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In-Depth Interviews REPORT

Trinidad (2014): The “Lifting Lives” Study: Gender Norms and Intimate Partner Violence in Three Counties in Trinidad

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The “Lifting Lives” Study: Gender norms and Intimate Partner Violence in three counties in Trinidad

The experience of physical, sexual and emotional Intimate Partner Violence: Trinidad (2015): Health Area TRaC Study Evaluating Behavior among Women 18-49 in the counties Caroni, St George and Victoria. Round 1

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BACKGROUND & RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Intimate partner violence is a severe threat to the health of women, men, children, and communities. The effects of violence are both immediate and far-reaching. Not only is violence associated with immediate physical harm and poor health outcomes for the victim, but it is also shown to be associated with poor health effects among children and families, such as infant and fetal mortality and morbidity¹ and poor psychological adjustment of children². Among survivors, IPV is associated with HIV infection³ and other risk behaviors for HIV⁴, reduced use of modern contraception and antenatal care services⁵, and poor long-term physical and mental health outcomes⁶.

The study incorporated a dual system of data collection by use of: 1) a quantitative survey and 2) qualitative methods of focus groups and in-depth interviews. This report concentrates on one component of the qualitative research, specifically, in-depth interviews of female survivors of IPV through their life histories.

The objectives of these in-depth interviews were to explore and describe the risk factors, decision-making and health seeking of female survivors of IPV. More specifically, this aspect of the study sought to document the experiences of female survivors of IPV through life histories, including an exploration of the factors associated with violence, patterns of violence, the triggers of violent episodes and the motivations and experiences for seeking support services.

METHODOLOGY

In-depth interviews are a unique way of capturing respondents' narratives on specified research subjects and are useful in providing insights to causal, risk resilience and protective factors of a social phenomenon. Padgett (2008), iterated the importance of a qualitative study in gathering data through the narratives of the participants. She further argued that it is not so much the

¹ Alio AP, Nana PN, Salihu HM. *Spousal violence and potentially preventable single and recurrent spontaneous fetal loss in an African setting: cross-sectional study*. *Lancet*. 2009;373(9660):318-24. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(09)60096-9. PubMed PMID: 19167571.

Emenike E, Lawoko S, Dalal K. *Intimate partner violence and reproductive health of women in Kenya*. *International nursing review*. 2008;55(1):97-102. doi: 10.1111/j.1466-7657.2007.00580.x. PubMed PMID: 18275542.

Karamagi CA, Tumwine JK, Tylleskar T, Heggenhougen K. *Intimate partner violence and infant morbidity: evidence of an association from a population-based study in eastern Uganda in 2003*. *BMC pediatrics*. 2007;7:34. doi: 10.1186/1471-2431-7-34. PubMed PMID: 17988374; PubMed Central PMCID: PMC2186330.

² Owen AE, Thompson MP, Kaslow NJ. *The mediating role of parenting stress in the relation between intimate partner violence and child adjustment*. *Journal of family psychology* : JFP : journal of the Division of Family Psychology of the American Psychological Association. 2006;20(3):505-13. doi: 10.1037/0893-3200.20.3.505. PubMed PMID: 16938009.

³ Dunkle KL, Jewkes RK, Brown HC, Gray GE, McIntyre JA, Harlow SD. *Gender-based violence, relationship power, and risk of HIV infection in women attending antenatal clinics in South Africa*. *Lancet*. 2004;363(9419):1415-21. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(04)16098-4. PubMed PMID: 15121402.

Jewkes RK, Dunkle K, Nduna M, Shai N. *Intimate partner violence, relationship power inequity, and incidence of HIV infection in young women in South Africa: a cohort study*. *Lancet*. 2010;376(9734):41-8. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(10)60548-X. PubMed PMID: 20557928.

⁴ Fonck K, Leye E, Kidula N, Ndinya-Achola J, Temmerman M. *Increased risk of HIV in women experiencing physical partner violence in Nairobi, Kenya*. *AIDS and behavior*. 2005;9(3):335-9. doi: 10.1007/s10461-005-9007-0. PubMed PMID: 16133903.

Jewkes R, Dunkle K, Nduna M, Levin J, Jama N, Khuzwayo N, et al. *Factors associated with HIV sero-status in young rural South African women: connections between intimate partner violence and HIV*. *International journal of epidemiology*. 2006;35(6):1461-8. doi: 10.1093/ije/dyl218. PubMed PMID: 17008362.

⁵ Diop-Sidibe N, Campbell JC, Becker S. *Domestic violence against women in Egypt--wife beating and health outcomes*. *Social science & medicine*. 2006;62(5):1260-77. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2005.07.022. PubMed PMID: 16139404.

⁶ Ellsberg M, Jansen HA, Heise L, Watts CH, Garcia-Moreno C. *Health WHOM-cSoWs, et al. Intimate partner violence and women's physical and mental health in the WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence: an observational study*. *Lancet*. 2008;371(9619):1165-72. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(08)60522-X. PubMed PMID: 18395577

number of participants that matters as it is the depth of the information, which is pivotal to explicating the participants' experiences⁷.

Instrument

The study used an in-depth interview guide that followed a semi-structured format with interviews lasting between thirty-five (35) to fifty-seven (57) minutes. The guide sought to elicit the life stories of the intimate partnerships in which the violence occurred, describing the relationship and the events. The guide was intended to help identify the risk factors for intimate partner violence (IPV), the sources of emotional, economic or legal support sought by women, and the decision making process that women went through when deciding to seek support.

Participants

Eleven women between the ages of 27-44 years were purposively selected to participate in this study. These survivors volunteered to participate in the study after the nature and purpose of the study was explained to them by a senior staff member of the non-governmental organization Families in Action (FIA)⁸. All interviews with participants were scheduled by Families in Action and conducted within the organization's counselling room. Study participants were provided cash compensation of 20 USD.

Participants' ages ranged from 27 to 44 years. All the women interviewed had at least one child (range 1 to 5 children). Assessing the employment status of the participants, seven were employed, three were not working and one preferred not to state.

CLIENTS	AGE	EMPLOYMENT STATUS
Participant 1	44	Employed
Participant 2	27	Employed
Participant 3	34	No mention
Participant 4	33	Employed
Participant 5	31	Unemployed
Participant 6	40	Unemployed
Participant 7	33	Employed
Participant 8	36	Employed
Participant 9	34	Employed
Participant 10	36	Unemployed
Participant 11	28	Unemployed

The in-depth interviews were all conducted by a trained person hired by the research company. The interviewer was involved in a five-day course on IPV and conducting research in IPV (including ethics and protection of human subjects and familiarization of study instruments)

⁷ Padgett, D. (2008). *Qualitative Methods in Social Work Research, 2nd Edition*. Sage Publications, Inc.

⁸ Families In Action (FIA) is a Non Governmental Organsiation dedicated to the upliftment and healing of families and individuals through counselling and group support. FIA as part of its support services currently provides counselling and group support to female survivors of intimate partner violence

before field work commenced. The moderator was required to sign confidentiality agreements before engaging in this study.

Eligibility Criteria

The criteria for selection of participants for the in-depth interviews were females between the ages of 18-49 years, having ever experienced or at present experiencing any form of violence (physical, sexual, emotional or economic) from an intimate partner. Further, these participants would have received support services from any of the following partners: Coalition for Domestic Violence (CADV), Families in Action (FIA), Family Planning Association of Trinidad and Tobago (FPATT).

