



Experiences of Battered Women in Ohio: A Community Focus Group Report



October 2003

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Sojourner House
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YWCA of Cincinnati

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....2
Executive Summary.....4
About ODVN.....6
Introduction.....8
ODVN Focus Group Project9
Definition of Terms.....10
Demographic Information.....12
Demographic Highlights.....15
Results & Analysis.....17
Survivor Support Systems.....17
Survivors & Shelter Services.....20
Experience with Counseling22
Barriers & Gaps in Resources.....25
Barriers for Women of Color.....28
Offender Accountability.....31
Survivors & the Justice Systems.....33
 Experiences with Law Enforcement.....33
 Survivors & Justice System Advocacy.....36
 Survivors & the Criminal Justice System.....37
 Survivors & the Civil Justice System.....40
 Divorce Experience.....42
Other Issues Important to Survivors.....44
Appendices.....47
 Appendix A: Focus Group Tables
 Appendix B: Focus Group Regions Map
 Appendix C: Focus Group Questions & Forms

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nancy Neylon, ODVN Executive Director

Over the past three decades countless professionals through numerous public and private agencies have strived to provide effective, safe, supportive, and empowering interventions to survivors/victims of domestic violence. Further, our communities have worked collaboratively to develop comprehensive coordinated responses, in an effort to advance the safety of survivors/victims and the accountability of perpetrators.

It is indeed difficult to hear from survivors/victims that our services and our communities have yet to achieve those laudable goals. But it is essential that we listen to their voices. Listening to survivor input may mean that we must intentionally change the focus of our work, both policy and practice. Where do agencies conduct outreach, the courts and emergency rooms or also TANF offices, well baby clinics and substance abuse programs? How is the impact of major legislative changes on the lives of survivors/ victims such as preferred arrest and welfare reform, and marriage promotion being evaluated? Are the current interventions such as emergency shelter and protection orders responsive to the actual needs of survivors/victims? If not how do they need to change to make them responsive?

The Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) plays a critical role in the development and enhancement of standards of service for local domestic violence programs and improved response from the health care, public benefits, housing, children's services,

and justice systems. To this end ODVN convenes a Promising Practices Committee whose task is to research, discuss and examine evidence-based policies and practices and recommend adoption of best practice models to the ODVN Steering Committee. In addition ODVN collaborates with numerous state, regional, and local initiatives focused on the development of evidence based practice for domestic violence intervention and prevention.

As ODVN began the strategic planning process for 2003 it was agreed that the policy work of ODVN and local intervention policies and practices would be best informed by the survivors/victims of domestic violence. The idea of conducting focus groups emerged from discussions with Dr. Cris Sullivan, University of Michigan, regarding evaluation of domestic violence services and the Kentucky Coalition Against Domestic Violence who had previously conducted a series of focus groups with victims/survivors.

The purpose of the focus groups was to explore the success of intervention services in meeting the needs of survivors/victims of domestic violence by talking to them directly.

Our objective was to provide a safe forum for survivors/victims to discuss their experiences confidentially. We wanted to find out what their greatest barriers and challenges were as well as what interventions and professionals were most helpful. We worked closely with the members of ODVN's Promising Practices Committee and Women of Color Caucus to include diverse geographic locations around Ohio and to secure survivors/ victims for the focus groups, both women who had accessed

local domestic violence programs and those who had not.

We wish to acknowledge the support of the Promising Practices Committee, the Women of Color Caucus, and the entire ODVN Steering Committee throughout this process. ODVN would also like to thank Dr. Walter DeKeseredy of Ohio University for his guidance in the analysis of the data and Carolyn Joseph, Ohio University graduate student, for her invaluable assistance in data analysis.

Analysis of the demographic information from the focus groups found that domestic violence clearly represents the intersection of oppression in women's lives. Women who are experiencing domestic violence are also experiencing severe economic disadvantage, regardless of their marital status. Perhaps as relevant to women's lives as the abuse is the instability of employment, housing, and educational opportunities.

Another major finding was that victims of domestic violence still face incredibly inconsistent response among helping professionals, particularly in the justice system. From the discussions of the survivors, it is apparent that professionals in local communities play a role in revictimization of survivors/victims and contribute to the lack of accountability of perpetrators. Local domestic violence services play a critical role in providing safety, emotional support and practical help to survivors/victims. While not all of their expectations had been met with regard to service provision, the victims who participated in the focus groups who had used local domestic violence services credited them with being the major

reason they were able to maintain a violence free life.

The work of addressing domestic violence began with making visible what was, for so long, invisible. As women began to speak to each other, their collective voice penetrated the public denial and silence surrounding the reality of violence in our homes. What was secret and acceptable had become a topic of public discussion and concern. Constantly evaluating and re-evaluating the system of interventions and public policy initiatives for survivors/victims cannot be successful without the inclusion of their voices. Services and public policy must be grounded in the experiences of survivors/victims.

About ODVN

The Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) is a statewide coalition of domestic violence programs, allied agencies, and concerned individuals working to eliminate domestic violence in Ohio. ODVN believes that ending violence against women and children requires a connection between individuals and organizations to create a clear vision and collective voice for social and systemic change. ODVN's purpose is to support and strengthen Ohio's response to domestic violence through training, increased public awareness, and public policy work on behalf of battered women and their children.

Over the past ten years, the Ohio Domestic Violence Network has worked to address the needs of battered women, community members, and service providers. ODVN staff offers coalition and community members over 60 years of combined experience in social change, public policy, and woman-defined advocacy. Committed to empowerment, public education, and social change, ODVN offers a wide spectrum of services including training, technical assistance, victim/survivor information referral, a clearinghouse of domestic violence resources, and continual networking opportunities for service providers and their allies in the state.

ODVN's comprehensive training program focuses on such topics as improving the medial response to domestic violence, elder abuse, domestic violence in the work place, domestic violence advocacy fundamentals, and facilitating survivor support groups. ODVN offers extensive training to domestic violence service providers and

allied professionals in the domestic violence field, including law enforcement and medical professionals. Each year allied professionals are invited to attend a variety of job-specific workshops designed to improve their response to domestic violence victims and perpetrators. These efforts are complimented each year by ODVN's coordination of and participation in statewide training programs.

In addition to dynamic training services, ODVN also offers on-site and telephone consultation to domestic violence service providers and allied professionals. Consultation is offered in a number of areas including program development, agency administration, grant management, media advocacy and developing community prevention initiatives. ODVN also assists communities in developing coordinated community responses to domestic violence and sponsors issue-specific networking caucuses, such as legal advocacy and women of color.

ODVN serves as the statewide leader in making connections between service providers in Ohio and also serves as an information network for victims/survivors of domestic violence. To ensure that survivors have a link to support in Ohio, ODVN provides a statewide 24-hour toll free information and referral line that links survivors to domestic violence programs in their communities.

ODVN's website and semiannual newsletter provide victim/survivors, service providers, and concerned community members with access to the most up to date information on current issues involving domestic violence and connects them with the larger domestic

violence community in Ohio and the United States.

ODVN's clearinghouse is a comprehensive reference collection that consists of more than 2,100 articles, books and videos addressing a wide spectrum of domestic violence issues such as batterer's intervention, supporting communities of color, anti-oppression advocacy, supporting the immigrant community, elder abuse, women with disabilities, criminal justice system advocacy, and coordinated community response. All articles, books, and videos are available for public circulation.

Introduction

Over 30 years ago, violence against women activists and battered women began to focus on raising public awareness and addressing sexual and domestic violence in the lives of women. This work was necessary for a number of reasons: there was an overwhelming need for services for battered women and batterers were not being held accountable for their behavior in their communities. In addition, advocates found that women reaching out for support received highly inconsistent community responses. There were also medical and legal policies that made women feel revictimized by the system they turned to for help.

As these conditions may continue through the present day, domestic violence advocates and battered women are still speaking out in public and refusing to let domestic violence remain a private issue. One way to address these ongoing issues is to convene survivor focus groups.

Survivor focus groups are organized by the Violence Against Women Movement to stay grounded in the experiences of survivors and to offer them the opportunity to directly inform advocacy efforts and services. Survivor focus groups are designed to take the guesswork out of forming policies and developing services for victimized women, their children, and abusive individuals. As domestic violence advocates continue to interact with communities on behalf of battered women, the responses they encounter reinforce the importance of seeking out the experiences of survivors and relaying that information to community members.

Domestic violence is an epidemic social problem that warrants public attention. Results from the National Violence Against Women Survey indicate that violence against women is primarily intimate partner violence: 64 percent of the women who reported being raped, physically assaulted, and or stalked since age 18 were victimized by a current or former husband, cohabitating partner, boyfriend, or date (Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. 2000). In fact, national surveys continue to report that during their life time, approximately half of all women experience some violence within an intimate relationship, with 25 percent experiencing recurring abuse (Brandewine, 1999).

ODVN believes that the experiences of survivors who have used community services should always be present to ensure that social change efforts are relevant and appropriate. Communities benefit from staying grounded in the experiences of battered women as well. The elimination of domestic violence calls for more than just establishing shelters and forming community taskforces. Knowing where battered women and their children are turning for help, uncovering their experiences with community services once they have disclosed their experience of abuse, and addressing the barriers victim/survivors find when looking for support and protection promotes more effective domestic violence intervention. Victim/survivor safety and offender accountability are enhanced, which ultimately leads to social change.

ODVN Focus Group Project

As the statewide leader in advocacy with and for battered women it is vitally important that ODVN continues to consult with battered women to stay grounded in their experiences and to uncover what needs to be done to promote appropriate community response to domestic violence. In order to advance advocacy efforts, ODVN wanted to uncover the following: who were battered women talking to for help with domestic violence; what services were beneficial; what additional assistance might have been needed but not found; what were their experiences with the criminal justice system; and how were community members responding to them when they sought support or protection.

The project began by consulting with ODVN's Promising Practices Committee and Women of Color Caucus for input related to the scope of the project. Both groups decided that several focus groups and a few individual interviews would be conducted to respond to a variety of victim/survivor needs. With their input, ODVN strived to make the focus groups diverse in relation to racial and ethnic background, age, as well as geographic location. Committed to honoring the diversity and uniqueness among women's experiences, ODVN relied on the support of local domestic violence programs and members of both the Promising Practices Committee and Women of Color Caucus to bring together a diverse group of women who wanted to share their experiences.

In order to honor confidentiality and safety of participants, ODVN included

only female survivors of domestic violence in the focus groups. Two female staff members from ODVN conducted the groups with one staff member facilitating the group session and the other present to take notes. To ensure note-taking accuracy each group session and individual interview was tape recorded. Staff members from the hosting programs were not allowed to be present during the group session, and participants were assured of their anonymity in the written report.

