

# **Men's Formal Help-Seeking Experiences Following Female Perpetrated Intimate Partner Violence**

by

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# Approval

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## **Abstract**

Traditionally, IPV has been viewed as a gendered phenomenon, with a focus on women. However, victimization surveys and emerging research have started to explore the experiences of male victims, particularly in relation to their reluctance to seek help and their predominantly negative experiences upon doing so. To expand on the literature, this qualitative study is exploratory in nature and aims to better understand the formal help-seeking experiences of male victims of severe female perpetrated IPV. A total of 389 male victims responded to an open-ended qualitative survey question administered in the United States. Thematic analysis of their responses was conducted, and five main themes and a number of sub-themes were identified, namely: the context of formal help-seeking and types of abuse experienced, negative experiences with police, courts, and IPV victim agencies, and barriers to formal help-seeking. The gender paradigm theory and stigmatization theories informed the discussion of the results, and ultimately it was found that male victims who seek formal help report overwhelmingly negative experiences as a result of societal expectations surrounding gender roles and hegemonic masculinity, and male victims who do not seek formal help report barriers related to internalized stigma, shame, and embarrassment in their reasoning. Various recommendations for policy and practice are discussed in light of these findings, and issues of generalizability are taken into consideration.

**Keywords:** intimate partner violence; male victimization; formal help-seeking; gender paradigm; stigmatization; hegemonic masculinity

## Dedication

*I dedicate this thesis to my mother, father, and grandmothers. Thank you for your endless support, encouragement, and for instilling in me the importance of education at a young age.*

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## List of Acronyms

IPV

Intimate Partner Violence

MEPA

Men's Experiences with Partner Aggression Project

# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a global health problem that affects many, regardless of socioeconomic, cultural, or religious background. It is defined as violence or aggression that occurs in an intimate relationship and includes current and former spouses or dating partners (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). IPV varies in "frequency and severity and occurs on a continuum, ranging from one episode that might or might not have lasting impact, to chronic and severe episodes over a period of years" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). Types of behaviour can be physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, or economic in nature, and may include actions or threats of actions (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018).

IPV is a public health issue that has devastating effects on victims, families, and communities, going so far as to costing the Government of the United States approximately \$5.8 billion US dollars in 1995 alone, or \$15.6 billion when converted to 2018 dollars (Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, 2003). Costs associated with IPV include policing costs, legal aid, court fees, divorce lawyers, child protection systems, healthcare and visits to the emergency department, lost wages, damaged property, moving expenses, funeral expenses, shelters and transition homes, crisis lines, and many other factors (Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, 2003). Comparatively, IPV cost the Government of Canada an estimated amount of \$7.4 billion dollars in 2009, and the Government of the United Kingdom an estimated 5.5 billion euros in 2009, further illustrating the global nature of the problem (Coy & Kelly, 2011; Zhang, Hoddenbagh, McDonald, & Scrim, 2012).

Traditionally, IPV has been viewed as a gendered phenomenon, in which the majority of victims are female (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). As a result, the literature and research on victimization against women by intimate partners is saturated, viewing violence against female partners through the lens of the socially constructed patriarchy (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Johnson, 1995; Sugarman & Frankel, 1996). Comparatively, the academic literature on male victims of female perpetrated IPV is sparse. Emerging research on the recent gender symmetry theory has suggested that men and women

perpetrate IPV at relatively equal rates, but male victims are simply more reluctant than female victims to seek help and disclose their experiences of abuse due to dominant societal perceptions of masculine gender roles (Archer, 2000; Chan, 2012; Fiebert, 1997; Hamel & Nicholls, 2007; Kessler, Molnar, Feurer, & Appelbaum, 2001; Pleck, Pleck, Grossman, & Bart, 1978; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1993; Steinmetz, 1978; Straton, 1994; Straus, 2011). When men do seek help, they often report negative experiences, such as being ridiculed, accused of perpetrating violence, or refused help (Cook, 2009; Douglas & Hines, 2011; Machado, Santos, Graham-Kevan, & Matos, 2017; McCarrick, Davis-McCabe, Hirst-Winthrop, 2016).

