of women's violence; and 3) it treats domestic violence as a relatively equal interaction between two parties rather than as an abusive dynamic in which the batterer (usually a man) dominates, controls and physically victimizes the victim (usually a women). While current research suggests that there are a number of different kinds of abusive relationships and that not all abusive relationships constitute the prototypical male "batterer" and female "victim" dynamic described by Johnson as "intimate terrorism" (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000), it is clear that the vast majority of women in the current study do fit that description. As a result, it was alarming to find that a sizable portion of these battered women were treated by criminal justice professionals and even victim services agencies as though *they* were criminals. Because of the complex nature of domestic violence, a greater understanding of the law enforcement response to battered women who use violence is necessary. It is not enough to measure the statistical occurrence of women's arrest rates: an in-depth analysis of how police make their arrest decisions is needed.

Finally, women's use of "street justice" as an extralegal method of attempting to deal with the abuse should be further examined. While some research has been conducted on crime victims who "take matters into their own hands" (Karmen, 2001), very little attention has been paid to battered women who rely upon others to threaten or harm their abusers in order to try to deal with the abuse. In the current study, one-third of the women tried to use street justice at least once. The use of extralegal tactics to dealing

with abuse can be regarded as a failure of the criminal justice system to adequately respond to domestic violence. It may also represent some women's ambivalence toward the criminal justice system—this may be particularly true of poor women of color (Hampton et al, 2003; Richie, 2000).

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

I.D. NUMBER OF PARTICIPANT (based on order of interview): _____
DATE OF INTERVIEW:_____
SITE OF INTERVIEW: _____

I'd like to start by talking to you about some things that will help me understand a little bit about who you are:

1. How old are you? _____
If less than 18 *years old, discontinue interview and explain that the study focuses on adult women*
   1- 18-27
   2- 28-37
   3- 38-47
   4- 48-57
   5- 58+

2. How would you describe your ethnic background? For instance, some people classify themselves as: (circle appropriate code)
   1- White (not of Hispanic origin)
   2- Black/African-American/Caribbean-American (not of Hispanic origin)
   3- Hispanic
   4- Other:
      Specify: _____

3. Where were you born (country)? _____

4. *If not born in the U.S.*, how many years have you been in the U.S.? _____

5. What language do you feel most comfortable speaking? _____

6. Are you working outside the home? (circle the one that applies)
   1- Full time 2- part time 3- not at all

7. Are you a homemaker? 1- yes 2- no (circle appropriate code)

8. Are you (check appropriate code)
   1- married (legally)
   2- living together with a partner, but not married
   3- have a partner, but not living together
   4- single (not in a relationship)

9. How many children do you have? (circle appropriate code)
   0- none 1- one 2- two 3- three 4- four 5- five or more

10. What is your family's income each year? _____
    1- <$10,000
    2- $10,000- <$15,000
    3- $15,000- <$20,000
    4- $20,000- <$25,000
    5- $25,000- <$30,000
    6- $30,000 and over

11. How many people does this income support? _____

12. Do you receive public assistance? (circle appropriate code) 1- yes 0- no

13. How far did you go in school? (circle appropriate code)
    1- Less than HS
    2- HS diploma/GED
    3- Some college
    4- Graduated college
    5- Other: _____

14. Where do you live? (circle appropriate code)
    1- Private house
    2- Apartment
    3- SRO Hotel
    4- Shelter
    5- With friends and family
    6- Group home
    7- Other
        Specify: _____

I would like to talk to you about the abuse you have experienced in adult relationship(s) in the past. If you have been in more than one abusive relationship, please focus on the most recent abusive relationship you were in.