Both the Promising Practices Committee and the Women of Color Caucus assisted ODVN staff in developing the questions asked in each focus group. For a complete list of the questions asked during the focus group, please see Appendix C. Nine questions were developed centering on the following themes:

- Who were survivors talking to about their experience of abuse
- Responses from service providers, including domestic violence programs
- Responses from the justice systems
- Barriers facing victims
- Additional services needed
- Experiences of women of color
- Abuser accountability

In February of 2003, ODVN began conducting focus groups in five regions around the state. Over a five month period, ODVN conducted eight focus groups and four individual interviews with survivors of domestic violence. Each group session lasted from one to three hours and consisted of between four and fourteen women. Four individual interviews were also conducted in an effort to hear the voices of women who may not have been

comfortable giving information in a group setting. Focus group participants included women who had and had not accessed shelter services, women of color, as well as survivors in urban and rural areas. In total, eighty-four women from the Northwest, Northeast, Southwest, Southeast, and Central parts of Ohio participated in the project.

Permission to tape record the discussions was obtained from each group participant. Participants were also given the option not to fill out the general demographic questionnaire or participate in any part of the discussion with which they were uncomfortable.

By June of 2003, all groups and individual interviews were completed, and ODVN began processing the data gathered from group participants. The audio recordings of the focus groups were all professionally transcribed, and through a collaborative effort with researchers from Ohio University, ODVN began processing and analyzing the data. With the support of researchers, Dr. Walter DeKeseredy and Carolyn Joseph, the quantitative and qualitative data of this report was organized and interpreted.

Defining Terms

The following terms will appear throughout this report. They are defined to offer a clear perspective on the experience and discussions of the focus group participants and to assist in understanding report findings.

- **Abuser/Batterer/Offender:** This term will be used to represent persons who are abusive or have abused an intimate partner or family/household member.

- **Accountability:** This term refers to holding individuals responsible for their choice to use violence and not allowing blame to be displaced onto victims, childhood experiences, substance abuse, or other circumstances.
- **Barriers:** These are numerous difficulties battered women experience that impede their efforts to free their lives of violence. These barriers may be social, physical, or economic in nature. They may be barriers that are internal or external to the victim such as lack of community resources, physical restraint from the abuser, or misinformation about their options.
- **Domestic Violence:** Domestic violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion, that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners.
- **Oppression:** Cultural and institutionalized social discrimination that is based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other bias directed toward a person because of their membership in a particular group. Oppression may involve denial services or resources, involve harsh judgments, or perpetuate harmful stereotypes.
- **Revictimization:** This term refers to negative treatment a victim/survivor may experience when seeking help from

community members, domestic violence programs, medical professionals, social service agencies, or other community systems. This negative treatment mirrors the behaviors of an abusive individual.

Revictimization may include blaming the victim/survivor for the violence in her life or making her responsible for ending the violence.

- **Victim/Survivor/Battered Women:** These three terms will be used interchangeable in this report to represent persons who have been or are still being abused by an intimate partner or family/household member.

- **Women of Color:** The term Women of Color refers to women who belong to those groups which have typically been targets of racism in this country. Women of color are a diverse group that is inclusive of Native American, African American, Latina, Asian American, and multiracial women as well as others.

Demographic Information

A questionnaire was created and distributed to obtain demographic information from focus group participants. The nine questions covered the areas of race and ethnicity, age, personal income, marital status, children, and community support services. Please see Appendix C for a complete version of the demographic form that participants completed. All participants in the focus group project were women who had experienced abuse. All participants voluntarily shared their demographic information for this project. The information gathered from all eighty-four participants is illustrated in the tables below.

Race & Ethnicity

Of the 84 women interviewed, 66.3% identified themselves as Caucasian and 37.3% identified as women of color. For further information on the race/ethnicity of participants please refer to Table 1.

Table 1: Race & Ethnicity

| Race/Ethnicity | % of All Women |
|------------------------------------|----------------|
| African American/Black | 28.9% |
| Asian American | 2.4% |
| Caucasian/White | 66.3% |
| Latina, Chicano, Hispanic | 1.2% |
| Native American | 4.8% |
| Does not Identify with Any Choices | 10.8% |

Age

Approximately 16% of the women interviewed were between the ages of 18-24 years old. The majority of the women interviewed (75.9%) were between the ages of 25-54 years of age, with 27.7% of the participants were

between the ages of 25-34 years of age. Additionally, 37.4% of the women were between the ages of 35-44 years of age. Please see Table 2 for more detailed information about the age of participants.

Table 2: Age

| Age Range | % of all Women |
|-----------|----------------|
| 18-24 | 15.7% |
| 25-34 | 27.7% |
| 35-44 | 37.4% |
| 45-54 | 10.8% |
| 55+ | 8.4% |

Personal Income

The 84 women who participated in the focus groups had an income ranging from \$0- \$35,000+. As Table 3 indicates, approximately 60.2% of the participants' personal income was between \$0-\$12,000. Overall, 75% of the women whose income ranged from \$0 to \$12,000 were from urban areas of Ohio. Thirteen percent of the participants indicated their personal income was within the range of \$12,000-\$18,000. Almost 10% of the participants indicated that their personal income was over \$35,000 a year. Please refer to Table 3 for additional information related to participants' incomes.

Table 3: Range of Personal Income*

| Personal Annual Income Ranges | % of all Women | % of Women from Urban Areas | % of Women from Rural Areas |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| \$0 - \$12,000 | 60.2 % | 75% | 51.3% |
| \$12,000 - \$18,000 | 13.3 % | 4.6% | 23.1% |
| \$18,000 - \$25,000 | 4.8% | 2.3% | 7.7% |
| \$25,000 - \$35,000 | 8.4% | 9.1% | 7.7% |
| \$35,000+ | 9.6% | 11.4% | 7.7% |

Table 4: Public Assistance*

| Have you used public assistance? | % of all Women |
|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 75.9% |
| No | 22.9% |
| No Response | 1.2% |

Marital Status

Seventy-four percent of the women indicated that they were married, separated, or divorced. Approximately 1/5 (20.5%) of the participants were single, and 1.2% of the participants indicated that they were widowed.

Table 5: Marital Status*

| Status | % of all Women |
|-----------|----------------|
| Divorced | 39.8% |
| Married | 25.3% |
| Partnered | 4.8% |
| Separated | 8.4% |
| Single | 20.5% |
| Widowed | 1.2% |

Children

Eighty-eight percent of the women who participated in the group had children, with sixty five percent indicating that they had more than one child. Thirty seven percent of the participants indicated that children protective services had been involved in their family, while fifty three percent of the women with children indicated that child protective services had not been involved with their family.

Table 6: Children*

| Children | % of all Women |
|----------|----------------|
| Yes | 88% |
| No | 12.1% |

Table 7: Number of Children

| # of Children | % of all Women |
|---------------------|----------------|
| One Child | 24.7% |
| More than one Child | 68.5% |

Survivors & Community Support

Focus group participants indicated that they turned to domestic violence shelters or programs, the legal system, or counseling services for support when experiencing violence in their lives. Almost 70% of the participants said that they had sought support from domestic violence shelters, and 60% of participants said they sought support from a mental health professional.

A large percentage of women sought criminal charges/protection orders (54.4%) or civil remedies or protection orders (47%).

Hospitals or other medical institutions were also places where survivors frequently turned to for support, with 38.9% of the participants indicating that they had sought medical attention. A significant percentage of women also sought the support of spiritual leaders (24%).

Please see the following page for Table 8.

Table 8: Use of Services for Support*

| Types of Services Used | % of all Women | % of Women from Urban Areas | % of Women from Rural Areas |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Shelter or Domestic Violence Program | 69.9 % | 70.5% | 69% |
| Criminal Court (Charges or TPOs) | 55.4% | 59.1% | 51% |
| Civil Court (Divorce, Custody, or CPOs) | 47% | 42.3% | 51% |
| Medical/Hospital | 38.6% | 45.5% | 31% |
| Counseling Services | 60.2% | 50% | 72% |
| Church or Clergy | 24.1% | 29.5% | 18% |
| Other Community Services | 27.83% | 13.6% | 44.1% |

*Data not broken down by demographic characteristics due to similarity between groups.

Highlights of Key Demographic Information

While the majority of participants in the focus groups were Caucasian, approximately 37% identified as women of color. It is important to note that the majority of the women of color who participated were African American. This fact points to the need for additional outreach efforts by both ODVN and local domestic violence programs to provide services and hear the voices of other groups of women of color. Notably underrepresented in this project are women of Asian, Latina, and Indigenous descent. A small number of women who “did not identify with any choices” described themselves as immigrants to this country.

Clearly the majority of the project participants had lower incomes with 60.2% reporting an income of \$12,000 or less. In addition, a full 75.9% of participants had used public assistance.

This has several implications for domestic violence programs and others providing services to victim/survivors, including the need for increased advocacy for survivors to address economic justice issues in Ohio. Clearly, many victims in Ohio are affected by such economic issues including housing shortages, welfare reform, and the current economy. Programming and advocacy to help survivors must address these issues.

In addition, the disproportionately high representation of women with lower incomes in this project, illustrates one characteristic of the population of women who are using the services of

domestic violence programs. Not only should service providers address issues facing this particular group of women, they also need to evaluate how to make services more relevant to women with higher incomes who are experiencing abuse as well.

In this particular sample, domestic violence programs continue to be the place where survivors turn to most for assistance with violence in their lives, with almost 70% of survivors stating that they had turned to their local domestic violence program for support. This points to the vital role domestic violence programs play in providing victim safety. Clearly, the services provided to survivors by Ohio domestic violence programs are meeting significant needs and are relevant and timely. With the cuts in private and public funding, continual funding for general domestic violence programs is in jeopardy at a time when these services are obviously needed.

Limitations of the Project

While the information gathered from the focus groups is indeed valuable, it is important to mention the limitations of the data. Because this data was gathered by group interviews, there exists the possibility of interview bias. In addition, the group format of gathering information may have caused the experiences of some of the women interviewed to be lost among the voices of other women in the group.

The sample size of 84 women is not large enough to generalize battered women, although ODVN believes that the stories shared in the groups is indicative of the experience of many battered women and their children in Ohio. Because the vast majority of women who participated in the project were gathered with the assistance of domestic violence programs around the state, victim/survivors who have not used such services are underrepresented in this report. Finally, although an effort was made to include the voices of a diverse group of women of color, the majority of women of color interviewed were African American. Thus, important issues facing other groups of women of color are underrepresented in this report.

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

The following portion of this report will highlight the results of the focus group project. Survivor's experiences in the following areas will be discussed: disclosing experiences of abuse, shelter services, barriers encountered, community resources, and the criminal and civil justice systems. Each section will have an analysis of the focus group participants' responses followed by a discussion of the future implications of these results. Throughout the report quotes from the participants will be used to illustrate discussion points.

For the purposes of this report, responses from the four individual interviews were combined and reported as results from one "group." Therefore, the following results section will discuss the responses of nine groups of women. These responses were brought together due to the similarity of experiences between the individual women interviewed and ease of analysis and reporting of results.