There exists several important gaps in the current literature on male victims of IPV and their help-seeking experiences. Firstly, few of the existing studies on help-seeking have included male victims in their sampling frame, and instead they have drawn samples from women's shelters and the National Violence against Women Survey, entirely excluding male experiences from the research (Dutton, 2006a; Dutton, 2006b; Dutton & Nicholls, 2005; McCarrick, Davis-McCabe, Hirst-Winthrop, 2016). Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, most existing studies have been quantitative in nature (Bell, Larsen, Goodman, & Dutton, 2013; Hines & Douglas, 2014; Hines & Douglas, 2015; Hines & Douglas, 2018; Hines, Douglas, & Berger, 2015). Although important in their role of providing numerical comparisons and statistical inferences, ultimately quantitative studies are incapable of providing a platform for male victims to voice their subjective experiences of severe abuse. Finally, the few qualitative studies that did explore male IPV victimization have had relatively small sample sizes, as is typically seen in a qualitative research framework (Cook, 2009; Machado, Santos, Graham-Kevan, & Matos, 2017; McCarrick, Davis-McCabe, Hirst-Winthrop, 2016).

The purpose of this thesis is to expand the research on the formal help-seeking experiences of male victims of severe IPV perpetrated by females. By engaging in a qualitative framework, this study aims to explore and understand the male victim's experience with the CJS and other formal resources through the lens of the gender paradigm and stigmatization theories. Additionally, this study aims to address the above-mentioned gaps in the literature: in particular, it focuses exclusively on male victims, utilizing a large sample size of 389 victims in the United States. However, it is important to acknowledge that this sample is unique in that most male victims of IPV do not seek formal-help, and as such the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all male

victims. Furthermore, the study is qualitative in nature, with the intent of providing male victims with the opportunity to voice their experiences of severe violent victimization. It is hoped that this study will add to the small amount of existing knowledge surrounding the experiences of male victims of IPV and assist in the reinforcement of a gender-inclusive approach to the current response to IPV in North America. The analysis of emerging themes from this exploratory study provides a strong foundation and direction from which to proceed to undertake future studies in this area of research.

This thesis includes a total of 8 chapters. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth examination of the types of IPV, dominant theories and typologies of IPV, and the health consequences of IPV. Chapter 3 discusses the formal responses to IPV, focusing exclusively on the policies and procedures employed by the police, the courts, and IPV victim agencies. Chapter 4 explores the gender paradigm theory and stigmatization theories with respect to male victim help-seeking behaviours, and the barriers to formal help-seeking. Chapter 5 discusses the research methodology used to conduct the current study, touching on the sampling frame used as well as coding practices. Chapter 6 presents key results and findings, while chapter 7 discusses the findings, considers implications and recommendations to improve the formal help-seeking experiences of male victims, and addresses study limitations and directions for future research. Finally, chapter 8 is the conclusion.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Intimate Partner Violence**

Chapter 2 begins by providing definitions for the various forms of IPV that exist. Additionally, it outlines the various theories and typologies that have traditionally been used to explain IPV, such as feminist theories, gender symmetry theory, and Johnson's typologies of IPV. Finally, it explores the health consequences for male victims of IPV.

#### **2.1. Definitions and Types of IPV**

IPV is characterized by "any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those in the relationship" (World Health Organization, 2012). Physical abuse refers to acts of physical violence, such as hitting, kicking, burning, or biting. Psychological and emotional abuse include but are not limited to intimidation, threats, insults, and humiliation (World Health Organization, 2012). Sexual abuse refers to any sexual violence, such as forced intercourse and any form of sexual coercion. Although less known, economic or financial abuse are also forms of IPV, and consist of controlling or restricting a partner's access to monetary resources, as well as preventing a partner from being employed or remaining employed (Larsen, 2016; World Health Organization, 2012).

One of the most pervasive forms of IPV is coercive controlling violence (CCV), which can be defined as actions and behaviours in intimate relationships in which the abuser attempts to strip the victim of their liberty (Stark, 2009; World Health Organization, 2012). CCV can manifest in the form of monitoring a partner's whereabouts through stalking and constant surveillance. CCV can also encompass intimidation, threats, 'gaslighting' games, removing access to a personal bank account, and controlling access to basic necessities such as food, sleep, sex, and transportation (Stark, 2009; World Health Organization, 2012). One study examined the consequences of CCV in 28 countries, concluding that victims experience a significant degradation in physical and psychological health, as well as in economic well-being (Nevala & Goodey, 2017). Furthermore, they found that European countries with the highest prevalence of CCV included Lithuania (16%), Bulgaria (11%), Hungary (11%), Latvia (10%), and

Romania (10%). The prevalence of CCV was positively correlated with rates of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse by an intimate partner, exemplifying how different types of IPV often overlap (Nevala & Goodey, 2017). Unfortunately, much like the study on IPV more generally, this CCV study included a strict sample of female victims, effectively excluding male victims from consideration.