Ethical Considerations

Participation of the respondents was voluntary and all participants were advised that the topics to be discussed were sensitive. They were further advised that if the questions were upsetting or difficult at any moment they could stop the interview or skip a question. Respondents were also informed that they did not have to answer any question or to even participate in the study if they did not want to. If respondents at any time felt like stopping the interview to speak with a counsellor, they were referred to someone. Permission was sought from the respondents to record the interviews and an oral informed consent was obtained.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

The socioecological model⁹ (Heise, 1998) provides one perspective on the factors associated with intimate partner violence, from micro to macro level factors that are both associated with triggering the experience of violence and perpetuating the cycle of violence. Emerging from the interviews with the female survivors of IPV were several individual, relationship, family, community/societal, organizational/support services, and policy level factors associated with the experience and perpetuation of violence, including the following:

Individual

- Witnessing or experiencing violence as a child
- Fear of external perception
- Perpetrator's alcohol use
- Past history of abusive relationships
- Accepting attitudes toward violence
- Self blame
- Violence as a reaction to violence

Relationship

- Love & happiness
- Jealousy, infidelity, & mistrust
- Communication, power, & control
- Change in the dynamic of the relationship (moving, pregnancy, work)

Family

- The influence of relatives (perpetrator and survivor) in relationships (enablers, instigators, supporters, and perpetrators)

Community/Societal

- Social norms about reporting violence
- Support networks
- Weak community sanctions

Organizational/Support Services

- Shelters
- Health Institutions

Policy/Legal

- Negative experience with reporting to authorities
- Perceived inefficacy of reporting to authorities

⁹ Heise, L. (1998). Violence against women: An integrated, ecological framework. *Violence Against Women*, 4, 262-290.

INDIVIDUAL

Witnessing or Experiencing Violence as a Child

Examining both survivors and their partners' childhoods revealed at least one partner in each relationship either witnessed or experienced abuse as a child. Most participants indicated they grew up either witnessing their primary caregiver (usually their mothers or step mothers) being physically or emotionally abused by their male partners. Some participants recounted how they themselves have been physically or sexually abused by close male relatives.

"I grow up as an only child and my father was abusive to my mom so it wasn't a pleasant situation"

"I was back and forth between my grand mom and my mom because my mom was in an abusive relationship. My grandmother used to try to keep us away from that. So it was always back and forth" (Participant #4)

Assessing the history of those participants who did not overtly state that they witnessed or experienced abuse during their childhood revealed some interesting aspects of their family life; for instance, one participant mentioned her mother leaving her older siblings to discipline the younger children. Another mentioned that her father died when she was very young and her mother was very controlling where she operated based on the rule *"listen to what your mother says and do what she says."* (Participant #6)

It would therefore, appear that although there was no mention of witnessing abuse or experiencing it themselves they describe conditions of growing up in a transient or unstable household, including being disciplined by older siblings or experiencing frequent uprooting.

When participants made mention of their male partners' experiences witnessing or experiencing violence during childhood almost all of the males grew up in a household where the male head of the household was abusive towards his female partner, or in some circumstances, his mother being physically abusive towards him as a child.

"His father was like...the devil. I mean like, he was an abuser. He used to abuse his mother, he used to abuse them they went through a whole lot of things. (Participant #10)

"He said anytime his mother beat him, she would rip his clothes off and beat him until she tell him she will kill him." (Participant # 3)

Findings suggest that women tend to retaliate more violently towards their partner when both partners experience violence in the home as children. This occurred once these women felt that their partner was being violent towards them. In fact, these relationships saw at times the survivors initiating the acts of violence against their male partners.

"Yes I got another black eye after that and it had like slapping, at that point I use to retaliate now so it turned like a fight and ... it's like I sometimes would initiate the fight." (Participant #4)

In another interview, the participant explained *"... my father refuse to work, he would send my mother out on the streets to beg, she would beg from store to store, and all of us as we got older and old enough to go out there to make money he send us out too, you can't even touch a dollar*

even to buy a mint you have to give it to him and if you come home with less than what he was expecting he would beat the living day light out of everybody. Mommy is not allowed to talk to a man because she with some man he beating she for that too, he take away all the under wares it's a whole horror story, then he was abusive to me in particular and I was just was waiting to get out of there". (Participant #11)

Later in the interview she explained that her partner embarrassed her in front of her co-workers and her friends so she felt the need to defend her pride by physically fighting with him at the function.

"Somebody was talking about something and I was putting in my contribution and he jumped up in an aggressive manner and started (to) curse and thing, like dissing me like whatever was happening wasn't so, it was so, so, so, so, so, so, so ..., and he now launched a glass that he had in he (his) hand at me and I duck. Allyuh know me ain't taking that. In front of this guy, in front of everybody, all my co-workers, I not taking that so I went and I deal with it. Fight, kick and cuff... real violence." (Participant #11)

External Perceptions

External perceptions were reported as important throughout the interviews; survivors reported fear around what others would think about their situations and that external perception was also something important to the perpetrators. Survivors felt "embarrassed" about their experiences of violence, while perpetrators feared that survivors would portray them in negative light to friends and family outside of the household.

"And any time he behave bad I used to tell the brother. So the brother would talk to him and he find I..Oh you spoiling my character. You spoiling my good name. Why you telling people about me? I eh telling them you telling them what you doing. I is the demon inside of here." (Participant #3)

"Right, ahmm sometimes I meeting with my manager and she speaking to me and I tell him I have to call him back and he talking hard, quarrelling on the phone and she hearing and I feeling embarrassed. Right and I ahmm, I tell him he need to sort out heself and check me back." (Participant #2)

Alcohol Use

The consumption of alcohol as leading to violence was mentioned infrequently throughout the interviews. Interestingly, the violent acts that accompanied alcohol consumption also occurred when they were sober, indicating that alcohol may not be the cause of violence but rather the consumption of alcohol compounds the extremity of the violence.

One woman tells of her experience with her partner when she returned from an evening out with her friends. She says:

"I came home and went to sleep and like after five he came and like he was drinking and stuff and he was like he sorry or whatever and he wanted to come back and I was like its best we separate and this is for the best...he trip off. He end up grabbing my neck and he was strangling me and he was telling me that I could never leave him ... so I was like okay I'll never leave you, I'll never leave you... He went for the Chinese chopper and he was like come lie down next to him

and don't move and I was terrified all his eyes were bloodshot and he lie down there.”
(Participant #5)

Later in the interview the same woman recounts leaving the violent partner and not being able to cope with the termination of the relationship the partner will continue to act violently towards her. She says:

“He did not want to leave but eventually he end up leaving and then that’s when it started to happen. He would come back sometimes drunk and he would rape me again and you know all these things . . . and he would tell me he would kill me . . .” (Participant #5)

Another woman recounts her relationship and some of the different episodes of abuse. During one recall she says:

“I went shopping in town and then I met this fellow, it was all nice, and find out how many children I have, very supportive, everything was nice until we started living together and then you know . . . it just get out of hand, then I started blaming myself because he use to say it’s my fault and things like that, then this I does be asking my mother for money to buy milk or pampers or to cook or something, then it come now I got to eat the food before he reach home because he throwing away all the food and he make sure he burn up the children birth papers . . . I lost a baby, I spend about three days or four days in the hospital and when I come out he realize now I start to fight back and he hit me with a piece of wood in my belly” (Participant #9)

From the above recall it is seen that the perpetrator was already displaying extreme acts of violence. In another violent episode the same female recalled her partner cursing her after drinking alcohol and is almost stabbed in her sleep.

“So he drink and he drunk and he cussing and he carrying on. He (His) mother does say don’t have no time with he (him), by the time in the morning he (is) going (to) forgot about all he said and all what he do last night. So I gone in my bed and I dosed off a little bit and I just feel like a shadow over me and when I open my eye I see a knife coming down to stab me and I hold the knife and I pull it away.” (Female #9)

In the two examples, both females shared examples of experiencing intense physical violence when their partners were sober and drunk. In the description of the incidents it seems that when their partner was not under the influence of alcohol there will be a longer heated exchange of words before escalating to physical violence whereas under the influence of alcohol there was a much quicker progression to physical abuse and in some cases sexual abuse.