Due to the nature of group interviews, some group members had contradictory experiences. "Group responses" recorded refer to the experience of the clear majority of that group. For example, if nine of eleven women indicated difficulty with child support enforcement, then this was recorded as an issue for that particular group. If responses were more evenly divided, then the report indicates a "mixed experience" or reports both experiences. Therefore data reported refers generally to the responses from the majority of the group members. ODVN understands that this decreases the sensitivity of the data but feels that the results do

accurately describe the experiences of the focus group participants.

Survivor Support Systems

Results/Analysis

All focus group sessions were opened with the question, "Who did you talk to about your experience of domestic violence?" This question was asked to assist ODVN in determining the direction of future advocacy efforts. Please see Table 9 for a complete description of responses.

ODVN learned that victim/survivors talk to many people in their communities in an effort to get help with domestic violence. One hundred percent of groups indicated that they had spoken to their local domestic violence program about the abuse they had experienced. Many survivors reported that they had not spoken with anyone about the abuse before speaking to domestic violence program staff.

"I found the shelter...it was like the weight of the whole world had lifted off my shoulders. I didn't have to worry about where I was going to go, what I was going to do because I didn't want to go back there."

"Without the shelter, I don't know what I would have done."

TABLE 9: WHO ARE SURVIVORS TALKING TO ABOUT ABUSE?

| Survivors Talked To | # of Groups | % of Groups |
|------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Police | 9 | 100% |
| Shelter/DV Program | 9 | 100% |
| Friends/Family | 8 | 88% |
| Church/Minister | 7 | 77% |
| Therapist | 7 | 77% |
| Doctors | 6 | 67% |
| Hotline | 5 | 55% |
| Neighbor | 3 | 33% |
| Someone in Criminal Justice System | 3 | 33% |
| Abuser's Family | 3 | 33% |
| Children Services | 3 | 33% |
| Other Community Service | 1 | 11% |

Surprisingly, one hundred percent of groups also discussed talking to the police about their experience of domestic violence. Survivors experience with the criminal justice system will be discussed at length later in the report.

Eight of nine groups (89%) reported that they had spoken with their friends and family about their experience of abuse. Reactions from friends and family were reported as very inconsistent ranging from very supportive and helpful to hostile and victim blaming.

The third most common places of disclosure occurred to therapists or clergy members. Seventy-seven percent of survivors disclosed to one or both of these community resources. Counselor response to victim/survivor disclosure is discussed later in this report. Participants indicated that the responses of clergy and church communities were generally positive, leading to the conclusion that this is a system that has aspects that are working well for survivors; however, some survivors

described that while their clergy member was emotionally supportive, the referrals and advice given were not always helpful or safe for the survivor.

“I thought I had to learn not to upset him. And several years ago when he hit me so bad, I called my pastor, and he said ‘you need to find out your rights.’ I didn’t know that I had rights.”

A significant number of survivors turned to medical services or hospitals for support when experiencing domestic violence. Sixty seven percent (6 groups) reported talking to their doctors about their experience of abuse. Rural women were less likely to turn to this resource for help than were women in urban areas, although both groups of women accessed these services at a significant rate. Reportedly, responses in the medical community ranged from very helpful (some survivors first heard about the local shelter from their doctors) to unsupportive and revictimizing.

One third (33%) of survivors spoke with neighbors or the abusers’ family about their experience of domestic violence, again accessing informal community networks for support. Three groups (33%) mentioned discussing the abuse with someone in the criminal justice system. Finally, thirty three percent of victim/survivors discussed their experience of abuse with their local children protective services.

Future Implications/Directions

Support of Local Domestic Violence Programs

Because domestic violence programs are often the first source of assistance for victims, these programs remain in the front-line of defense against domestic violence. Continued funding of domestic violence services is imperative to help victim/survivors and their children obtain safety. For communities to adequately address domestic violence, local domestic violence programs must have sufficient funding and the collaborative support of other community service providers.

Increase General Community Awareness of Domestic Violence

Since such a large number of victim/survivors first disclose abuse to their friends and family, efforts must be made to increase general public awareness of domestic violence. By making the general public aware of domestic violence and its harmful effects on battered women and their children, a significant number of victims who never come into contact with other community systems may be helped.

Support Appropriate Response by Faith Communities

While victim/survivors generally indicated positive response from faith communities to their disclosure of abuse, continued education of clergy and church communities could only enhance the safety of victim/survivors and their children. Education should address increasing understanding of domestic violence dynamics as well as appropriate interventions and referrals.

Improve Medical and Hospital Assessment and Intervention

Due to the large number of survivors who disclose abuse to their medical provider, medical personnel should be a significant target of advocacy efforts to improve victim/survivor safety. Medical personnel need to be trained in assessment, documentation, and appropriate intervention with domestic violence cases. In addition, protocols for assessment and intervention need to be implemented for a variety of medical settings.

Survivors & Shelter Services

How do domestic violence programs help? Victims and survivors of domestic violence require personal support in finding safety and in addressing the violence in their lives. Domestic violence programs have been very successful in assisting battered women with crisis intervention, finding community support, working on personal development, impacting public policy, and interacting with the justice systems. In addition to providing emergency shelter and advocacy services, domestic violence programs serve as a support network for many women who may have had other personal networks eroded by the violence in their lives.

The majority of the participants agreed that their experiences in the shelter were very helpful and supportive. Several women describe their shelter stay as a peaceful refuge from the violence in their lives, while other women commented that the support groups by domestic violence programs helped them realize that they were not alone and gave them valuable information about the dynamics of domestic violence.

The 24-hour crisis hotline domestic violence shelters operate for victims of domestic violence provides access to vital information. Through hotlines, domestic violence programs have been successful in providing battered women with information about all forms of abuse, connecting them to community resources, and in providing emotional support.

"Yeah, I think it's easier to call the hotline and tell someone... cause you don't want to have that chance of being...ashamed... or embarrassed."

"In my case the National Hotline gave me really good, positive information."

TABLE 10: HOTLINE EXPERIENCE

| Hotline Experience | # of Groups | % of Groups |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Helpful | 5 | 55% |
| Not Helpful | 0 | 0% |
| Mixed | 3 | 33% |

During the group sessions, there was considerable focus on finding out if battered women thought domestic violence hotlines were accessible and helpful. When asked about their experiences with the hotline, women in 5 out of 9 groups responded that they found the hotline to be helpful. Women in 3 out of 9 groups reported mixed feelings about the hotline, recalling both positive and negative experiences.

In discussing the positives about their hotline experiences participants said:

- It was a less embarrassing way to talk about the violence in their lives
- Hotline workers were good at listening and allowed them to talk
- They appreciated the way the hotline workers treated their concerns seriously
- Hotline workers provided good information

In discussing the negatives about their hotline experiences, participants said the following:

- Waiting on returned phone calls from previous messages was a problem

- The referrals that were given by the hotline worker were sometimes not adequate to address their specific needs

Future Directions/Implications

Support Existing Crisis Line Programming

Since 55% of groups describe their experiences with domestic violence hotlines as helpful, it is important that domestic violence programs maintain existing hotline programming. Battered women overwhelmingly said that the information and resources provided through the hotline are vital to supporting them in addressing the violence in their lives. It is also important that public and private funding sources continue to provide funding opportunities specifically directed to sustaining the 24-hour capacity of hotline services statewide.

Enhance Community Resource List for Referrals

A smaller percentage of participants said that community referrals were sometimes not adequate in addressing their specific needs. To address this concern, domestic violence program should evaluate community referrals. Evaluation could provide programs with added knowledge about what programs are helpful to women. The evaluation process would also assist programs in identifying gaps in community resources. Community taskforces or coordinating councils could be used as a venue to update information about community resources or to uncover alternative referrals to fill the gaps in resources available to domestic violence survivors.

Address Gaps in Hotline Capacity

Since some women in the group indicated that they had difficulties with receiving returned calls after they had left messages for assistance, it would be beneficial for domestic violence programs to revise protocols for returning phone calls. Agencies should consider adding a hotline coordinator position, as funding allows. In addition, increasing the use of volunteers to manage the large volume of incoming calls may be necessary.

Experiences with Counseling

Results/Analysis

A significant number of participants (60.2%) reported that they had sought support from counseling services. Interestingly, 72% of women in rural areas had accessed counseling services versus only 50% of participants in urban areas. This highlights some differences in help-seeking behavior by participants in different areas of the state, although counseling services are accessed by a significant number of survivors regardless of their geographic location. Due to the large number of participants who had received counseling services, this topic was raised several times during focus group discussions.

TABLE 11: INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING FROM A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAM

| Individual Counseling | # of Groups | % of Groups |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Available | 6 | 67% |
| Not Available | 1 | 11% |
| Helpful | 5 | 55% |
| Mixed | 1 | 11% |
| Not Helpful | 0 | 0% |

Please refer to Table 11 for a summary of survivors’ experiences with counseling. For the purpose of this report, survivors’ experiences with counseling are divided between counseling that was offered by the local domestic violence programs and counseling that was offered by others in the community. It was unclear in all groups, however, whether or not the counseling received was from a source outside of the local domestic violence program. ODVN understands that only four of the local programs

where survivors received services offer individual counseling, so some of the numbers recorded for individual counseling provided by the shelter must necessarily refer to outside counseling services although this was not clear from the interviews. While it is reasonable to assume that every city has some type of outside counseling available, Table 12 refers only to those groups which specifically mentioned that they had seen a counselor outside of a domestic violence program.

Of the six groups (67%) who indicated that counseling was available to them from their local domestic violence program, five groups indicated that this counseling was helpful to them.

“DV Program (counseling) is more geared towards women and battering.”

“It [therapy] was very enlightening. It made me believe that I wasn’t going through something that nobody else had gone through. And it helped me to be able to deal with my kids. And get plans on how to leave him.”

One group (11%) indicated that counseling was not available to them from the local domestic violence program. None of the groups which indicated that counseling was provided by the local domestic violence program found the counseling to be “not helpful”, and only one group (11%) indicated that there experience with counseling was mixed.

TABLE 12: COUNSELING OUTSIDE OF SHELTER

| Counseling Outside of Shelter | # of Groups | % of Groups |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Available | 5 | 55% |
| Not Available | 0 | 0% |
| Helpful | 2 | 22% |
| Not Helpful | 0 | 0% |
| Mixed | 2 | 22% |

Of the five groups who indicated that they had received counseling services from a program outside of the shelter, two groups indicated that the counseling had been beneficial. Two groups reported a mixed experience with outside counseling, and none of the groups reported that the counseling had not been helpful.

It became clear through the interviews that those participants who had a mixed experience with psychotherapy had been in counseling with therapists who did not have a thorough understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence. This was evidenced by inappropriate therapeutic interventions such as couples counseling and other typical interventions aimed at improving communication.

“...this counselor would try to reconcile me and my husband there. So he would suggest that we should just, you know, start going out like we were dating. You know, like a fresh start type of thing. And then go out, like keep the romance alive....and then I was kidnapped at one point...after an “outing”...”