Two more recent types of IPV identified include parental alienation and legal and administrative abuse. Parental alienation can be defined as a parent terrorizing their child by targeting the other parent until the child is reluctant or fearful to have a relationship with the targeted parent on the basis of untrue or exaggerated reasons (Harman, Kruk, & Hines, 2018). Ultimately parental alienation leads to the child rejecting the targeted parent and being chastened and shamed when they do show affection for the targeted parent (Harman, Kruk, & Hines, 2018). This form of IPV is intended to damage "the child's relationship with that parental figure, and/or to hurt the parental figures themselves" (p. 1276). Examples of parental alienation include repeatedly criticizing, insulting, or yelling at the targeted parent in front of the child, interfering with the child and targeted parent's contact, or continually undermining the child's relationship with the targeted parent (Harman, Kruk, & Hines, 2018).

Legal and administrative abuse is a form of IPV that occurs when female perpetrators of abuse knowingly and purposely manipulate legal resources to the detriment of their male partners (Tilbrook, Allan, & Dear, 2010). Examples of this form of abuse can include filing false accusations of abuse in an attempt to receive child custody or simply to cause additional monetary burden to their partner. This form of IPV occurs due to dominant gender stereotypes in society and within the legal system that assume men are the perpetrators of violence and females are the victims (Berger, Douglas, Hines, 2016; Douglas & Hines, 2010; Tilbrook, Allan, & Dear, 2010).

Importantly, the various forms of abuse discussed frequently overlap within an abusive relationship, where most victims experience physical violence accompanied by psychological, emotional, sexual, and controlling abuse (Larsen, 2016). For the purposes of this thesis IPV is defined as physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, financial, or controlling behaviours committed by an intimate partner. An intimate partner refers to a partner with whom the victim was involved in a physical, sexual, and emotional relationship, regardless of marital or living status, at the time of the abuse.



## **2.2. Theories and Typologies of IPV**

In order to truly touch upon the definition of IPV, it is crucial to consider the theoretical perspectives that mould that definition. Explanatory models of IPV can be organised into three general groups (Gelles, 1993). The first is individual models, which posits that violence perpetrated by abusers is caused by their individual psychological characteristics. The second touches on sociological models, whereby IPV is explored through a lens of social structure, and violence is believed to be caused by issues surrounding class, race, and family. The third is the socio-structural models, also known as the feminist model, and it focuses on gender inequality, patriarchal structures within society, and social attitudes to violence against women. Of these models, two overarching and opposing perspectives have taken hold of the research on IPV, with the feminist perspective being dominant, and the family violence perspective a more recent development. In order to understand the nature of IPV, it is imperative that one acquire an in-depth understanding of the two opposing perspectives and their diverging paradigms (Winstok & Straus, 2016).

### **2.2.1 Feminist Theories and the Feminist Perspective**

The feminist perspective argues that IPV is a direct result of a patriarchal society that continues to disadvantage women as a sex, enabling the unequal distribution of power. The axiomatic assumption of feminist theories asserts that domestic violence and aggression is a means for men to dominate and oppress women, thus ensuring the continuity of women's inequality within the political, economic, and public sphere (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p. 521; Simpson, 1989, p. 608). Domination and control over women occurs through cultural norms that encourage female obedience, and if necessary, are supported directly by male "use of force, or indirectly, by shaping women's opportunities and constraints in basic institutions such as the family and work that reinforce women's subordination" (Rodriguez-Menes & Safranoff (2012), p. 585). When female on male violence occurs, the feminist perspective views it as a defensive response (Winstok & Straus, 2016). As a result, the feminist perspective does not focus on violence against women as isolated behaviours and occurrences, but rather focuses on the power dynamics that allow it to occur in the first place, and the consequences it has on victims and women as a whole (Larsen, 2016). In this sense, the feminist

perspective suggests that rates of IPV will decrease as gender equity increases within society (Stark, 2010).