15. **In this relationship, did your partner ever do any of the following:**

Physical Abuse (ever)?	**1- Yes 0- No**	**If yes, how many times**
throw objects at or near you	_____	_____
push or shove you	_____	_____
pull your hair	_____	_____
slap you	_____	_____
kick you	_____	_____
punch you	_____	_____
bite you	_____	_____
beat you up	_____	_____
choke you	_____	_____
threaten you with a gun	_____	_____
threaten you with a knife	_____	_____
stab you	_____	_____
shoot you	_____	_____
harm you during pregnancy	_____	_____
force you to engage in sexual activities	_____	_____
other types of physical abuse	_____	_____

Specify:

16. **In this relationship, did your partner ever do any of the following?**

[How often: **0**- Never, **1**- Daily, **2**- Once a week, **3**- Once every two weeks, **4**- Once a month,

5- Once every 6 months, **6**- Once a year, **7**- Other: _____]

Nonphysical Abuse	**1- Yes 0- No**	**If yes, how often?**
Emotional Abuse	_____	

_____

(Includes name calling, insults, humiliation, mind games)

Please explain:

Nonphysical Abuse	1- Yes 0- No	If yes, how often?
Intimidation **(Includes intimidating looks/gestures/actions, smashing things, destroying your property, harming pets, displaying weapons)**	_____	_____
Threats **(Includes threatening to: kill or harm you, to kill or harm your children or family, to commit suicide, to report you to child welfare, to hurt you so that you will drop charges)**	_____	_____

17. **How long did this relationship last?** _____ (number of months)
    - 0- less than a year
    - 1- 1- <5 years
    - 2- 5- <10 years
    - 3- 10- <15 years
    - 4- 15+ years

18. **At what point in the relationship did the first incident of physical abuse take place?** _____ (number of months into the relationship. If less than a month, write < 1 month)

19. **What kept you in the relationship past the first violent incident? Please explain.**

20. **How would you describe the abuse:**
    1- it got worse over time
    2- it lessened over time
    3- it stayed the same throughout the relationship

21. **Did you seek help from others?** 1- **Yes** 0- **No** (circle appropriate code)

22. **Over time, did you seek help from others...** (circle appropriate code)
    1- **more frequently**
    2- **less frequently**
    3- **the same amount throughout the relationship**
    4- **no help-seeking**

23. **Please explain:**

24. **How did the abusive relationship end? Please explain:**

The next questions are about how you dealt with the abuse.

25. **During the abusive relationship, did you ever:**
FREQUENCY: 0- Never, 1- Rarely (1 time), 2- A few times (2-3 times),
3- Several times (4-5 times), 4- Frequently (6 or more times)

Help-seeking behaviors	1- **Yes** 0- **No**	**Frequency** (write code)
TALK TO FRIENDS ABOUT THE ABUSE	_____	_____

If No,

25a. **Why not?**

If yes, ask the following questions:

25b. **What made you decide to turn to your friend for help? Explain:**

25c. **In general, how effective was your friend's response?** 1- **generally effective** 0- **generally ineffective** 8- **n/a** (circle code that applies)

25d. **Explain:**

25e. **Did you ever turn to this friend for help again?** 1- Yes 0- No 8- **n/a** (circle appropriate code)
If No,

25f. **Why not?**

26. **During the abusive relationship, did you ever:**
FREQUENCY: 0- Never, 1- Rarely (1 time), 2- A few times (2-3 times),
3- Several times (4-5 times), 4- Frequently (6 or more times)

Help-seeking behaviors	1- **Yes** 0- **No**	**Frequency** (write code)
TALK TO FAMILY MEMBERS RE: ABUSE	_____	_____

If No,

26a. **Why not?**

If yes, ask the following questions:

26b. **What made you decide to turn to your family for help? Explain:**

26c. **In general, how effective was your family's response?** 1- **generally effective** 0- **generally ineffective** 8- **n/a** (circle code that applies)

26d. **Explain:**

26e. **Did you ever turn to your family for help again?** 1- **Yes** 0- **No** 8- **n/a** (circle appropriate code)

If No,
26f. **Why not?**

27. **During the abusive relationship, did you ever:**
FREQUENCY: 0- Never, 1- Rarely (1 time), 2- A few times (2-3 times),
3- Several times (4-5 times), 4- Frequently (6 or more times)

Help-seeking behaviors	1- Yes 0- No	Frequency (write code)
GO TO RELIGIOUS COUNSELING OR SEEK ADVICE FROM SOMEONE IN A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY	_____	_____

If No,

27a. **Why not?**

If yes, ask the following questions:

27b. **What made you decide to turn to a religious counselor/religious community for help? Explain:**

27c. **In general, how effective was their response?** 1- **generally effective** 0- **generally ineffective** 8- **n/a** (circle code that applies)