Future Implications/Directions

Continue Counseling Programming by Local Domestic Violence Programs

What is clear from the discussions is that survivors enter counseling at significant rates to address the domestic violence in their lives. Since counseling provided by local domestic violence programs was overwhelmingly helpful, continuation of funding for these services is vitally important to address the needs of survivors. When domestic violence agencies do not have the resources to support such programming, local counseling agencies should seek training from domestic violence programs in their area and work to improve collaboration between the two agencies.

Increased Training of Mental Health Professionals

As evidenced by the description of inconsistent responses by counselors, increased training related to the dynamics of domestic violence and appropriate therapeutic interventions is needed for these professionals. Therapists should be trained to recognize the issues of power and control in families experiencing violence and understand the dangers associated with couples counseling.

Counselors should understand that interventions such as couple’s counseling do nothing to address the violence that is occurring in families and actually increase the risk of violence to survivors and their children. Couples counseling is contraindicated when there is violence in the family as the victims’ safety is jeopardized by

engaging in the counseling process, and many participants indicated that they had been negatively affected by engaging in this type of counseling. In addition, these types of interventions can lead to increased survivor self-blame and promote possibly dangerous actions on the part of the survivor such as increased assertiveness.

In addition, there is a need for increased understanding of typical emotional reactions to domestic violence and safety planning for victim/survivors.

Barriers & Gaps in Community Resources

Survivors in Abusive Relationships

Many barriers exist that prevent battered women from addressing the violence in their lives. Participants were asked to share experiences or situations that made it harder for them to leave abusive situations.

The groups reported that financial support, lack of knowledge about abuse and options, children, and fear were the most popular reasons given by participants.

89% of the participants cited finances as a major reason for remaining in abusive relationships. Many women brought up the high costs of housing deposits, bus tickets, storage, and vehicles when discussing remaining in abusive relationships.

77% of the participants cited the safety and the well-being of their children as a reason for why it was harder to leave their abusive situations. Fear that the abusive father may obtain full custody of the children or would harm the children in her absence during visitation, compelled many women who participated in our project to remain in their abusive situations despite the physical, sexual, or mental abuse they had endured.

Table 13: What made it Harder to Leave or Easier to Stay?

| What Made it Harder to Leave or Easier to Stay? | Total # of Groups | Total % of Groups |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|
| Finances | 8 | 89% |
| Children | 7 | 77% |
| Afraid for Life or Other Fears | 6 | 67% |
| Hope/Belief that things would change | 6 | 67% |
| Familiarity & Security | 4 | 44% |
| Transportation | 4 | 44% |
| Isolation | 3 | 33% |
| Lack of Abuse Knowledge & Helpful Information | 3 | 33% |
| Medical Issues: His Health | 3 | 33% |
| Sense of Commitment / Love or Sympathy for Him | 3 | 33% |
| Child Care | 2 | 22% |
| Employer Insensitivity | 2 | 22% |
| Housing Situation | 2 | 22% |
| Lack of Family Support | 2 | 22% |
| Pride | 2 | 22% |

33% of the participants said the lack of knowledge about abuse and information about their options made it harder for them to leave. Many women cited that they did not know that what they were experiencing was considered abuse. Other women said that they did not know about what community services were available to them; nor did they know about the range of services offered by domestic violence programs.

67% of the participants said that fear that the abuser might carry out his threats to end her life, the lives of their children, or loved ones kept them from leaving. Other women brought up being stalked or re-assaulted after leaving so that they returned to the relationship in

an effort to get the abuser to stop the abuse.

Other reasons participants cited for staying in abusive relationships were

- Isolation
- Security and familiarity
- Lack of family support
- Lack of transportation
- Medical issues
- Housing
- Hope for change

For a full listing of participant responses, please refer to Table 13.

Gaps in Community Resources

During the focus group sessions, participants were also asked about what assistance they needed in dealing with the violence in their lives that was not available to them. Please refer to Table 14 for a full listing of participant responses. Sixty-seven percent (6 of 9 groups) indicated that they could have used additional information and support in relation to issues of parenting children who have experienced domestic violence. The participants were clear that their children had been affected by the violence in their homes and were concerned about how to help their children heal from their experiences. All groups were concerned about stopping the intergenerational cycle of violence for their children, but felt that community resources were inadequate when addressing this problem. Participants wanted counseling, support groups, and educational classes related to preventing domestic violence in their children's lives.

“Kids need advocacy.”

“I have teenagers. And see, my biggest fear right now is the cycle repeating itself.”

Fifty five percent (5 of 9 groups) reported that they needed additional financial assistance that was unavailable to them. Survivors reported needing additional assistance obtaining affordable child care to allow them to obtain employment as well as assistance with health insurance. In addition, 55% (5 of 9 groups) reported difficulty finding affordable and quality legal representation as they went through divorce/custody proceedings and other civil court processes such as obtaining a civil protection order.

“You work just to pay for childcare.”

“I handle 2 or 3 jobs just to make ends meet.”

A significant portion of groups (44%) reported that they needed assistance in the criminal justice system that was not provided. Four of nine groups reported that they needed better treatment and more assistance by the police and local court systems. Survivors' experiences in this area will be discussed later in this report. Please refer to the section related to the criminal and civil court systems.

TABLE 14: HELP THAT WAS NEEDED BUT NOT FOUND

| Help That was Needed but not Found | # of Groups | % of Groups |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Support for Children who Witness violence | 6 | 67% |
| Affordable & Quality Legal Support | 5 | 55% |
| Financial Support | 5 | 55% |
| Better Treatment & Help from Police & Courts | 4 | 44% |
| A Solution to Stalking & Violence After Leaving | 2 | 22% |
| Child Support | 2 | 22% |
| Counseling | 2 | 22% |
| Safe and Affordable Long-term Housing | 2 | 22% |
| Support Groups | 2 | 22% |

Four out of nine groups (22%) mentioned that they were unable to access safe and affordable long term housing. For these families, leaving abusive relationships was only the first step to obtaining safety. The lack of quality, affordable housing continued to put them at risk for homelessness, other types of victimization, and returning to abusive situations.

“So housing is an issue in this city...I’m essentially homeless.”

“I think there should be more houses out there that people can afford.”

Over 1/5 of participants (22%) reported that they needed assistance with child support, and the same number reported that they would like to have support groups to discuss their experience of domestic violence. Other responses to this question included an increased need for protection of children from their abusive fathers, larger domestic violence shelters, assistance with transportation, and support with immigration issues.

Future Implications/Directions

Increased Services Addressing the Needs of Children Who Witness Violence

All participants were clear that the needs of children affected by violence were of paramount importance in their lives. Many domestic violence programs currently provide programming for children as part of their core services, although with decreasing budgets this type of programming may be lost. It is vitally important to keep funding levels high enough to maintain children’s programming. In addition, this type of programming should provide support for the victim/survivor as the non-offending parent. Participants indicated that this type of parental support would be beneficial for family relationships.

To comprehensively address the needs of children from violent homes, there is also a need for increased collaboration between those community agencies that directly affect children. Domestic violence agencies, child protective services, juvenile courts, and other child serving agencies should collaborate to develop joint service models and protocols, improve access to services, and promote new resources for children.

Increased Advocacy Regarding Economic Justice Issues

With 60.2% of participants reporting an income of \$12,000 or less, and 75.9% of participants having used public assistance, the need for advocacy around issues of economic justice is clear. Clearly, many victims in Ohio are affected by such issues as welfare reform, affordable housing shortages, and the current economic downturn.

Programming to help survivors must address these issues, specifically the lack of safe and affordable housing. The absence of accessible health insurance and affordable child care are also significant issues facing families healing from domestic violence. Finally, poor child support enforcement for these single-parent families continues to adversely affect victim/survivors and their children.

Expanded Services by Domestic Violence Programs

With several focus groups mentioning the desire for support group programming to address their experience of violence and the need for parental support for these issues, many survivors would benefit from the expansion of local domestic violence programs to address these needs. ODVN believes that local domestic violence programs are the best agencies to provide these types of services because local programs have expertise in domestic violence as well as the trust of and positive relationship with survivors. Since domestic violence service providers are often the first agencies to respond to survivors' needs, it's important that they are able to comprehensively address these long term needs. To do this, increased funding for expansion of services is needed.

Barriers for Women of Color

Results/Analysis

Approximately 37% of the focus group participants identified as women of color, with the majority of the women of color participating being African American. Most of the focus groups had

at least one woman of color participating, and one focus group in Northeastern Ohio was composed of only African American women. ODVN also conducted three individual interviews with women of color who may not have been willing to participate in a larger group discussion due to cultural issues. These individual participants as well as the focus group of African American women were asked about barriers they faced specifically as women of color experiencing domestic violence.

The participants reported that they encountered the following barriers when attempting to end the domestic violence in their lives:

Cultural issues and differences in general

Several participants referred to a lack of awareness of domestic violence in their specific communities, as well as cultural pressure to remain in the abusive relationships. Participants discussed cultural norms which prohibit divorce as well as discourage outside intervention with "family" problems. Several participants did not feel that calling the police, for example, was an option for them due to cultural messages. In addition, some participants indicated that there was no discussion of domestic violence in their communities so they did not identify what they were experiencing as domestic violence or as an issue that they could seek help for.

"But in our culture, if you have that person as your partner, or as a husband or a wife, you want to keep that relationship as

long as possible.”

“Because you, you don’t open your mouth and tell the community. You are afraid to talk...”

Lack of information regarding domestic violence programs and social services in general

Some participants reported that, while they were experiencing abuse, they were unaware of domestic violence services and other community agencies that could have possibly provided assistance. Participants explained that they were not aware that there were agencies to help them address the violence in their lives. In addition, there was a lack of awareness of how to access these services.

“You know, I think I probably learned the word domestic violence...Oh, I don’t know. Maybe...I really don’t know when I learned that word, domestic violence.”

“I didn’t know any social services in my neighborhood.”

Increased silence and isolation due to being part of a minority and/or immigrant community

These participants belonged to communities that experience oppression in the forms of racism and/or xenophobia. Experiencing these forms of oppression added to the isolation and silencing that is typical for all battered women. To gain safety for themselves

and their children, participants had to address barriers related to their race, immigration status, and language in addition to confronting the typical barriers encountered by other battered women. These additional barriers made the process of ending the violence more complex for these participants.

Issues related to language barriers and difficulty communicating concerns relating to the violence in the relationship.

Accessing typical avenues of support and assistance was also made more complex for some participants who spoke English as a second language. Not all domestic violence programs or social service agencies are able to provide interpreter services which can make obtaining assistance very difficult for some women of color.

Lack of transportation

Participants described difficulty obtaining transportation to find employment, housing, and needed social services.

Lack of culturally-specific support groups

Most participants indicated that support groups specifically for women of color would have been beneficial for them. Such groups might have been helpful in decreasing their sense of isolation and addressing other concerns specific to their experience of battering.

Lack of consistent law enforcement response

Several women of color in the focus groups discussed inconsistent responses from law enforcement. One particular group of women in an urban area said that officer response depended on whether they lived in a wealthy area or

not. The same group reported that the police would not come to their residences when called to assist with domestic violence. In addition, there were reports that police response was slow and that women were threatened with arrest if they continued to call. Finally, these women described being counseled to remain in their relationships by the police or questioned about the validity of their reports.