Past History of Abusive Relationships

As findings from each interview were compared a trend emerged of participants who indicate having serial relationships with abusive men. One female laments *“I just attracting these type of fellas.”* (Participant #2)

Another participant – Participant #11 – recalls about three different partners who all displayed different types of violence. For one of her partners she comments: *“He wasn’t violent in the physical, he was violent where food was concerned he wouldn’t buy meat and everything you know he would gamble out all he money”.*

In another relationship the same respondent talks about her partner attempting to kill her: *"I had somebody ... and we lived together for a year ... he was a very jealous person he actually try to kill me. We went head on into a bus on a motorbike."*

It is important to note that some of these women who previously experienced abuse in their past relationships, at any perceived moment that they think their current partner would act out violently they were more inclined to retaliate with violence. Female # 7 shares: *"My first boyfriend who became my husband tried that shit with me too. Because he also learned it from his father with his mother and I let him know that that eh happening to me. I used to beat him with the broomstick, whenever he tried to play rank on me."*

Acceptance of Violence

Another factor associated with violence is the general acceptance of violence as "normal." Females' experiences from childhood to adulthood shaped their views on violence and in some instances led to a tolerance of violence in the home. *"I come from...I would say basic home for Trinidad and Tobago because honestly domestic violence is quite a common thing as far as that is"* (Participant #8).

Reference to a violent home being a "basic home" speaks to the perceived pervasiveness and to some extent the acceptance of domestic violence within the society. This perspective may contribute to women staying within violent relationships as violence is seen as common place and to some extent even acceptable. *"I think...that what I was going through was not something that was strange or that other people did not go through"* (Participant #8).

Self Blame

Participants both blamed themselves and feared being blamed if they confided in others. Survivors viewed themselves and their behavior as triggers for violence and escalation of violence.

"When I told her, his sister in law, I figure that she would [say that] I just wanted it...I don't like no disagreement over my business and so on and so on...So I just let her know what was going on and say they would have talked to him. At least he would have listened to them and do something. Apparently I just make it worse."

I: Can you think of anything that may have changed in the relationship that would have led him to be sometimes physically violent? R: Me...ah learning not to blame myself, although, I know I told you that when you asked me before that...if I what would I think led to the violence and I tell you that it was me because I had changed, I wouldn't say it's my fault that he hit me or nothing like that but what had led to it." (Participant #2)

Violence as a Reaction to Violence

In many instances women were not submissive when their partners were violent towards them and reacted to violence with violence. In fact, in cases where the male partner was verbally abusive women would retaliate in a similar fashion *"I cuss his ass back, I was cussing a drunk man so it become like who most mad."* (Participant #9)

Although the retaliation or violent response by the female gave the partner a sense of the boundaries in the relationship as it pertained to violence, in many instances there was a redirection from one form of violence to another. For instance, males who may have attempted to hit their female partner and realized that it was not tolerated may have resorted to verbal/emotional violence as an alternative.

"I remember (it) is when he told me that he would hit me a slap. I can't tell you how I reacted because they would jail me. He realized I was a crazy woman and that I wasn't going to take it. So he never became physical with me. But the verbal abuse started to get more and more." (Participant #1)

Although born out of a need for self-defense, retaliation with violence leads the relationship into a tailspin of more violence.

"so I would retaliate... if he raise his voice at me I raising mine too. And he would say that I have no respect for him and what not and we would be going at it right through." (Participant #2)

"You trying to embarrass me or what, you see people passing and you playing you throwing the clothes on the floor. So I say is not that you ask me for? And ...he slap me I never forget it ... I end up pulling a scissors and stabbing him with it." (Participant #9)

RELATIONSHIP

Love & Happiness

Most participants referred to the beginning of their relationships as positive, happy times in their lives. Participants referred to love for their partners, acts of kindness, gifts, and gestures of caring. This "honeymoon" phase would often last several months or years, and was often disrupted by a major life event such as moving in together or a pregnancy.

"Like even if my foot, if my feet were swollen, he would rub my foot...he would do the washing, he would do everything, and rubbing my belly and...You know, he was really nice to me. And whenever he was on work, he would call me and ask me how I was feeling."

Cause like even when my sister, she was in an abusive relationship allowing the man to do all kinds of things and we sitting here talking about you can't let go because you love him; and when I asking her, why you love him, because I love him...It's not as if they can't, they don't want to because of love. And you can't tell me why you love...a whole year now I am trying to leave him...I am trying to leave and I keep going back...going back going back leaving going back because why I love you, right...(Participant #2)

"I think with him, like, like woman battering, it use to be like long intervals, it's like he's not bad, like what some people get, things good in the middle so it wasn't bad so I use to tolerate it." (Participant #4)

Jealousy, Infidelity, and Mistrust

Participant's as well as their partners' insecurities played a huge role in governing their behaviours within their relationships. These insecurities manifested many times as suspicions

and accusations of infidelity ultimately leading to violent situations. Survivors experienced violence when confronting their partners about infidelity, and experienced violence after being accused of infidelity themselves.

"...as I say he had a real jealousy issue ... I had to work late because in those days we had to work overtime a lot. And so when he outside waiting for me, he always accused me of being inside with the boss" (Female #7).

Communication, Power, & Control

Participant responses suggested that resulting breakdowns in communication resulting from jealousy and mistrust resulted in the perpetrator's need to exert power and control, resulting in escalation of violence. In many situations partners engaged in heated exchanges that then led to physical harm, especially to the women in the relationship.

"Well we quarrelling..., we have our own issues when he want to go out to party with people who do not have no respect for our relationship and I... told him if you do decide to ... associate yourself with people who cares not about me, disrespect me and you rushing to lime (hang out) with these very same people...I give him an ultimatum, I think that's what caught him, realizing you don't give an ultimatum and we started quarrelling and fighting and he cuff me ... he had a ring on his hand and that's what give me the mark, from that time I just see the blood." (Participant #12)

Deciding to ignore a partner engaged in an argument also escalates violence. *"I put the clothes on top of the double decker and he still quarrelling, quarrelling and I not taking him on. I just feel somebody cuff me behind my head and with that I went back and hit the bar on the double decker and burst my head...I got four stitches." (Participant #3)*

For another woman her leaving her child and visiting a neighbour's home to view her favourite television show triggered a violent episode. *"Don't go-stay. I said but she is sleeping. He say don't go; stay here (at home)-why you going? I say I am going watch my picture (television show). He insist that I should stay home. So I just leave and lock the door. So when I go and come back the door was locked so I pound down the door. Oh, you are waking up the neighbours. So I keep pounding down the door. You don't want me to wake the neighbours, open it. So when he did open it now, I realize that he was angry so I stayed away from the door waiting for him to move to go inside. I stayed a while there. As I go inside now I just only feel this person grab me and give me a cuff in my mouth. So it started to bleed." (Participant #3)*

Wrapped up in the lack of effective communication and conflict resolution in relationships was the need for male partners to exert to control and maintain power. Participant responses suggested that when they gave partners an ultimatum, ignored them while quarrelling, or expressed defiance, the male partner would perceive a loss of power and control in the relationship, resulting in escalation to physical violence.

The use of mobile phones, access to the internet and social media have all become commonplace and has allowed for new means of communication between persons. These new means to communicate have also placed an additional mechanism to control or monitor who partners communicate with. Both men and women are seen using the technology for this purpose. For instance, male partners in attempting to prove their suspicions of infidelity would

seek evidence of such from their partners' cell phones or on their social media sites such as Facebook.