27d. **Explain:**

27e. **Did you ever turn to a religious counselor/religious community for help again?** 1- **Yes** 0- **No** 8- **n/a** (circle appropriate code)

If No,

27f. **Why not?**

28. **During the abusive relationship, did you ever:**
FREQUENCY: 0- Never, 1- Rarely (1 time), 2- A few times (2-3 times),
3- Several times (4-5 times), 4- Frequently (6 or more times)

Help-seeking behaviors	1- **Yes** 0- **No**	**Frequency** (write code)
TALK TO A THERAPIST/COUNSELOR RE: ABUSE	_____	_____

If yes, ask, **What kind of counselor?**

_____

If No,

28a. **Why not?**

If yes, ask the following questions:

28b. **What made you decide to go to a therapist or counselor for help? Explain:**

28c. **In general, how effective was their response?** 1- **generally effective** 0- **generally ineffective** 8- **n/a** (circle code that applies)

28d. **Explain.**

28e. **Did you ever go back to the counselor/therapist for help again?** 1- **Yes** 0- **No** 8- **n/a** (circle appropriate code)

If No,

28f. **Why not?**

29. **During the abusive relationship, did you ever:**
FREQUENCY: 0- Never, 1- Rarely (1 time), 2- A few times (2-3 times),
3- Several times (4-5 times), 4- Frequently (6 or more times)

Help-seeking behaviors	1- Yes 0- No	Frequency (write code)
CONTACT A VICTIM SERVICES AGENCY	_____	_____

If No,

29a. **Why not?**

If yes, ask the following questions:
29b. **What made you decide to go to a victim services agency for help? Explain:**

29c. **In general, how effective was their response?** 1- **generally effective** 0- **generally ineffective** 8- **n/a** (circle code that applies)

29d. **Explain:**

29e. **Did you ever turn to a victim services agency for help again?** 1- Yes 0- No 8- **n/a** (circle appropriate code)

If No,

29f. **Why not?**

30. **During the abusive relationship, did you ever:**
FREQUENCY: 0- Never, 1- Rarely (1 time), 2- A few times (2-3 times),
3- Several times (4-5 times), 4- Frequently (6 or more times)

Help-seeking behaviors	1- Yes 0- No	**Frequency** (write code)
GO TO A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTER	_____	_____

If No,

30a. **Why not?**

If yes, ask the following questions:

30b. **What made you decide to go to a domestic violence shelter for help? Explain:**

30c. **In general, how effective was their response?** 1- **generally effective** 0- **generally ineffective** 8- **n/a** (circle code that applies)

30d. **Explain:**

30e. **Did you ever turn to a domestic violence shelter for help again?** 1- **Yes** 0- **No** 8- **n/a** (circle appropriate code)

If No,

30f. **Why not?**

31. **During the abusive relationship, did you ever:**
FREQUENCY: 0- Never, 1- Rarely (1 time), 2- A few times (2-3 times),
3- Several times (4-5 times), 4- Frequently (6 or more times)

Help-seeking behaviors	1- Yes 0- No	Frequency (write code)
CONTACT THE POLICE	_____	_____

If No,

31a. **Why not?**

If yes, ask the following questions:

31b. **What made you decide to contact the police for help? Explain:**

31c. **In general, how effective was their response?** 1- **generally effective** 0- **generally ineffective** 8- **n/a** (circle code that applies)

31d. **Explain:**

31e. **Did you ever contact the police for help again?** 1- **Yes** 0- **No** 8- **n/a** (circle appropriate code)

If No,

31f. **Why not?**

32. **During the abusive relationship, did you ever:**

FREQUENCY: 0- Never, 1- Rarely (1 time), 2- A few times (2-3 times),
3- Several times (4-5 times), 4- Frequently (6 or more times)

Help-seeking behaviors	1- **Yes** 0- **No**	**Frequency** (write code)
FILE FOR AN ORDER OF PROTECTION	_____	_____

If no,

32a. **Why not?**

If yes, ask the following questions:

32b. **What made you decide to file for an order of protection with the courts? Explain:**

32c. **In general, effective was the court's response?** 1- **generally effective** 0- **generally ineffective** 8- **n/a** (circle code that applies)