Future Implications/Directions

Increased Domestic Violence Awareness in Communities of Color

The participants all described first seeking help within their own communities before accessing local domestic violence programs, and some participants had never sought services with a domestic violence program or other social service agency. This makes clear that helping survivors of color must include increasing awareness of domestic violence within their communities since this is where help is sought. Informal networks and community leaders must be accessed and educated about the prevalence of domestic violence and assisted to develop appropriate community-based responses to abuse in homes. This would best benefit women of color in these communities to increase safety and would also work to enhance offender accountability.

Increased Outreach Efforts to Communities of Color

As evidenced by the under representation of a diverse group of women of color in the focus group project, both local programs and ODVN need to increase their outreach efforts to

communities of color. Several participants mentioned that they were unaware of local domestic violence services and were not sure how to access these services. Local domestic violence programs need to increase their visibility within communities of color and foster collaborations with key community members and agencies to become a resource for battered women in communities of color.

In addition, ODVN should work to support and promote culturally-specific domestic violence programming throughout the state of Ohio. This may include assisting members of specific communities of color to develop new programming to address unmet needs in their communities or working with existing domestic violence programs to improve their outreach efforts. Training and technical assistance by ODVN needs to include consultation geared toward helping local programs to develop culturally-relevant programming, such as support groups, immigration support, and interpreter services.

Offender Accountability

Results/Analysis

Because ODVN believes that advocacy for battered women should be based upon the expectations and desires of the women themselves, it was important to ask participants about offender accountability. Each group was asked, “What do you think should happen to your abusive partner?” The groups had a number of different responses as indicated in Table 15 on the next page for further information.

“I want domestic violence on his record.”

One hundred percent of the groups indicated that they thought that jail time was appropriate for abusive partners. Each group also indicated that, in addition to jail time, some type of rehabilitation and counseling was needed for abusive partners. Although some women did not find Batterer’s Intervention Programming to be beneficial to their partners, each group suggested that some type of rehabilitative services were needed.

Seven of nine (78%) groups indicated that they would like to see stronger legal ramifications for the crime of domestic violence. These groups reported that more accountability for offenders in the legal system may provide some deterrence to future abusive behavior.

“I don’t like it when they dropped the charges I don’t like it when they plea bargain, and I hate the fact that the man can come knock the crap out of me and cause me a

concussion and sprained neck that’s never going to be straight now. And they say ‘six months.’”

Many participants desired that the offender take some internal responsibility for the abuse in addition to the community providing consequences for abusive behavior. Sixty seven percent (6 groups) reported that they wanted their abusive partner to experience the “same pain” that they had gone through when experiencing abuse, and forty four percent (4 groups) indicated that they wanted abusive partners to recognize their abusive behavior and hold themselves accountable for their actions. In addition, many survivors (33%) simply wanted to be left alone by their abusers so that they could continue their lives with their children free of violence.

“Only thing I’ve got to do is keep living and be the best I can be. I don’t have time to worry about him. That is his problem.”

“I want him to admit that he did it.”

TABLE 15: WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN TO ABUSERS?

| What should happen to abusive partners | # of Groups | % of Groups |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Jail | 9 | 100% |
| Rehabilitation & Counseling | 9 | 100% |
| Stronger Legal Ramifications & Accountability | 7 | 77% |
| Experience the same pain | 6 | 66% |
| Get a Job & /OR Life | 4 | 44% |
| Self Recognition & Accountability | 4 | 44% |
| Leave her Alone | 3 | 33% |
| Loss of Parental Rights | 3 | 33% |
| Public Identification/Registry | 3 | 33% |
| Surgical Intervention | 3 | 33% |

A full third (33%) of groups wanted some type of offender registry or public identification system established, similar to the current sex offender registry in the state. Concern for their children was again foremost in the minds of victim/survivors, with one-third (33%) of group participants desiring the termination of parental rights as a consequence for perpetrating domestic violence.

Future Implications/Directions

Stronger Legal Consequences for Domestic Violence Perpetrators

One clear message from these focus groups was that they believed that offenders are not being held appropriately accountable in the justice system for the crime of domestic violence. Enhancing offender accountability post sentencing should be developed by the criminal justice system. Please see the section related to the criminal and civil justice systems for further discussion of this topic.

Continued Funding and Further Development of Appropriate Batterer’s Intervention Programming (BIPs)

Because survivors continue to desire rehabilitative services for abusive persons, it is important that communities continue to support such services, and the continued development of appropriate services is paramount. The field of Batterer’s Intervention is relatively new, and many models of intervention are employed when working with domestic violence perpetrators. Only those models based on strong offender accountability and victim safety are appropriate. To hold batterers accountable for past abuse as well as to prevent future abuse, it is critical that BIPs have written procedures for providing information to the courts and work collaboratively with their local domestic violence programs to ensure victim safety and cross-training.

Survivors & the Justice Systems

Domestic violence advocates have strived to develop criminal options and remedies for victims of domestic violence through public policy changes. With the passage of the Violence Against Women Act there have been significant increases in pro-arrest and pro-prosecution policies of domestic violence and other related crimes throughout the country. These changes reflect progress made in how the justice system responds to domestic violence.

As a result of the changes made in how the justice system responds to domestic violence, there has been an increase in the number of battered women involved in this system, which has created a larger demand for support services and resources.

This section focuses on the shared experiences of focus group participants involved in the justice system. The major topics that were discussed with focus group participants will be divided into three larger sections law enforcement, the criminal justice system, and the civil justice system. Within those three main topic sections there will be smaller subsections that will discuss survivor interactions with law enforcement, judges, magistrates, and prosecutors as well as their experiences with legal advocates.

Experiences with Law Enforcement

Law enforcement officers were among those most frequently contacted for protection from domestic violence; however, they are still inconsistent in

their arrest responses, particularly for violations of protection order.

Participants were asked to share their experiences with law enforcement officers who were called to their homes. Participants were asked if calling law enforcement was an option. All nine focus groups (100%) had participants who said that they had called officers about the violence in their lives.

TABLE 16: LAW ENFORCEMENT ACCESSIBILITY

| Would you Call Law Enforcement? | # of Groups | % of Groups |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Yes | 1 | 11% |
| No | 7 | 77% |
| Mixed Response | 0 | 0% |

Women in seven groups out of nine (77%) said that they would not call law enforcement. In addition, six out of nine groups (67%) had women who said that officers were not helpful in providing referrals for support services or in effectively addressing the abusive behavior. Five out of nine groups (55%) had women who said that they had mixed responses from law enforcement that were both positive and negative.

For the women who described their experiences as helpful many said that the officers who responded did the following:

- Patiently took the time to explain her options to her, such as civil protection orders or court process
- Arrested the abuser for their violent actions or arrested the abuser for violation of the protection order
- Treated her in a respectful and nonjudgmental way

TABLE 17: LAW ENFORCEMENT HELPFULNESS

| Was Calling Law Enforcement Helpful? | # of Groups | % of Groups |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Yes | 0 | 0% |
| No | 6 | 67% |
| Mixed Response | 5 | 55% |

In discussing the negatives about their experiences with law enforcement, participants said that they encountered the following:

- Condescending, unsympathetic comments with little understanding of domestic violence
- Blame or criticism for staying in the relationship
- Refusal to make an arrest when victim indicated abuse
- Violence or abuse was not taken seriously
- Lack of referrals for resources in the community
- Incorrect determination of primary aggressor
- Threats to be arrested if the officers were called to the home again
- No arrest for protection order violations
- Advice for staying in the relationship with her abusive partner and making the relationship work
- Officers appeared easily manipulated by the abuser

In discussing the reasons for why they had mixed feelings about law enforcement experiences, participants said the following:

- Officers would take a report, but charges would not be filed

and there was no follow-up or referral for support services in the community

- Participants reported that they would receive inconsistent responses from officers depending upon who was called. They reported that some officers were helpful, gave good information, and made arrests while others were judgmental, revictimizing, or said they couldn't do anything to make the abuser leave or they would arrest her instead.
- Participants in some of the focus groups reported that law enforcement was called to their homes multiple times before arrests were made.

A number of focus group participants also indicated that they had been arrested along with their abusers when they sought help from law enforcement. These participants felt that the officers did not attempt to identify the primary aggressor in these instances.

Future Directions/Implications

Improve Determination of the Primary Aggressor

The Ohio Revised Code delineates the factors to consider when determining primary aggressor. Gathering additional evidence, such as witness statements, can also assist in appropriate determination. Law enforcement agencies could consider having officers attend training related to primary aggressor identification.

Increase Knowledge and Awareness of Domestic Violence

Obtaining additional education on the dynamics of domestic violence and victim/abuser interviewing will help officer's respond effectively to victims and as well as increase accountability for offenders.

Improve Enforcement of Protection Orders

State laws are clear that a violation of a protection order constitutes a crime. Violation of protection orders and non-compliance of court orders is recognized as a lethality factor in escalating violence. By receiving specific knowledge about the different types of protection orders and information on enforcing out of state orders officers, are reducing liability in not addressing a protection order violation.

Increase Adherence to Ohio's Preferred Arrest Policy

Ohio has a preferred arrest policy, and the Ohio Revised code specifies probable cause for offenses of domestic violence and further requires law enforcement department to have written policies that accurately reflect the preferred arrest policy. Law enforcement agencies should consider evaluating adherence to those policies on a regular basis in conjunction with other community agencies.

Increase Community Referrals/ Collaboration with Domestic Violence Programs

Through collaboration with local domestic violence programs, officers can gain valuable knowledge about community resources available to victims of domestic violence. Officers providing information on support resources in the community to victims/survivors will increase the likelihood that battered women will follow through with prosecution. Making referrals to local domestic violence programs will present an opportunity for survivors to receive follow-up support after an officer has been called to the home. In addition, victim/survivors feel that law enforcement take their situations more seriously when referrals are made.

Survivors & the Courts

Participants were asked to share their experiences with the justice system generally and more specifically experiences they've had when interacting with key members of the justice system: judges, prosecutors, magistrates, and legal advocates.

- Documentation of abuse
- Assistance with civil protection orders

When discussing the negatives of their experiences with legal advocates, participants gave the following answers:

- More advocates are needed in court
- More advocates with experience are needed

Survivors & Justice System Advocacy Offered By Domestic Violence Programs

In response to the increase of battered women involved in the justice system, domestic violence shelters have been successful in establishing programs that have specifically trained individuals to offer emotional support, education about the court process, and assist battered women in understanding their options.

TABLE 18: LEGAL ADVOCACY

| Legal Advocacy | # of Groups | % of Groups |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Available | 7 | 77% |
| Not Available | 0 | 0% |
| Helpful | 5 | 55% |
| Not Helpful | 0 | 0% |
| Mixed | 2 | 22% |

When asked about their experiences with legal advocates, most group participants agreed they the support of an advocate through that process was helpful. When discussing the positives of their experiences with legal advocates participants gave the following answers:

- Explanation of the court process
- Assistance throughout the court process
- Advocates listening skills
- Assistance with finding an attorney

Future Directions/Implications

Maintain Existing Legal Advocacy Programs

Since participants have agreed that they find the presence of legal advocates throughout the court process helpful and supportive, domestic violence programs should continue current programming and work to make additional enhancements such as researching funding opportunities to increase the number of advocates available to assist battered women in the courts.