One example showing the extremities of insecurity, the male partner would attempt to screen all the incoming phone calls to the female's phone. The survivor shared:

"there was this occasion where, my phone would be on the table and if it rings, he would grab my phone before I notice who it is, to see who calling me....them kinda thing...A night my phone was ringing and he grabbed it and I told him that he can't keep on coming around me with this stupidity and I grabbed back my phone and he bent back my hand and took the phone out of my hand." (Participant #2)

"I think he went through my laptop and saw the pictures and I was sleeping. So when he came he dragged me from my hair from the bedroom and dragged me outside and he's like holding me down and he's like "yuh lying, yuh lying, what is it yuh lying for? Trip off on me like a crazy person and then ... he went for a Chinese chopper and ... and he was threatening to chop off my finger unless I tell the truth ... and it was the worst, the worst experience I've had in my life. And I was just there trembling and he tortured me for no reason cause even if he knew he wasn't going to do that, that was torture and from since then I watching him like he's crazy, something is wrong with him." (Participant #5)

Conversely, women who confronted their male partners of infidelity led to their male partners becoming enraged responding verbally and in some instances physically violent towards them. *"we use to have a lot of incidents with females, that one in particular, but there use to have others in general, so it use to have a lot of texting and phone calls and female issues. A time we had an argument about the females and then he end up hitting me in my eye and that's when I get a black eye."* (Participant #4)

Change in the dynamic of the relationship

Moving in together

Participants reported violence first occurring often within a few weeks or months of living together. *"I think he had talked to his dad about me being pregnant and since he had to come down to by me every day, they saw that the daily driving was taking a toll, his family told him to bring me to move in with them. We didn't really have any conflicts. As young people we tried to work things out. Things started happening one drop at a time."* (Participant #1)

Pregnancy

The occurrence of the first episodes of violence were often during pregnancy or soon after the birth of their child. It seems that as changes to the dynamic of the relationship such as, cohabiting and pregnancy occurs, male partners respond negatively. Incidents of physical violence ranged from being kicked to being punched. One woman recounts, *"He kicked me off the bed on my belly when I was pregnant"* while another tells of them *"renting and my child had been born so we had a new born baby and that was the first time he hit me."* (Participant #7)

When relationships are drifting apart, in some cases due to a pregnancy, emotional abuse can be introduced into the relationship. A clear example of this situation was within the interview with Participant #2, When asked how often violence would happen, Participant #2 responded with

"... after the baby it was often, like every five days, two weeks . . . it would not always be physical but would be some sort of thing . . . until we living in the same house and we just not speaking anymore."

Work

Stress at work and not being able to properly manage that stress was related with violence at home. *"Well what we used to quarrel about, his workmen, he used to have problems with his workmen..."* (Participant #4) In at least one case, the participant linked the perpetrator's experience of witnessing violence at work with the escalation of violence at home. *It got more intense and more intense. Not everyone can separate. And I think with work being heavy that triggered his temper. Every time he was verbal with me I would respond. Once he came home and grabbed my son. He said "if you ever try to beat me up" and I had to check him "Hello! Hello! Hello!" He had seen a crime that day where a son had beat up a father. The crimes kept getting more and more heinous and he was bringing that home with him every day.*" (Participant #1)

Additionally, several participants mentioned their partners held positions of power, such as soldiers or policemen.

"I think the violence was related to what he was starting to see in the CSU. Before that he was in CID and before that just a sentry, so the crimes he saw were becoming increasingly violent. He was moving up the ladder.

"I found out because I know he was a soldier. So then ahmm, so yeah...it had this occasion where he... I was supposed to...he find like if he work 48 on-24 off...he come off of 48 I should be home cuz we was living together and right sometimes that would not happen and it will cause lil argument, lil pulling and tugging here and there." (Participant #2)

FAMILY

The influence of relatives (perpetrator and survivor) in relationships

In reference to the role or degree of involvement of parents in relationships, many women described a negative association, especially regarding the mother-in-law. Participants' descriptions of their parents or partner's parental involvement and/or influence was classified as either; 1) Enablers; 2) Instigators; 3) Supporters; 4.) Perpetrators

Enablers are parents who would observe women being in an abusive relationship and do not say anything or who would minimize the violent act and advise the survivor to stay in the relationship. One participant indicated that during her first pregnancy her partner started to become distant in the relationship and this escalated into arguments and then violence. She spoke with her mother-in-law about the situation and her mother-in-law's advice was *"... bear with him and wait for him he's probably just afraid and what not"* (Participant #8).

Instigators are those who directly intervene in the relationship and create scenarios for violence to occur. One woman spoke of her mother-in-law giving her son alcohol so that he could be violent towards her in a bid to end the relationship. *"She (her partner's mother) push, push, push and she do everything for us to separate, she start buying rum for him, so he have the rum and when he drink he going mad."* (Participant #11)

Another parent harped on his son's insecurities by questioning the paternity of an unborn child when she was pregnant. *"His father...started pushing things in his mind. When I was pregnant, if he sure the child is his own, all that kinda thing. And start putting doubt in him (her partner)...he jacked me up and ... he was like, 'where you went today, meh father tell me he see you.' I was like I went by mummy and them and whatever and he want me to give him a whole list and I was like for what."* (Participant #10)

Supporters are those who try to help the survivor. In several cases, the survivor's mother or sister became aware of the violence and attempted to support the survivor, even though they weren't always sure of the best course of action. *"My mother was like ahmm.... She didn't know what to say cause she eh know what to do but she spoke to someone else who was a senior in the service and they was like well, no that not supposed to happen..."* (Participant #10)

Perpetrators are those who also exert violence against the survivor. Only one participant reported a family member directly participating in the violence. *"When the father start making him take things away and I realize that I couldn't function comfortable... cause they came and they took the doors of the house too...the neighbours who saw they were like, this man mad and he helping he son be mad. He (her partner) was still living there, but he could have gone and stay by them (his parents)...At the point in time my parents were not in the country so I had nowhere to go. My kids and I we slept in the savannah in Arima for three nights because I didn't used to talk to people."* (Participant #10)

COMMUNITY & SOCIETAL

Social Norms about Reporting Violence

Beliefs about how to manage issues in a relationship dictate to a large extent how women respond to IPV. Emerging from the interviews was a strong sense that IPV should be an issue resolved between the two partners with minimal interference from a third party.

"I think two people should sort out their differences without involving a third party. If we living together and can't talk about our disagreements then what is the point." (Participant #1)

"I used to talk to my sisters and them often but not to have anybody in your business. What was between husband and wife was to stay between husband and wife." (Participant #8)

Support Networks

First time occurrences of IPV were rarely mentioned in their entirety to either formal support agencies/networks (e.g. police, hotlines, counsellors, organisations) or social networks (e.g. family members, friends or co-workers). However, survivors would sometimes test the waters within their social networks, revealing a part of their experience. *"Well I started to complained to like one or two of my friends, yes, and even at that time it wasn't the whole truth I use to water down the story."* (Participant #4)

In many instances, the network of family and friends of these female survivors was very small, with most of the women stating that they did not have many friends or family members whom they were close to. The lack of any meaningful or close friendships in some cases were deliberate where women felt embarrassed of their situations and therefore preferred not to

have to explain their situation to others. In other scenarios, their male partners isolated the women by choosing rural areas to live or controlling who they could invite into the home leading to very limited social network. In other instances, even after the relationship ended their partner's action would force them to limit interaction with family and friends. *"I moved away from my mother... I had to move away ... I does feel so bad that this man does come all hours of the night, around the house and cursing and call out, I going to kill your mother so and so and my mother listening to these things I feel hurt, I have my siblings in there and they watching...me because I'm the eldest. So I move away I went up in the bush to live, in my place."* (Participant # 11)

Friends and family sometimes act as the first line of defence against violent partners where they would physically intervene to protect the woman from violence. *"I had like a friend of mine, a childhood friend of mine was living right next door, had to be, come and part us a lot and this one instance that she came over, he actually had a boulder. And he ... had that in his hand to, to throw at me. And she came in then and she said, 'Are you a mad man?' and she said, 'If you know you can't live with her, you all can't get along, leave'."* (Participant #7)

Other friends and family members provide support by encouraging the survivors to leave the situation, "the friends that knew basically hated his guts or whatever and they wanted me to get out of it" (Participant #5) and in many instances they are the ones who refer the survivors to support services, *"my aunt brought me here (Families in Action) and that's when I started talking to people and telling them he raping me all the time and I used to feel basically that he would kill me and she brought me here."* (Participant #5)