32d. **Explain:**

32e. **Did you ever file for another order of protection help again?** 1- **Yes** 0- **No** 8- **n/a** (circle appropriate code)

If No,

32f. **Why not?**

33. **During the abusive relationship, did you ever do any of the following:**
FREQUENCY: 0- Never, 1- Rarely (1 time), 2- A few times (2-3 times),
3- Several times (4-5 times), 4- Frequently (6 or more times)

Help-seeking behaviors	1- **Yes** 0- **No**	**Frequency** (write code)
GO TO DOCTOR/NURSE PRACTITICIONER FOR HELP (Circle the one that applies)	_____	_____

If no,

33a. **Why not?**

If yes, ask the following questions:

33b. **What made you decide to talk to your doctor/nurse practitioner about the abuse? Explain:**

33c. **In general, effective was their response?** 1- **generally effective** 0- **generally ineffective** 8- **n/a** (circle code that applies)

33d. **Explain:**

33e. **Did you ever go to your doctor/nurse practitioner for help again?** 1- **Yes** 0- **No** 8- **n/a** (circle appropriate code)

If No,

33f. **Why not?**

34. **Did you turn to anyone else for help?** 1- **Yes** 0- **No** (circle appropriate code)

If Yes, ask:

34a. **Who else did you turn to for help?** _____ (type of agency or individual)

34b. **How many times did you turn to them for help?** _____ (# of times)

34c. **What made you decide to turn to** _____ (type of agency or individual)? **Explain:**

34d. **In general, effective was their response?** 1- **generally effective** 0- **generally ineffective** 8- **n/a** (circle code that applies)

34e. **Explain:**

34f. **Did you ever turn to this individual or organization for help again?** 1- **Yes** 0- **No** 8- **n/a** (circle appropriate code)

If No,

34g. **Why not?**

35. **Considering all of the agencies and individuals you turned to for help, how effective was their overall response to your abuse?** 1- generally effective 0- generally ineffective 8- n/a (circle code that applies)

The following are just a few questions about other reactions you may have had to the abuse

36. **Did you ever use physical force against your partner to try to stop the abuse?**
1- **Yes** 0- **No** (circle appropriate code)

If Yes, ask the following questions:

36a. **What made you decide to physically fight back against your partner? Please explain:**

36b. **How did fighting back effect the relationship?** (circle appropriate code)
1- **it made the situation worse (more abuse)**
2- **it made the situation better (less abuse)**
3- **nothing changed (same level of abuse)**
8- **not applicable**
Explain:

37. **Did you ever have someone else threaten or harm your partner to try to stop the abuse?** 1- **Yes** 0- **No** (circle appropriate code)

If Yes, ask the following questions:

37a. **What made you decide to have someone threaten or harm your partner?**

Please explain:

37b. **How did doing so effect the relationship?** (circle appropriate code)
1- **it made the situation worse (more abuse)**
2- **it made the situation better (less abuse)**
3- **nothing changed (same level of abuse)**
8- **not applicable**
Explain:

38. The following questions are about obstacles that you may have faced when trying to seek help for the abuse. Answer yes or no to the following questions.
(write code that applies next to each question. 1- Yes 0- No)

a- _____ **Did your partner threaten to hurt you if you sought help?**

b- _____ **Did your partner threaten to take custody of the kids if you sought help?**

c- _____ **Did your partner threaten to kidnap the kids if you sought help?**

d- _____ **Were you hesitant to seek help because of your commitment to the relationship?**

e- _____ **Were you hesitant to seek help because you thought your partner would change?**

f- _____ **Did you not seek help because you did not consider yourself a victim?**

g- _____ **Were you unable to seek help because you were too depressed to do anything about your situation?**

h- _____ **Were you reluctant to seek help because you thought the abuse was normal?**

i- _____ **Were you reluctant to seek help from social service agencies and the criminal justice system because of a perception that they are ineffective?**

j- _____ **Were you reluctant to involve the criminal justice system because of a perception that they are racist?**

k-_____ **Were you reluctant to involve the criminal justice system because of your own drug use or other criminal activity?**

l- _____ **Were you ever denied space in a domestic violence shelter?**

m- _____ **Were you reluctant to enter a domestic violence shelter because of restrictive rules?**