Expand Program Capacity

Domestic violence programs should ensure adequate training and consider a longer shadowing program for inexperienced advocates. ODVN has developed specific training to enhance the skills of justice system advocates. ODVN also convenes regional legal advocacy caucuses for continuing education and networking.

The Criminal Justice System: Survivor Experiences with Judges and Prosecutors

"I'll go down to the police department or something to file a complaint, and they'll say, 'Well you have to go do that with the prosecuting attorney.' You get to the prosecutor, they take the paper [police report] but they don't do nothing."

55.4% of the participants in our focus groups indicated that they had sought criminal charges or criminal protection orders. In sharing their experiences about the criminal process, participants discussed inconsistent responses from key members of the criminal justice system: judges and prosecutors.

Participants reported feeling verbally revictimized throughout their criminal court cases. The most frequently reported complaint was feeling blamed by judges and prosecutors for the violence in their lives or for not just leaving the abuser. Participants reported feeling that they had been given misinformation about the court process or forced to cooperate in programs they did not feel were their best options for safety. In addition, many participants reported that they were not given information regarding community services and supports.

TABLE 19: PROSECUTOR INTERACTIONS

| Prosecutor Interactions | # of Groups | % of Groups |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Helpful | 0 | 0% |
| Not Helpful | 8 | 89% |
| Mixed | 1 | 11% |

TABLE 20: JUDGE INTERACTIONS

| Judge Interactions | # of Groups | % of Groups |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Helpful | 1 | 11% |
| Not Helpful | 8 | 89% |
| Mixed | 0 | 0% |

Six out of nine groups (66%) had members who reported that they had concerns with prosecutors reducing or dismissing of charges against their abusers.

When asked about interactions with key members of the criminal justice system all nine focus groups (100%) had women who reported that their interactions with prosecutors didn't further their ability to get free of abusive relationships. Eight out of 9 groups (89%) also had women who felt that interactions with judges in criminal court cases were revictimizing.

TABLE 21: CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM EXPERIENCE

| Criminal Justice Experience | # of Groups | % of Groups |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Concerns with Dual arrest and arrest of victim | 8 | 89% |
| Concerns with Reducing or Dismissing Charges | 6 | 66% |
| Concerns with accessing affordable legal representation | 4 | 44% |

When discussing barriers in the criminal justice process, participants also discussed the inability to get prosecutors to prosecute for violations of the order.

"They told me if he violates it, they told me to call the police. If I call the police and can't get through then call his parole officer. I call his parole officer and she was like, 'Well, there is nothing I can do, all I can do is talk to him.'"

"...I got a protection order one time and he said it doesn't matter. It was just a piece of paper. Whatever he was going to do he is going to do it."

prosecutor] said 'come on, he's beating the crap out of you and you are going to sit there and tell me he didn't do anything to you. Well the next time you'll be dead and that will teach you a lesson. That is exactly what that man said to me... and nobody deserves to be talked to like that."

Participants described the following experiences with prosecutors and judges participants as helpful:

- The prosecutor referred them to the domestic violence program
- The prosecutor met with them about the case
- The prosecutor called to tell them about change in the hearing date
- The judge sanctioned the abuser in what she felt was an appropriate way

Participants described the following experiences with prosecutors and judges as not helpful:

- Prosecutors do not pursue protection order violations
- Prosecutors and judges blamed them for not leaving the abusive relationship
- Charges were dismissed against their abusers if they do not cooperate by testifying
- Abusers were released on a recognizant bond, which they said was dangerous for them
- There are few sanctions for their abusers in the sentencing process

"The prosecutor out of ___ area, he needs to stop yelling. He kept yelling at me and yelling at me. He did that...he completely beat me down... the prosecutor, he made me feel like total white trash... I was bawling my head off but he [the

Future Directions/Implications

Increase Focus on Abuser Accountability and Victim Safety

Given the seriousness and potential lethality of domestic violence abuser, abuser accountability and victim safety should be the main focus of all criminal proceedings. Effective prosecution of charges is critical to the protection and restoration of both the victim and community. Prosecutors should carefully consider the interests of the state and the victim to identify prosecution strategies that preserve both. It is essential that victims are advised of their rights in criminal processes. It is also important that victims are advised of their role in the criminal proceedings as well as the role of the prosecutor. Prosecutors should notify victims of all charges, conditions of release, and procedures for enforcing those conditions. Prosecutor's should also notify victims of an alleged offender's release and update them on any upcoming court proceedings. Victims should be involved in decisions regarding charges, plea negotiations, sentencing, and pre and post trial conditions of release.

Increase Focus on Evidence-Based Prosecution

Evidence-based prosecution is recognized as best practice around the

country. When deciding to go forward without the victims testimony, prosecutors should consider whether adequate corroborating evidence exists. If a case goes forward without a victim, it should be explained why and how that can be done. Prosecutors should also consider if compelling a victim to testify will place her in greater jeopardy.

Increase Referrals to Domestic Violence Programs

Providing valuable information about how community resources can be accessed is vital to improving how helpful the justice system is to battered women. Prosecutors could work closely with domestic violence programs on establishing a domestic violence protocol.

Ensure Effective Sanctions While Ensuring Due Process

Intervention programs for offenders need to be evaluated to ensure their effectiveness and accountability to the court. Batterer intervention program sanctions can be combined with other sanctions such as probation, no contact orders, community service, or incarceration.

Increase Domestic Violence Education for Judges and Prosecutors

Continued education that includes general information on domestic violence, available resources for victims, and abuser manipulation of court processes could equip prosecutors and judges with a heightened understanding of abuse and also with strategies on how to increase abuser accountability and promote victim safety. Inviting local domestic violence programs to co-sponsor educational workshops specifically for judges and prosecutors

could assist in increasing domestic violence awareness.

Increase Collaboration Between Prosecutors and Domestic Violence Programs

Community based advocates can provide victims with myriad of services including emergency shelter, emotional support, and safety planning. Advocates can also support victims in communicating their needs and wishes to the prosecutor.

Reconsider Dual Arrest Cases

Dual arrest cases need to be assessed so that the primary physical aggressor is determined. Primary physical aggressor assessment can assist prosecutors in determining appropriate charges where both the victim and perpetrator have been arrested.

Pursue Prosecution of TPO/CPO Violations

Pursuing charges against abusers who refuse to follow a court order, works to ensure battered women the protection granted by the order. If violations are repeatedly ignored the safety of battered women is at even greater risk. Violations of protection orders are often considered a warning sign to increased violence or lethality.

The Civil Justice System: Survivor Experiences with Judges and Magistrates

Survivors are accessing the civil justice system at very high rates. 47% of participants accessed the courts for civil protection orders, divorces, or custody issues.

Participants brought up several key barriers in sharing their experiences through the civil process:

- Judges/magistrates who blamed them for the violence in their lives
- Abusers using court proceedings to further revictimize them or to punish them for seeking help
- Difficulty accessing affordable legal representation
- Unsupervised visitation
- Judges/magistrates not considering domestic violence when ruling on custody or visitation cases
- Difficulty obtaining a protection order
- Poor child support enforcement

"...He destroyed everything on my property, in my house, beat the crap out of me, left me, put me in the hospital and I couldn't get a protection order... So you're telling me that it's alright for him to come to my house, do what he wants to me, leave, and never spend time in jail."

Table 22: CPOs

| Civil Protection Orders | # of Groups | % of Groups |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| CPO/TPO Issued | 9 | 100% |
| CPO/TPO Denied | 6 | 67% |
| CPO/TPO Violations | 9 | 100% |

Civil protection orders are an additional legal remedy battered women use to stop domestic violence. However, women in 6 out of 9 groups reported that when they attempted to get a protection order it was denied for reasons that were unclear to them.

"Anytime I tried [to get a protection order] they end up turning me down."

Although denials of orders were problematic for some participants in the focus group, the pursuit of violations for others who had the orders was problematic as well. Women in all 9 groups reported that their abusers violated their protection orders.

The ability to obtain the protection order was considered a positive experience for women in the groups; however, if a CPO was subsequently violated and the abuser was not held accountable, this led to ambivalent feelings about the courts for participants.

When discussing what the help they needed but could not find, several participants listed the following:

- Protection for their children from their abusive fathers
- Better child support enforcement
- Better access to affordable legal representatives
- Enforcement of protection order violations

Future Directions/Implications

Increase Collaboration with Community Partners

No single entity in the justice system can succeed in increasing the safety of victims without the coordinated efforts of law enforcement, prosecutors, domestic violence programs, and other community resources. Communities most successful in addressing domestic violence have established a coordinated community response councils. Courts are encouraged to participate in these efforts within reasonable limits to improve the administration of justice.

Consider Continuances that are Request to Obtain Counsel

To allow both parties the opportunity to have their legal interests represented the court should carefully consider a request by a pro se petitioner when the respondent appears at the civil protection order full hearing with legal representation.

Increase Training for Civil Justice System Personnel

Domestic violence is a new field in American jurisprudence with statutory law, case law, and legal research being developed and implemented in the past two decades. Education in the field of domestic violence will assist judges and magistrates with the complex decision their making with present domestic violence cases. On-going training in domestic violence for court personnel would help to ensure courtroom security, victim protection, and increase referrals to community based victim services.

Increase Legal Representation for Victim/Survivors

A significant number of participants discussed difficulty obtaining protection orders. A portion of these denials may be due to inappropriate pro se cases coming before the court. Increased representation of victim/survivors would help to sort out victims not eligible for protection orders. In addition, advocates may be able to better prepare victims for the court process.

The Civil Justice System: Divorce Experience

“I’m on a waiting list
now for a divorce.”

Results/Analysis

With 74% of the participants indicating that they were married, divorced, or separated, it is clear that marriage is no protection from abuse in homes. Battered women are experiencing abuse in their marital relationships and other partnerships. Please see Table 23 for a full description of participants’ experiences obtaining divorces.

When discussing divorce, 6 of 9 groups (67%) described their divorce process as “difficult”. The difficulties experienced were similar across geographic locations and race. Problems encountered ranged from difficulty finding adequate legal representation to lengthy divorce proceedings that were draining financially and emotionally.

“I’ve actually called
legal aid [to obtain a
divorce] but...they have
a waiting a list.” “They
don’t have enough help
right now so try us back
in six months.”

While discussing divorce, the majority of the groups (55%) mentioned issues of child custody as a barrier to obtaining a divorce. Some group participants mentioned that their partners continued to victimize them through prolonging divorce/custody proceedings, and others reported that court ordered visitation and other court dates provided their abusive partners with opportunities to further harass or abuse them.