Weak Community Sanctions

Participant responses suggested a prevailing social norm that IPV was a matter to be resolved between a couple. This norm is tied closely with both survivor and perpetrator fear of external perceptions about themselves and their relationship. *"Well my co-workers saw what was going on because my co-workers was there and they were afraid to get involved. I don't know for what reason my very close friends...one point in time I started thinking all you head straight and nothing wrong with what he was doing? They would tell me -no girl, well you know how things does be, don't worry that's your husband."* (Participant #11)

Survivors, even after mustering the strength to confide in someone about their situation, are then faced with the burden to endure the situation rather than seek support or the partner face sanctions by the community. *"Eventually, when I did speak to the friend about his way, the friend explained to me that, it's just how he is and to try and just go with it... that's how he is. So I think that is what I was trying to do. Just allow him to be him, not realising that going along with his behaviour I was losing who I was."* (Participant #7)

ORGANIZATIONS/SUPPORT SERVICES

Shelters

Some of the survivors linked to shelters experienced a restrictive environment that created difficulty in maintaining their distance from their abuser. Those with older male children, those who were repeat survivors, or those with late night work hours found shelter services difficult to use.

“Because I mean, alright forget me, maybe it might have someone who was in worse position than I was in and they went to a shelter the first time, then they left, one of the things that people don’t like about them is that ahmm, you cannot enter their premises after six o’clock... there was a girl who was working security, so she had it a bit hard so most of the nights she would spend on the outside then come in whenever she could reach back in. (Participant #6).

“All shelters allow you to bring your children with you, but the fact that my boys are teens most shelters don’t allow it.” (Participant #7)

Health Institutions

While several participants mentioned being hospitalized or needing to seek medical services as a result of IPV, none mentioned hospitals or other health institutions as referral points to support services. None of the participants mentioned reporting IPV to a healthcare provider.

POLICY AND LEGAL SERVICES

Negative experience with Police

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the police are less than supportive to women who experience violence in relationships. Findings from the in-depth interviews support this anecdotal account as in several instances survivors reported the incidents to the police, but nothing happened, and this could be that the abusive partner was also a member of the protective service.

According to Participant #10, because her partner was a member of the protective service, his peers protected him by not recording her reports in the police station’s diary which according to legal precedent a police officer is obligated to do. Participant #10 said *“I called the police they came to the house, they told me the next day to come to the station, when I went to the station, because they know that he is an Officer, they did not write it in the diary, and they put it in a manila folder And the countless occasions and things that happened after that, it was about twelve or thirteen. They put it in a manila folder and they never put it in the diary. Never.”*

In addition to supporting their peers (despite the possibility that their peers may be abusers), police officers were noted by survivors as having inappropriate responses in times of violent confrontations. *“...he snatch my handbag and mash up my phone and I get two slaps it so happen that when I turn two police came on the scene because they were hearing the argument and with that he just leave and go home. The officer was like so what the argument was about? Well I say he was accusing me of having someone else, with a nice thing like you, (he said) take my phone number after you done deal with your situation you could call me for find a place for you. I throw away the number I didn’t want problems on top of problems (Participant #9)*

Legal Process

Police officers were not the only component of the legal faculty that came under fire by the survivors. Participants shared experiences with the inefficiencies of the legal system which hampers the legal recourse for some survivors.

“Legal aid would not listen. When I went to the magistrate the files were not there, I think he had someone pulling out my files in the court. I went to legal aid 8 times. I went before the magistrate 3 times. 2 times my file went missing. I was frustrated and needed to let someone know what was going on. Honestly I did not know what was going on and needed help. I was at

the justice of the peace 3 times a week for 6 months, to the point that the security guards would say – oh you come to work again. I would sit there from 8am to 4 pm waiting to be seen if I had to” (Participant #1)

“So I still have to see him and deal with him, go to court and deal (with it). Even with the court system how he was able to...go to the court although I had a restraining order against him and file for custody of the children to put me through this again. In the courts they don’t look back at files and notes to know that I had a restraining order against him and all these things” (Participant #8)

MOTIVATION TO SEEK SUPPORT

The principal factors that seemed to motivate women to seek support were: 1) protection of children; (2) increased severity/humiliation with abuse; and (3) increased awareness of options/access to support and resources. In nearly all cases the abuse occurred over many years, with support services being sought only after violence had escalated to a level where it threatened the life of the survivor or her children.

Protecting Children

The interviews revealed that many survivors would stay in abusive situations as they felt a greater harm in dissolving the family unit than in removing children the situation of violence.

“I have my daughter and of course I wanted her with a perfect family (be)cause I didn’t have that as a child and (I) am certain things that went on with me in terms of rape and all these things I didn’t want for her. So for me the best option was to be at home with mommy and daddy.” (Participant #12)

“My kids, they are my life...even when I was thinking you see if I left the home nah, oh gosh these children so attached to this man, is like oh gosh I going to yank him out, yank them out of he (his) life if I leave.” Sometimes he would be fighting with me and when blows land you would make noise. (The) children in the next room (so) I’ll be like, suck it up ... take it, no noise, no crying, no bawling, no nothing. When the children wake up the next morning, he normal, let them go to school, without a worry you know and that’s the things I would do.” (Participant #10)

This drive or need to preserve the family unit, however, became secondary in most instances when women perceived that their children’s lives or well-being was being threatened by their partner’s behaviour. It is at this point that women were greatly motivated to seek support and/or leave the relationship. *“So it had a mattress on the ground ... he tripped her causing her to fall to the mattress, pulled down her pants and underwear and burnt her (with a hot pot cover). When I went to report it they (the police) can’t arrest him...And that’s why this move, that was supposed to be done, then waited two years because the same things that they were telling me then is the same things that they would tell me now. Right but the difference is that I just decided it has to stop.” (Participant #7)*

Another survivor shared an experience where her four year old son on observing his mother’s swollen face *“ears was busted, thing was oozing out my head”* said: *“Daddy do that? ...Mummy*

come let we got Trincity Mall... I not going and play no game in the arcade you know mummy... We going to the gun store so I could blood (shoot) him.” (Participant #10)

Increased Severity & Humiliation over Time

In instances where survivors felt that the violence had shifted to an “unbearable” level, particularly when women felt that their lives were threatened, support services were sought.

“he would come to talk at my work and he begging my boss to please I just want to talk to her and next thing bam! Next thing you see a blade in the car and a bottle of thing in he hand, yeah he coming to kill me.” (Participant #11)

“When I had decided to seek support is was because it really had reached a point... a point where I realize that it could end up in death cause you always hear on the news you know is killed you know, and I kept picturing myself you know coming across the news and (people saying you) ain’t hear ...RS died.” (Participant #12)

“he stabbed me, he cut me all over my body and thing...” (Participant #10)

The intensity of violence in many of the relationships whether physical, verbal/emotional and sexual, increased over time, leading women to: 1) become acutely aware that they were in an abusive relationship and 2) the hope of their partner changing was a fantasy that was not going to become a reality. Upon this realisation many women sought to seek support and/or leave the relationship.

“but then he got comfortable ... it started off little by little again and then the same cycle of you doing this. I’m not going to take it, I forgive you, yes, but I’m not going to take it. I know that I’m not going to take it all the time...The same thing started back and then I just decided you know what, nah (no more)...I came home and ... he wanted to... be intimate, but I told him the place is hot ... and he got so angry ... he started to beat me and he started to say things that I realized, no matter what you do no matter how you think he would not change the things he say...let me know that he wouldn’t change.” (Participant #12)

Infidelity and increasing humiliation as a result of the partner’s inability to change behavior was another determining factor for women to leave a relationship in which they were experiencing IPV as well as to seek support.