n- _____ **Were you reluctant to seek help because of financial dependence on your partner?**

o- _____ **Were you reluctant to seek help because of a lack of child care?**

p- _____ **Were you reluctant to leave your home/lose your home if you left?**

q- _____ **Were you reluctant to seek help because you felt you had nowhere to go if you left?**

r- _____ **Were you reluctant to seek help out of fear that your abuser would report you to child protective services or that you would lose your children?**

s- _____ **Did your partner's controlling and isolating behaviors make it difficult for you to seek help?**

t- _____ **Were you reluctant to seek help because you wanted to keep a two-parent family?**

u- _____ **Were you hesitant to leave for fear of being alone?**

v- _____ **Were you reluctant to leave because you loved/had sympathy for your abuser?**

w- _____ **Did you face any other obstacles to seeking help?**

If yes, What other obstacle did you face?

_____

If the respondent answered "yes" to any of the above, ask:

39. **What was the greatest obstacle to seeking help?** _____ (write 1-22)

40. **Why was this the biggest obstacle to seeking help? Please explain.**

These last questions are about what helped most in your process of getting safe/leaving your abusive relationship

41. **What organization or individual was the most helpful to you?**
_____ (type of organization or individual)
1- friends, 2- family, 3- religious institutions, 4- therapist/counselor, 5- victim services agency, 6- domestic violence shelter, 7- police, 8- prosecutor/judge, 9- healthcare practitioner, 10- other, 11- no one
Please explain:

42. **What organization or individual was the least helpful to you?**
_____ (type of organization or individual)
1- friends, 2- family, 3- religious institutions, 4- therapist/counselor, 5- victim services agency, 6- domestic violence shelter, 7- police, 8- prosecutor/judge, 9- healthcare practitioner, 10- other, 11- no one
Please explain:

43. **In your opinion, what should be done to help battered women get out of abusive relationships?**
Please explain.

The Graduate School and University Center

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Information Sheet

My name is Ida Dupont and I am a doctoral student in the Ph.D. Criminal Justice Program at the Graduate Center at the City University of New York and an adjunct professor at John Jay College. I am also the Principal Investigator of this project entitled, "Help-Seeking Behaviors of Low-Income, Formerly Battered Women from Different Ethnic/Racial Groups". This study is about how low-income women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds who have been in abusive relationships got out of their violent relationship. I am particularly interested in how women cope with the violence in their relationships, who they reach out to for help, and which individuals or agencies are the most helpful to them in their process of leaving. I would like permission to interview you about your experiences.

The interview will take about 1- 1.5 hours. I will give you a $20 metro card for doing the interview. I would like to audio tape this interview so I can record the details of the interview accurately but if you do not agree to this, you can still be interviewed without being taped. If you agree to be tape recorded, I will make sure that the tapes will only be heard by me and my advisor.

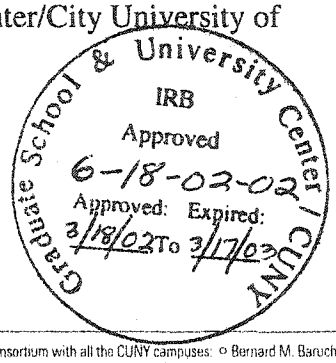
To protect your anonymity and confidentiality, I will ask you to use a nickname instead of your real name. Any information you give me will be kept strictly confidential, and will be stored in a locked file cabinet, to which only I, and my advisor, will have access. You are completely free to refuse to answer any questions or to end the interview at any time.

The main risk involved in this study is that you may experience some discomfort in answering questions about the abuse you have experienced. The main benefit of your participation is that, in the future, there will be more information on how to improve services for battered women.

I may publish results of this study, but your name, or any other identifying characteristics, will not be used in any publications or reports. If you would like a copy of the study, please contact me at (646) 623-5164 which will notify you about how get a copy when it is completed.

If you have any questions about this research, you can call me at (646) 623-5164 or my advisor, Barry Spunt at (212) 237-8677. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact Hilry Fisher, Sponsored Research, Graduate Center/City University of New York, (212) 817-7523, hfisher@gc.cuny.edu.

I will give you a copy of this form to take with you.



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