**TABLE 23: DIVORCE
EXPERIENCE**

| Divorce Experience | # of Groups | % of Groups |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Difficult | 6 | 67% |
| Child Custody Problems | 5 | 55% |
| Poor Child Support Enforcement | 5 | 55% |
| Costs | 4 | 44% |
| Good Child Support Enforcement | 1 | 11% |

In addition, several groups (66%) discussed child support enforcement as a facet of their experience with divorce or custody issues. Five out of nine groups (55%) reported that their experience with child support enforcement was poor. Understandably, poor child support enforcement leads to economic hardship for battered women and their children. It’s important to note that 1 out 9 (11%) groups reported positive experiences with child support enforcement, so this system is working for some survivors.

Four out of nine groups (44%) indicated that the cost of obtaining a divorce was prohibitive to them, leading some women to remain in abusive marriages after they desired to leave. This indicates that many women were *willing* to get a divorce from their abusive partners before they were *able* to do so.

“[he] is trying to
financially hurt me.
Doing a damn good job
of it. Lawyers cost a lot,
don’t they?”

In one of the focus group areas, the free legal services in the community did not have the resources to assist with divorce and custody issues and so gave battered women a “divorce packet” with information about how to represent themselves in divorce/custody

proceedings. This is obviously inadequate for battered women who are facing additional harassment and abuse by their batterers through the court system.

Future Implications/Directions

Improve Legal Representation in Divorce/Custody Proceedings

Since 67% of women described their divorce experience as “difficult”, it is important to remedy those conditions that impede battered women from gaining safety away from their abusive relationships. A major concern for group participants was the lack of adequate legal representation. With so many women in the groups having low incomes, it is difficult for them to afford private attorneys with expertise in the dynamics of abuse. Often women are turning to overburdened, low cost legal services to provide assistance in these very complex divorce/custody proceedings. There is a clear need for improved legal representation for battered women in the civil court system. This could be addressed by increased funding for free or low cost legal services in communities to allow these agencies to fully address the legal needs of survivors.

Increase Education of Judges, Magistrates, and Private Attorneys in Relation to Domestic Violence

Because divorce and custody proceedings are often used to further harass and abuse survivors, increased education about domestic violence dynamics is needed by those court officials who interact with survivors. This education should include a description of general domestic violence

dynamics, typical victim responses to domestic violence, and the use of the court system by perpetrators of abuse to further victimize their partners. This would increase the effectiveness of the civil justice system in responding to the needs of survivors and their children.

Improve Child Support Enforcement

With a full 67% of groups choosing to discuss their experience with child support enforcement during the project, this is clearly an area that deserves attention in regard to battered women and their children. Since batterers often continue economic abuse beyond separation by withholding child support, aggressive child support enforcement is needed to adequately provide for families who are rebuilding after the experience of domestic violence.

Increase Awareness of the Implications of Marriage Promotion Policies

This project clearly shows that many battered women experienced abuse in their marriages. This has important implications as many victim/survivors will be encountering marriage promotion policies and practices when interacting with community systems. Service providers must be aware that these policies and practices may work to increase barriers to safety faced by many survivors of domestic violence.

Other Issues Important to Survivors

Results/Analysis

At the end of each group session, the facilitator asked the participants, “What haven’t we talked about today that you would like us to know?” This question was designed to elicit information that the interviewers did not consider asking and to better identify the issues victim/survivors that feel are a priority for them. There were a wide variety of answers to this question by the groups, and Table 24 summarizes the topics that were most often reported by the groups. For a full listing of all group responses to this question please see the appendix.

The most popular response to this question was that survivors feel that there needs to be improved education in the community and government about domestic violence and its effects on survivors and their children.

“The children need to be taken away from the violent ones and protected. Not just us women need to be protected. Most importantly the children, cause they have to grow up with it.”

“You know, just because we’ve removed our self, our children are still in that situation.”

Eight out of nine groups described a need for this increased community education. Survivors described their difficulty seeking and receiving assistance due to lack of community awareness of domestic violence and the

appropriate way to respond to violence in families. Participants described multiple efforts to access support in their communities which were unsuccessful due to lack of awareness of domestic violence by community members and/or inappropriate community response.

**TABLE 24: OTHER ISSUES
IMPORTANT TO SURVIVORS**

| Important Topics Not Discussed In Group | # of Groups | % of Groups |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| More DV Education for Government & Community | 8 | 89% |
| More Education & Resources for Children About Abuse | 7 | 77% |
| Emotional Abuse Awareness | 6 | 66% |
| More Advertising of Services | 6 | 66% |
| Support Group & Counseling for Children | 5 | 55% |
| More Women Awareness of DV and Help | 4 | 44% |
| Protect Children From Abuse Fathers | 4 | 44% |
| Larger & Better Shelters | 3 | 33% |
| Lack of Help From Children Services | 2 | 22% |
| More Money for DV Programs | 2 | 22% |

In addition, the participants were very concerned about the effect of domestic violence on their children. Seventy seven percent (7 of 9 groups) indicated that there needs to be additional education and resources for children related to domestic violence. Participants indicated that this education should focus on improving awareness of “red flags” of abusive relationships for teenagers and younger children. Several groups (55%) also felt that there should be additional assistance for children whose parents experienced domestic violence in the

form of counseling and shelter programming.

The next responses to this question again focused on improved awareness of domestic violence by both survivors and the community. Sixty-seven percent of groups felt that there needs to be increased awareness of emotional abuse as a form of domestic violence. Many group members identified that they had not known that their experience of emotional abuse could be considered domestic violence and that emotional abuse is not taken seriously by service providers as a legitimate form of abuse.

“The verbal and mental abuse is very, very bad. That needs to be recognized.”

“About mental and verbal abuse...they threw that out of court...there is no proof.”

Further, 6 out of 9 groups felt that there was not enough awareness in the community about the services offered by domestic violence programs. Many participants reported that they had not heard of the domestic violence program in their community until they had experienced abuse for a significant length of time. Additionally, those that had heard of the domestic violence program, often only knew of one type of service offered: shelter. If the women did not want shelter at that particular time, they were not aware of other services that the program could offer to them.

Finally, survivors discussed the need for additional protection for their children from battering parents. Frustration was expressed in 4 of 9 (44%) of the groups

that children were forced to continue visitation and/or were subjected to shared parenting court orders with a person who was abusive to them and their mothers. Participants expressed fear for their children’s safety and welfare when interacting with battering partners, and several survivors mentioned that they continued in the relationship with the batterer to protect their children from unsupervised time with him.

Future Implications/Directions

Increased Community Education and Awareness

Several barriers related to lack of community education and awareness of domestic violence were present for survivors as they tried to seek assistance for domestic violence. Because survivors reach out to several different resources for assistance from friends and family to counselors and clergy, a broad based community awareness of and intolerance for domestic violence is necessary to combat this epidemic in communities. Community awareness efforts continue to be vitally important to assist survivors and children.

Participants mentioned several areas in particular for improved awareness efforts. Teen dating violence awareness and programming was viewed as very important by the participants, as was general domestic violence awareness for children of younger ages. In addition, both survivors and community members could benefit from improved awareness related to the existence and effects of emotional abuse as a form of domestic violence. Community awareness campaigns that highlight the seriousness of emotional abuse would be beneficial

in improving response to survivors and their children.

Increase Awareness of Domestic Violence Program Services

Since a significant number of participants indicated that they had not been aware of the assistance offered by local domestic violence programs, there needs to be an effort to improve the visibility of domestic violence programs in communities. Both shelter and other services need to be widely advertised. Earlier awareness of such services may have allowed participants to seek safety before their experience of abuse escalated and so further protected themselves and their children.

Improve the Response to Children from Violent Families

It is clear from the group discussions that children's programming in shelter and counseling for children is of paramount importance in meeting the needs of survivors. The majority (88%) of participants had one or more children in their homes. This indicates that services for battered women must address the needs of their children as well to comprehensively address the needs of victims and provide safety. Many domestic violence programs currently provide programming for children as part of their shelter services. It is important to keep funding levels

high enough that programming for long term services for children who witness violence is available. In addition, ongoing collaboration and education efforts with child protective services should be a priority for domestic violence programs and other systems interacting with families experiencing domestic violence.

Improve Protection of Children from Offending Parents

The effect of battering on the parent-child relationship with both the offending and non-offending parent needs to be further understood and addressed by all systems that interact with families experiencing violence, particularly the justice systems and child protective services. Focus group participants discussed the harm their children experience from their abusive parent during visitations and the opportunity visitations provide the abuser to continue to harass and abuse them. In addition to increased understanding of the harm done to children by battering parents, these children need protection when interacting with offending parents. One way of providing this protection is to improve funding for supervised visitation centers.

Appendix A:

Focus Group Tables

WHO ARE SURVIVORS TALKING TO?

| Survivors Talked To | Total # of Groups that Mentioned the Topic | Total % of Groups that Mentioned the Topic |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Police | 9 | 100% |
| Shelter/DV Program | 9 | 100% |
| Friends/Friends | 8 | 88% |
| Church/Minister | 7 | 77% |
| Therapist | 7 | 77% |
| Doctors | 6 | 67% |
| Hotline | 5 | 55% |
| Children Services | 3 | 33% |
| His Family | 3 | 33% |
| Neighbor | 3 | 33% |
| Someone in Criminal Justice System | 3 | 33% |
| Case Worker | 1 | 11% |
| Family Services | 1 | 11% |
| Job Placement | 1 | 11% |
| Military Official | 1 | 11% |
| Other Community Service | 1 | 11% |
| United Way | 1 | 11% |

HELP THAT WAS NEEDED BUT NOT FOUND

| Help that was need but not Found | Total # of Groups that Mentioned the Topic | Total % of Groups that Mentioned the Topic |
|--|--|--|
| Parental Education on Supporting Children Who Witness Violence | 6 | 67% |
| Affordable & Quality Legal Support | 5 | 55% |
| Financial Support | 5 | 55% |
| Better Treatment & Help from Police & Courts | 4 | 44% |
| A Solution to Stalking & Violence After Leaving | 2 | 22% |
| Child Support | 2 | 22% |
| Counseling | 2 | 22% |
| Safe and Affordable Long-term Housing | 2 | 22% |
| Support Groups | 2 | 22% |
| Better Larger Shelters | 1 | 11% |
| Child Care | 1 | 11% |
| Child Counseling & Education | 1 | 11% |
| Community Response | 1 | 11% |
| Health Insurance | 1 | 11% |
| Help Finding a Job | 1 | 11% |
| Immigration Support | 1 | 11% |
| Protection for children from Abusive Father | 1 | 11% |
| Transportation | 1 | 11% |

SHELTER EXPERIENCE

HOTLINE EXPERIENCE

| Hotline Experience Helpfulness | Total # of Groups that Mentioned the Topic | Total % of Groups that Mentioned the Topic |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Helpful | 5 | 55% |
| Not Helpful | 0 | 0% |
| Mixed | 3 | 33% |