“...eventually it reached to a point where I just needed to leave, he was being disrespectful, he was still with the girl, (even though) we went counselling.” (Participant #8)

“On the phone arguing and stuff so then he told me she got pregnant and I told him you know that’s it.” (Participant #5)

“I know it was about besides being fed up ... he has a friend which is a female and she was attending school. She was a student and I think she ran away from home or something like that, but the last person they saw her with was with my husband. And ... the parents were blaming my husband for being sexually involved with their daughter...I didn’t want to believe that he wasn’t with the girl. I was more or less believing he was with her so I just kept that in my head and the next day I left.” (Participant #6)

Increased awareness of options/access to support and resources;

Survivors appeared to be more likely to be motivated to seek out support services through their interactions with persons in their networks such as family, friends, co-workers and neighbours rather than independently researching support services on their own. Participants became aware of support services largely through their existing social networks.

“One of the ladies in the village knew what was going on. She didn’t want me to speak to anyone in the area so she gave me the information for Families in Action.” (Participant #1)

“Well basically my sister was telling me about it...she wanted...felt like she needed someone to talk to and she found a group where she could relate to other women in the same situation. And she advised me to come along because she thinks that I suppress my emotions. So I just came along to see what the group was all about and just to basically relate as well.” (Participant #2)

The telephone directory which has the hotline numbers to the front was also a resource mentioned that aided in the awareness of support services. *“cause the phonebook to the front of it always has those hotline numbers and stuff. So yes from there, I called them and well, I didn’t actually know that there was a place that you could stay but when them they spoke to me and I packed my clothes and when I got there they took me to the shelter.” (Participant # 6)*

One participant reported accessing resources through social media. *“Facebook one of the founders of the group ‘A Woman’s Worth,’ she and I are friends and she’s like hear what I putting you on. Whatever woman you know we will try to help them.” (Participant #10)*

It can be noted that in most cases, the first instance of a survivor seeking support occurred several years after initiation of violence, however, survivors would often briefly leave the home after a particularly violent incident, only to return several days later.

“I was so angry in the morning I end up dressing for work and then I carried up my daughter by my mom. I didn’t tell her anything. So when I come home in the evening, I went and picked up my daughter and come back down. Well he started apologizing again and tell me he so sorry and it would not happen again. And I not listening to him because I still angry. He trying to be loveydovey. He trying to all sorts of things and I still eh paying him no mind. I was real...mih mouth real hurting mih so I was mad. And well he apologized.” (Participant #3)

“Well the end result was that we got separated for awhile right and he was apologizing and telling me was sorry and he want me and he to get back together.” (Participant #4)

EXPERIENCES SEEKING SUPPORT SERVICES

Generally, women felt optimistic and empowered after having sought and used various support services. Words such as, strong, confident, independent, enlightened, peace, courage, and hopeful were used to describe their state after seeking support. In contrast, to words such as helpless, lonely, insecure, depressed, frightened and lost were more frequently used to describe their state prior to seeking support. Accounts of women’s experiences with the shelters, support and counselling groups, hotline and police varied where some women had great experiences while others felt that they were being taken advantage of even from these institutions.

Shelters

The shelters for women in violent relationships appears to work on some level providing refuge for these survivors wishing to escape from their situation with their partners. The shelters are not advertised and therefore the addresses of these places are quite secretive which provides an added source of security to the women housed there.

"... the phonebook to the front of it always has those hotline numbers and stuff. So yes from there, I called them and well, I didn't actually know that there was a place that you could stay but when they spoke to me and I packed my clothes and when I got there they took me to the shelter.... I actually liked it (the shelter)...because it was peaceful and quiet" (Participant #6).

As effective as the shelters appear to be as a place of refuge, other issues were raised by the women interviewed. Women mentioned that within a particular shelter no one is allowed to enter or leave the premises after six in the evening. *"There was a girl who was working security, so she had it a bit hard so most of the nights she would spend on the outside then come in whenever she could reach back in. I know that was a problem for the staff there cause they were talking a little bit about it."* (Participant #6)

Another issue raised was the restricted access to support services once you have left a shelter and then wished to return. *"And to know that they sent me back at the same shelter because even once I saw a councillor whilst I was there this last time she told me, first thing she told me she say you know they normally don't give you a second chance back in at the shelter...(the councillor) tell me that I cannot get any services that you all (they) have...and they really want to go through with it a second time they would be in real crap because, just because of what they want to put you through because you left before. So its punitive, it's like you knew who I was and you knew about me and yet still take me back in to tell me that I cannot get any services that you all have."* (Participant #6)

One participant revealed that at least one shelter did not allow women with adolescent male children. *"All shelters allow you to bring your children with you, but the fact that my boys are teens most shelters don't allow it."* (Participant #7)

Additionally, some shelters have a specific time span persons could reside at the establishment which means that when this time is up they are required to leave the shelter and may return to the situation that they were trying to distance themselves from. *"One called me and told me why she left because she and all had a time span."* (Participant #6)

Support/Counselling Groups (Families in Action, Elder's and Associates, Rape Crisis Centre, Akilah)

Women expressed apprehension in accessing support groups or counselling as they felt that their experiences were unique to them and that they may be judged by others within the group. Interestingly, one-on-one counseling sessions made some feel uneasy. Survivors who may have been initially apprehensive to access support groups or counselling after joining a support group often lost most of these anxieties. Survivors perceived such groups as beneficial because others provided comfort and acknowledgement that others were going through a similar situation. *"when I was receiving counselling, I still wasn't comfortable ...the support group ... when I came and I realized there are other people out there, people who might be worse than me, I feel a little more freed, freer (to) give my opinion and so on."* (Participant #3)

However, group counseling can also be upsetting to women who experience violence. *"...because personally I don't like to...I don't like advantage and stuff and listening to these ladies and their stories, I just didn't wanted to come."* (Participant #2)

After accessing the support service survivors expressed the opinion that were more willing and comfortable in sharing their experiences and talking about the violence that they experienced. *"...hearing people's problems and so on make me open up more about mine. Plus it was a wakeup call for me you could say. I get more, more, at least I could talk a little, normally like with you questioning me I would not have turned up...before, I don't open up to people."* (Participant #3)

The support groups and counselling were seen as beneficial to the women as they provided them with a professional who was impartial and allowed the woman to work through her feelings without fear of being judged. *"I was glad to like have someone neutral I can talk to it wasn't like bias or judge full (judgmental)."* (Participant #4)

Further, these sessions were seen as providing the women with tools that enhanced their decision making ability, confidence and communication skills at home. *"I started to feel like better and like I feel more confident in the decisions I made. Because after some time I use to always be thinking about my son school and stuff like that. He (the counsellor) had explained to me that that was normal... and after that they helped me to make the right decision I think I have a few more years but its good."* (Participant #4)

Sessions also help build communication skills that can be used within the relationship. *"I didn't used to take him on at all but now that I am coming to the support group now, they showed me a way that I talk to him and let him know how I feel and so on. So you know, try and see if he would stop. It help a lot. The support group help a lot especially for me opening up. It help me a lot, a lot, a lot."* (Participant #3)

Support groups allowed participants to gain control over emotions and are part of the healing process. *"I would say to get my emotions in a place, to get me more comfortable with me again, which is yeah, that's actually it. So, because when an abusive relationship takes from you, it changes you."* (Participant #3)

Although most stories of the support groups and counselling were positive there were occasions where women felt rushed out. *"looked at me and she was like, 'You've been coming here for a year so when you think you will be strong enough to not come back?'"* (Participant #8)

Tying back to fear of external perception, stigmatization of seeking support services appears to act as a barrier. Some survivors were concerned about their social networks becoming aware of what they perceived to be personal problems. *"...just make it look like an ordinary place. Because for instance, when people hear about Families in Action, you know what Families in Action is about. So they hear me going Families in Action, (and) the say oh! she has problems."*(Participant #3)

Hot Line (800-SAVE)

For women seeking support, the hotline, which is toll free, appears to be effective as a gateway to these support services. Through the hotline, women were able to access the services of shelters, obtain information as to which legal services to contact and counselling services.

“I found out about the hotline in here (Families in Action) because after we broke up he kept coming at me and coming at my house and threatening me, so I had to take action... I phoned and I got advice on what to do so and I had to file custody for my son and I got through.”(Participant #4)

“Yeah, cause the phonebook to the front of it always has those hotline numbers and stuff. So yes from there, I called them and well, I didn’t actually know that there was a place that you could stay but when they spoke to me I packed my clothes and when I got there they took me to the shelter.” (Participant #6)

“And since the number is toll free, even with zero dollars on my phone I can call 24 hrs. I just call to find out when code 33 is working and call her then.” (Participant #1)

“I think you can advertise the hotline, have little workshops and pamphlets because I didn’t know that you all offered all of that, you know let everyone as fortunate as me to have someone who knows about the similar options.” (Participant #4)

Law Enforcement (Police and Courts)

While not all participants had contact with law enforcement, all of those who did reported a negative experience. Law enforcement agencies, in particular the police service, appeared to fail the female survivors of IPV where the perpetrator was neither apprehended nor charged for the act committed. In several instances, the perpetrator belonged to the police service or uniformed population, which may have influenced the lack of follow-up for the case. None of the survivors reported successful prosecutions of their cases. *“When I called the police they came to the house, they told me the next day to come to the station, when I went to the station, because they know that he is an officer, they did not write it in the diary, they put it in a manila folder...And the countless occasions and things that happened after that maybe it was about twelve or thirteen. They put it in a manila folder and they never put it in the diary. Never.” (Participant #10)*

Perpetrators may also be able to use their own means to subvert the cases against him. *“We separated and I was going through court and he started to let his powers known in court. He knows powerful people. I felt closeted. There was no-one to help. He was a sergeant so he knew people. Nobody would listen to me. I called so many times and no one would really listen... Legal aid would not listen. When I went to the magistrate the files were not there, I think he had someone pulling out my files in the court. I went to legal aid 8 times. I went before the magistrate 3 times, 2 times my file went missing. I was frustrated and needed to let someone know what was going on. Honestly I did not know what was going on and needed help. I was at the justice of the peace 3 times a week for 6 months, to the point that the security guards would say – ‘oh you come to work again’. I would sit there from 8am to 4 pm waiting to be seen if I had to.” (Participant #1)*

DISCUSSION

Risk Factors & Experience of Violence

Childhood history of abuse and childhood witnessing of IPV are well-documented as risk factors for both IPV victimization and perpetration^{10,11} (Renner & Slack 2006; Roberts, Gilman, Fitzmaurice, Decker, and Koenen 2010). In the experiences of the participants, family members were often aware to varying degrees of the violence occurring. While survivor parents and siblings were sometimes supportive, perpetrator parents and siblings were often enablers of violence, particularly the mothers-in-law. Interestingly, this phenomenon has also been explored in the context of India, where actual perpetration of violence by mothers-in-law has been linked to older women with a history of control under men, regaining power by exerting violence against their daughters-in-law¹² (Fernandez 1997). While none of the participants reported experiencing violence from their in-laws, the in-laws may have been trying to protect their family image and in a sense their power within their communities, by enabling the violence to continue.

Reactions to Violence

Evident in all the interviews of the survivors was the cycle of abuse as developed by Lenore E. Walker (1980) which explains patterns of behaviour in an abusive relationship¹³. Several women described retaliating to their experience of violence with violence. However, both those who fought back and those who tried to leave saw a continuation or escalation of violence. Current literature suggest that avoidant, angry, or aggressive behavior on part of the survivor can influence the odds of re-victimization¹⁴ (Kuijpers, Knapp, & Winkel 2012). This may explain in part why survivors try to placate their perpetrators rather than seek a means to leave the relationship or support services.

In the case of those who did not react to violence, several mentioned that it was normal or expected. The normalization of violence is tied closely with survivor self-blame^{15,16} (Suruchi & Morgan 2010; Hlavka 2014). Survivors were often told by perpetrators that they were to blame for violence and survivors often agreed. Research has shown that survivors who retaliate with violence both receive lower levels of support and experience more self-blame than women who have not experienced violence¹⁷ (Barnett, Martinez, & Keyson 1996).

In nearly all cases the abuse continued for years and only ended when the survivor felt mortal danger to herself or her children. Some literature suggests that survivors become accustomed

¹⁰ Renner LM, Slack KS Child Abuse Negl. 2006 Jun; 30(6):599-617.

¹¹ Witness of intimate partner violence in childhood and perpetration of intimate partner violence in adulthood.

Roberts AL, Gilman SE, Fitzmaurice G, Decker MR, Koenen KC Epidemiology. 2010 Nov; 21(6):809-18.

¹² Fernandez, Marilyn. "Domestic violence by extended family members in India Interplay of gender and generation." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 12.3 (1997): 433-455.

¹³ Walker, Lenore E. *The battered woman*. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.

¹⁴ Kuijpers, Karlijn F., Leontien M. van der Knaap, and Frans Willem Winkel. "Risk of revictimization of intimate partner violence: The role of attachment, anger and violent behavior of the victim." *Journal of Family Violence* 27.1 (2012): 33-44. <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10896-011-9399-8/fulltext.html>

¹⁵ Thapar-Björkert, Suruchi, and Karen J. Morgan. "'But sometimes I think... they put themselves in the situation': Exploring blame and responsibility in interpersonal violence." *Violence against women* 16.1 (2010): 32-59.

¹⁶ Hlavka, Heather R. "Normalizing Sexual Violence Young Women Account for Harassment and Abuse." *Gender & Society* (2014): 0891243214526468.

¹⁷ Barnett, Ola W., Tomas E. Martinez, and Mae Keyson. "The relationship between violence, social support, and self-blame in battered women." *Journal of interpersonal violence* 11.2 (1996): 221-233.

to severe but non life-threatening abuse because in a sense they know what pattern to expect and follow the course of the pattern in order to survive. However, when mortal danger is introduced, the fear of the unknown and of death becomes a trigger for seeking help¹⁸.

Reporting Violence

Interestingly while many participants mentioned at first that they had told no one about their experiences of violence, through the course of the interview it would be revealed that a friend or family member had come to know some of the information or had been told parts of the survivor's story. This partial response has been documented by Dunham & Senn (2000) in which severity of abuse, more accepting attitudes toward physical abuse, and delayed disclosure correlated to the likelihood of a survivor minimizing her situation when disclosing violence to others¹⁹. Survivors would sometimes "test the water" to gauge a friend or family member's response to the report of violence. Sometimes friends or family would try to help, while other times they would attempt to normalize the violence or dismiss it altogether. However, few were equipped to be able to provide the survivor with linkages to support services, with the exception of one survivor's sister who linked the participant with her own support group. While campaigns such as the "Bell Bijao" campaign have attempted to engage these "bystanders" and community members to decrease community tolerance for violence, participant responses from this study suggest that more campaigns targeting the friends and family of survivors as potential referral agents could be even more effective in linking survivors with support services²⁰ (Heise 2011).

CONCLUSIONS

Findings from the interviews with the female survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) suggest that there are individual, relationship, community, institutional, and political factors that are associated with violence. Individual factors associated with IPV included witnessing or experiencing violence in the home as a child. The influence of parents was also a key individual factor associated with IPV as the parents of the female survivors or the parents of the perpetrators of violence were noted as enablers or instigators of the abuse in the relationship. Many of the interviewees spoke about their past history of abusive relationships, commenting that they seem to attract violent partners.

Closely tied to the history of abusive relationships, is the accepting attitudes toward violence, both at the individual and community levels. The childhood to adulthood experience of violence has led to the almost normalization of abuse within relationships. However, many female survivors retaliated as a form of protection of themselves.