HOTLINE POSITIVES

| Positives of Hotline Experience | Total # of Groups that Mentioned the Topic | Total % of Groups that Mentioned the Topic |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Listened & Let Them Talk | 5 | 55% |
| Less Embarrassing | 2 | 33% |
| Came to get her | 1 | 11% |

HOTLINE NEGATIVES

| Negatives of Hotline Experience | Total # of Groups that Mentioned the Topic | Total % of Groups that Mentioned the Topic |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| None or Useless Referrals | 2 | 22% |
| Problems with Call Backs | 1 | 11% |

COUNSELING EXPERIENCE

| Individual Counseling in Shelter | Total # of Groups that Mentioned the Topic | Total % of Groups that Mentioned the Topic |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Available | 6 | 67% |
| Not Available | 1 | 11% |
| Helpful | 5 | 55% |
| Not Helpful | 0 | 0% |
| Mixed | 1 | 11% |

| Counseling Outside of Shelter | Total # of Groups that Mentioned the Topic | Total % of Groups that Mentioned the Topic |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Available | 5 | 55% |
| Not Available | 0 | 0% |
| Helpful | 2 | 22% |
| Not Helpful | 0 | 0% |
| Mixed | 2 | 22% |

WHAT MADE IT HARDER OR EASIER TO STAY?

| What Made it Harder or Easier to Stay | Total # of Groups that Mentioned the Topic | Total % of Groups that Mentioned the Topic |
|--|--|--|
| Finances | 8 | 89% |
| Children | 7 | 77% |
| Afraid for Life or Other Fears | 6 | 67% |
| Hope/Belief that things would change | 6 | 67% |
| Familiarity & Security | 4 | 44% |
| Transportation | 4 | 44% |
| Isolation | 3 | 33% |
| Lack of Abuse Knowledge & Helpful Information | 3 | 33% |
| Medical Issues: His Health | 3 | 33% |
| Sense of Commitment / Love or Sympathy for Him | 3 | 33% |
| Child Care | 2 | 22% |
| Employer Insensitivity | 2 | 22% |
| Housing Situation | 2 | 22% |
| Lack of family support | 2 | 22% |
| Pride | 2 | 22% |
| Abused Only When Leaving or Left | 1 | 11% |
| Guilt or Belief the Violence was her fault | 1 | 11% |
| His Contacts in the Area | 1 | 11% |
| Immigration Status | 1 | 11% |
| Religious Reasons | 1 | 11% |
| Self-Esteem | 1 | 11% |
| Worried about Pets | 1 | 11% |

CIVIL & CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM INFORMATION

JUSTICE SYSTEM ADVOCACY

| Legal Advocacy | Total # of Groups that Mentioned the Topic | Total % of Groups that Mentioned the Topic |
|----------------|--|--|
| Available | 7 | 77% |
| Not Available | 0 | 0% |
| Helpful | 5 | 55% |
| Not Helpful | 0 | 0% |
| Mixed | 2 | 22% |

Legal Advocacy Positives

| Legal Advocates Positives | Total # of Groups that Mentioned the Topic | % of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| Helped with CPO | 3 | 33% |
| Clearly Explained Court Process | 1 | 11% |
| Documented Bruises | 1 | 11% |
| Helped her an Attorney | 1 | 11% |
| Helped her throughout the court process | 1 | 11% |
| Helped with Divorce | 1 | 11% |
| Listening | 1 | 11% |

Legal Advocacy Negatives

| Legal Advocates Negatives | # of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic | % of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Need more advocates | 2 | 22% |
| Inexperience advocates | 1 | 11% |

Survivor issues with Criminal Justice System

| Criminal Justice Issues | #of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic | % of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic |
|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Concerns with Dual arrest and arrest of victim | 8 | 89% |
| Concerns with Reducing or Dismissing Charges | 6 | 66% |
| Concerns with Poor Legal Aide Support | 4 | 44% |

Divorce Experience

| Divorce Experience | #of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic | % of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Difficult | 6 | 67% |
| Custody Issues | 5 | 55% |
| Poor Child Support Enforcement | 5 | 55% |
| Costs Issues | 4 | 44% |
| Good Child Support Enforcement | 1 | 11% |

CPO Issues

| Divorce Experience CPO Issues | # of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic | % of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| CPO/TPO Issued | 9 | 100% |
| CPO/TPO Denied | 6 | 67% |
| CPO/TPO Violations | 9 | 100% |

Prosecutor Experiences

| Prosecutor Interactions | # of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic | % of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Helpful | 0 | 0% |
| Not Helpful | 8 | 89% |
| Mixed | 1 | 11% |

Judge Experiences

| Judge Interactions | # of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic | % of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Helpful | 1 | 11% |
| Not Helpful | 8 | 89% |
| Mixed | 0 | 0% |

Magistrate Experiences

| Magistrate Interactions | # of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic | % of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Helpful | 0 | 0% |
| Not Helpful | 3 | 33% |
| Mixed | 1 | 11% |

Law Enforcement Experiences

Police Interactions

| Those who haven't would you call the Police | #of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic | % of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic |
|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Yes | 1 | 11% |
| No | 7 | 77% |
| Mixed Response | 0 | 0% |

Police Interactions

| Those who Have Called the Police was it Helpful | #of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic | % of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic |
|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Yes | 0 | 0% |
| No | 6 | 67% |
| Mixed Response | 5 | 55% |

ABUSER ACCOUNTABILITY

What should happen to abusive partners?

| What should happen to abusive partners | # of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic | % of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic |
|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Jail | 9 | 100% |
| Rehabilitation & Counseling | 9 | 100% |
| Stronger Legal Ramifications & Accountability | 7 | 77% |
| Experience the same pain | 6 | 66% |
| Get a Job & /OR Life | 4 | 44% |
| Self Recognition & Accountability | 4 | 44% |
| Leave her Alone | 3 | 33% |
| Loss of Parental Rights | 3 | 33% |
| Public Identification/Registry | 3 | 33% |
| Surgical Intervention | 3 | 33% |
| Alone for the Rest of His Life | 1 | 11% |

ISSUES IMPORTANT TO SURVIVORS

Important issues survivor felt needed to be brought up but was not asked about by facilitators in group session

| Important Topics Not Discussed In Group | Total # of Groups that Mentioned the Topic | % of Groups Who Mentioned the Topic |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| More DV Education for Government & Community | 8 | 89% |
| More Education & Resources for Children About Abuse | 7 | 77% |
| Emotional Abuse Awareness | 6 | 66% |
| More Advertising of Services | 6 | 66% |
| Support Group & Counseling for Children | 5 | 55% |
| More Women Awareness of DV and Help | 4 | 44% |
| Protect Children From Abuse Fathers | 4 | 44% |
| Larger & Better Shelters | 3 | 33% |
| Lack of Help From Children Services | 2 | 22% |
| More Money for DV Programs | 2 | 22% |
| After Shelter Support Groups | 1 | 11% |
| Attorney Revictimization | 1 | 11% |
| Better Child Advocates | 1 | 11% |
| Better Child Care for Battered Women | 1 | 11% |
| Child Support | 1 | 11% |
| DV Education in Ethnic Communities | 1 | 11% |
| More Patience & Sympathy from Criminal Justice System toward Survivors | 1 | 11% |
| More Support Finding Jobs | 1 | 11% |
| More Training for Criminal Justice Personnel | 1 | 11% |
| More Women involved in Changing the Laws | 1 | 11% |
| Poor Media Portrayals of DV Survivors | 1 | 11% |
| Shelter Staff Revictimization | 1 | 11% |
| Understanding Court & Court System | 1 | 11% |

Appendix B:

Focus Group Regions Map

Focus Group Regions



Individual interviews from a combination of Central, Northeast, and Southwest areas

Appendix C:

Focus Group Questions & Forms

Focus Group Questions:

1. Did you talk to anyone or seek help about what was going on? What did they do/say? How did you feel about what they said or did?

2. As a survivor of domestic violence, do you feel that calling the local domestic violence hotline is helpful?
 - a. If yes, why?

 - b. If no, why?

 - c. Do you feel that using other services that the domestic violence program provides is an option? (Give examples and ask directly)

 - d. If yes, why?

 - e. If no, why?

3. Would you call the police? Do you feel that calling the police is helpful?
 - a. If yes, why?

 - b. If no, why?

 - c. Did you ever go through any other court process related to domestic violence (i.e. file for divorce, get a Civil Protection Order, paternity)?

 - d. Overall (with all the examples listed above) was your experience in the justice systems helpful to you?

4. Who else would/or did you call in the community for help?
 - a. What was your experience like?
5. If you have thought about leaving or have left, what made it hard for you to get help or made it easier to stay?
6. What do you think should happen to your partner?
7. What help did you need that you couldn't find?

Questions for Women of Color Specifically:

1. What, if anything, made it harder or easier to get help in your relationship as African American/Latina/Asian women?

Final Question for Everyone:

1. What haven't we talked about today?

Focus Group Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Information

This form is voluntary. We are asking for this information only for statistical purposes and will not use this information to identify your participation in this group in any way.

Age: ___ 18-24 ___ 45-54
 ___ 25-34 ___ 55+
 ___ 35-44

Race (please check **ALL** that apply):

___ White/Caucasian ___ Black/African American
___ Latina/Hispanic ___ Asian/Asian Pacific American
___ Native American ___ Unknown
___ I do not feel that these categories apply to me. I identify as _____.

Annual Family Income:

___ \$0-12,000 ___ \$25,001-\$35,000
___ \$12,001-18,000 ___ \$35,001+
___ \$18,001-25,000

Have you ever received public assistance (i.e. welfare or food stamps)?

___ Yes ___ No

Marital Status:

___ Married ___ Divorced ___ Single ___ Widowed ___ Partnered

Do you have any children: ___ Yes ___ No

If yes, what are their ages? _____

If yes, has Children's Services ever been involved with your family?

_____ Yes _____ No

In connection with your experience of domestic violence, what, if any, services have you used?
(Please check all that apply)

Shelter or Domestic Violence Program ___

Legal system ___

 Criminal (charges or temporary protective orders) ___

 Civil (divorce, custody, or civil protection orders) ___

Medical/Hospital ___

Counseling services ___

Church or Clergy ___

Other community services ___

If so, please list:

Confidentiality Agreement and Release Form

I, _____, have agreed to participate in the Focus Group Project led by the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN). As a participant in the focus group discussion, I understand that all the information shared by myself and other participants is confidential. I agree to keep all information regarding the discussion and the participants confidential.

I understand that the goal of this project is to gather information about and improve service delivery in my area and not to focus on any individual participant or agency.

I understand that the focus group discussion will be tape recorded and that any information that ODVN obtains through my participation will be used to compile a written report which will be released to the public. I understand that my name and the names of any participating individuals or agencies that are discussed will not be released or disseminated in any way. I also understand that particular statements I make as a participant in the discussion may be quoted in the written report and released to the public but that my name and the names of any individuals and agencies I discuss will not be used in the report.

By signing below, I hereby agree to maintain the confidentiality of the information that I receive as a participant in the focus group discussion.