¹⁸ Dichter, Melissa E., and Richard J. Gelles. "Women's perceptions of safety and risk following police intervention for intimate partner violence." *Violence against women* 18.1 (2012): 44-63.
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Melissa_Dichter2/publication/221697140_Women's_perceptions_of_safety_and_risk_following_police_intervention_for_intimate_partner_violence/links/0046353c55518242e2000000.pdf

¹⁹ Dunham, Katherine, and Charlene Y. Senn. "Minimizing Negative Experiences Women's Disclosure of Partner Abuse." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 15.3 (2000): 251-261.

²⁰ Heise, Lori. "What works to prevent partner violence? An evidence overview." (2011).

In addition to individual factors, relationship factors are associated with IPV. Jealousy and perceived infidelity served as instigators to escalating situations of violence. Insecurities played a major role in how relationships were managed and the ensuing abuse was not limited to physical but included verbal and psychological abuse (such as controlling behaviours). The expression of negative emotions was also a key relationship factor. Findings showed that the first violent episode often took place soon after cohabitation or during pregnancy. It seems that cohabiting and pregnancy act as stressors in the relationship leading to negative responses. A final relationship factor found in this study, was the lack of effective communication and conflict resolution skills. Some female survivors, mentioned that in times of disagreement, the inability to navigate the difference of opinions led to verbal abuse which escalated into physical harm especially to the female. It further seems that the act of physical harm was used as a strategy by the partner to assert their dominance and control.

Within the interviews, emerging factors that are harboured by the community and society include the role of social networks. Women involved in violent relationships in this study, reported only having a small network of friends and families. This small network was either deliberate as their male partners forced the alienation/ostracism of friends and family or it was simply the survivor's reality (having few friends and family). The women often spoke about being silent in the first instances of violence because they felt ashamed and/or they felt that the matter was more personal. When situations escalated and friends and families find out about the situation it was oftentimes this social network who acted as a first line defence against the violent partners, encouraging the survivor to leave the relationship and/or referring her to support services.

There is a pervading belief among the female survivors that the legal systems are weak and not effective in addressing IPV. Many survivors spoke about seeking support from the police and received no support. Like the legal system, there was popular belief among the women that social norms, to a large extent, dictate a community's reaction to IPV. Social norms in the communities presented a negative response to IPV. Emerging from the interviews was a strong sense that IPV is not the business of the community but rather the concern of those directly involved in the relationship.

Further to the factors that are associated with IPV was the motivation to seek support. Findings from this study suggest that motivation to seek support include protecting others (children) from the abuse/abuser. Despite being detrimental to their wellbeing, survivors presented a strong desire to preserve the family unit and were therefore reluctant to leave the relationship. Another motivating factor was the increased severity/humiliation with abuse; female survivors experienced a shift in the severity of the violence, becoming more intense and detrimental, this led them to seek support. Some women did not know where or to whom they should seek support and through social networks as they increased their awareness of options/access to support and resources they were able to take action to relieve themselves of the situation. Another motivation to seek support was the fatigue/recognition that the abuser was not going to change. Survivors recognized that cycle of abuse and came to the realization that change was not evident and thus, sort support. In other instances women felt that the compounding issue of betrayal/infidelity was too much of a burden, coupled with the violence, and this was the spark for them to act. It should also be noted that role of bystanders/family members differed. In some instances the family members would normalize the violence, while other times they encouraged the survivor to get help.

In the interviews with these female survivors, their experiences with support services were explored. It was found that their experiences with shelters were both positive and not so positive. In some instances the women spoke about having the opportunity for a safe space as providing them with a sense of peace. At the same time, some women mentioned unhealthy experiences such as the unsupportive comments shared by the staff and other support service staff attached to the shelters and the difficulty of not being able to accommodate a male child over a particular age.

In exploration of the different support/counselling services, survivors referred to organisations such as Families in Action (FIA), Elder's and Associates, Rape Crisis Centre and Akilah. The women alluded to their apprehension in accessing support groups/counselling as they felt that their situations were unique to them. In many instances however, after seeking the support they expressed feelings of confidence. The impartiality of a professional and the common experiences by other women brought a sense of strength and realization to improve upon the situation. One concern noted, was the need for support services to operate almost clandestine. Women felt that if the organisations are advertised, when someone enters the building any onlookers will get an idea of their situation.

The Hot Line (800-SAVE) was a key support service. This service is free of charge to the user making it more accessible. The fact that unique identifier codes are used, makes the service much more appealing to women who are hesitant to seek services. The line was also described as a space where you can access a wide array of information.

In review of the law enforcement (Police and Courts), it seems that this type of support service has failed female survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV). Women expressed that the law enforcers did not apprehend their perpetrators, investigate their situations or bring charges to their perpetrators. In quite a few instances, the survivors alluded to the fact that the inaction by law enforcement can be linked to the fact that their perpetrators were members of the uniformed populations. This was a further deterrent for them in seeking support.

Findings around external perceptions could be critical to future interventions, which could seek to target both survivors and potential bystanders. Few IPV interventions have targeted the sphere of family, friends, and acquaintances around survivors of violence, who are likely the first to become aware of the violence. Bystanders should be encouraged and empowered to acknowledge violence when observed or reported, and to make referrals to appropriate services. Survivors should be empowered to report to bystanders, who could be friends, family, co-workers, acquaintances, or support service professionals, among others, with the knowledge that they will be met with compassion and referrals to needed services.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Positive Parenting programmes.** All of the women who participated in this qualitative study witnessed or experienced abuse as a child and most had young children who had witnessed their own abuse. "Schools for parents" could be effective in equipping parents to address conflict in the home and improve communication and negotiation skills. Exposure to positive parenting programs can provide individuals, families, and communities with healthy ways of engagements so that a more positive experience can

- be given and shared within future relationships. These parenting programs should also challenge traditional ideas of what defines the “perfect family.”
2. **Denormalization of violence.** Many participants indicated that violence was a normal and expected part of life, for them and their communities. Community-based mobilization campaigns, such as the SASA model, could begin to address norms around violence and reduce the stigmatization around reporting of violence²¹.
 3. **Promoting awareness amongst survivors and social networks.** Evidence suggests that awareness campaigns should target both survivors and their social networks with messaging around the importance of social networks as support for survivors of IPV and information on available resources in order to link survivors with services before violence escalates to a life-threatening level. Campaigns should target potential bystanders and empower them to serve as referral points to services. Social media tools such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are important to consider as message delivery tools. Given how many participants reported using the hotline, the campaign should include and promote the hotline, and ensure the hotline number’s reach is as wide as possible.
 4. **Advocacy efforts with employers.** Survivors sometimes reported feeling helpless because their perpetrators occupied positions of power within the military or police force. Advocacy efforts are needed amongs the military, police, and other employers to create and enforce policies that prevent and address GBV and IPV. Recognising that members of the uniformed services are active perpetrators of IPV and taking into consideration the psychological impact of working in situations where these persons are witness to the outcomes of heinous crimes efforts should be made to create a strong alliance with the Victim and Witness Support Unit. This alliance should respond to providing support to members of the uniformed population, particularly those who respond to heinous crimes and, the alliance also focus on advocating zero tolerance of members of the uniformed population who abuse their partners. Pilot interventions and corresponding studies are needed to improve law enforcement and military response to IPV and GBV.
 5. **Development of standardized operational guidelines for addressing IPV.** The development of a standardized operational guide will set the bar for the quality of service needed for delivery. This guideline should also include monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that allow organisations and entities the opportunity to assess their opportunities for improvement and expansion of services in demand by clients. Participants in this study mentioned only IPV specific support services; however, other institutions, including schools and health centers, could serve as critical points of referral to support services if properly equipped with the right tools and training.

²¹ Abramsky, Tanya, et al. "A community mobilisation intervention to prevent violence against women and reduce HIV/AIDS risk in Kampala, Uganda (the SASA! Study): study protocol for a cluster randomised controlled trial." *Trials* 13.1 (2012): 96.