Feminist academics and researchers argue that traditional sociological and criminological theories were created by men and centered around the experiences of men in social life (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p. 507; Kay, 2015, p. 225). In fact, Britton argues that criminology is perhaps the most masculinized and androcentric discipline within the field of social sciences, going so far as to claim that the term 'feminist criminology' is an oxymoron in and of itself (2000, p. 57). In an effort to counteract this historical reality, the feminist perspective has embraced a different epistemology and methodological approach to those seen in the family violence perspective (Winstok & Straus, 2016). Feminist oriented research on IPV is often characterized by qualitative research techniques, as accurately capturing the lived experiences of women is an important consideration within the field of feminist research. In fact, feminist research has traditionally criticized quantitative methodologies, claiming that "objectivist, value-neutral science overlooks the lived experiences of women and prevents . . . transformative research from taking place" (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p. 518; Kay, 2015, p. 225).

Although the radical feminist perspective (also known as mainstream feminism) continues to dominate the research on IPV, much like other theories, it is not without limitations (Mills, 2009). The challenges experienced by feminist theories include their innate inability to account for the rates of IPV in lesbian relationships, thus suggesting that all IPV is heterosexual when we know this is not the case (Hamel & Nicholls, 2007; Mills, 2009). An additional weakness of feminist theories is their inability to explain female on male violence where self-defence is questionable (Hamel & Nicholls, 2007; Mills, 2009). By failing to acknowledge female aggression, Nolet-Bos (1999) argues that the feminist perspective refutes that women can become angry without provocation, thus failing to account for female violence in other contexts, such as with their children or with peers. Finally, the feminist perspective fails to explain why some men do not engage in IPV despite living in a society plagued by gender inequality. These limitations are considered and accounted for by the family violence perspective. It is equally important to acknowledge that the feminist perspective continues to evolve and develop to address some of its limitations (Cannon, Lauve-Moon, & Buttell, 2015).

### **2.2.2. Gender Symmetry Theory and the Family Violence Perspective**

Although the family violence perspective acknowledges gender inequality within society as a factor of IPV, this perspective argues that it is only one factor of many and cannot be the only consideration (Capaldi et al., 2012; Larsen, 2016). Instead, family violence theorists also consider variables such as age, income, and employment status (Anderson, 1997). In contrast to the feminist perspective, the gender-inclusive framework and gender symmetry theory argue that both men and women engage in somewhat equal levels of IPV, and that arguments placing responsibility on the patriarchy and male privilege are insufficient in that they do not account for the rates of IPV in lesbian relationships and female on male violence (Hamel & Nicholls, 2007, p. 5). As a result, in contrast to the previously seen feminist perspective, the family violence perspective is more capable of advancing knowledge and understanding surrounding the rates of IPV committed by females against males.

The first study that garnered results suggesting gender symmetry amongst IPV victims was conducted by Straus and Gelles in 1975. Using the results from the National Family Violence Survey (NFVS) in the United States, they found that 12% of women and 11.6% of men had experienced IPV in the last twelve months (Straus, 2010). Many studies have since offered further support of gender symmetry (Chan, 2012; Kessler, Molnar, Feurer, & Appelbaum, 2001; Robertson & Murachver, 2007; Straus, 2011). In 2013, 80% of Canadian victims of police reported IPV were female (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2015), however many barriers exist that may prevent male victims from calling the police. In contrast, the results of the 1999 and 2004 General Social Survey (GSS) indicated that relatively proportionate levels of females and males report spousal violence in victimization surveys (Brzozowski & Brazeau, 2008), providing further support for the gender symmetry theory.

A recent study offered further supported the gender symmetry theory, reporting similar rates of controlling behaviours experiences by men and women in Canada, whereby 35% of male victims and 34% of female victims experienced high controlling behaviours (Lysova, Dim, & Dutton, 2019). In fact, this study found that male victims were more likely to experience being limited from contacting friends and family. Additionally, male victims reported jealousy by their female partners as well as a demand to know their whereabouts more than female victims did (p. 11). The traditional

belief that intimate terrorism and control is gender asymmetrical is increasingly being challenged as more research studies including male victims in their sampling frame have found that men also experience intimate terrorism perpetrated by their female partners (Carmo, Grams, & Magalhaes, 2011; Hines, Brown, & Dunning, 2007; Hines & Douglas, 2010). However, while there appears to be symmetry in perpetration, there continues to exist asymmetry in consequences of abuse for women and men (Straus, 2011).

### **2.2.1. The Johnson Typologies of IPV**

According to police data, it appears that men are more likely to be the perpetrators and women the victims with severe forms of IPV. However, when considering minor but frequent forms of violence, there appears to be a great degree of gender symmetry between victims and perpetrators (Hamel & Nicholls, 2007). Interestingly, proponents of the feminist perspective have argued that the family conflict perspective measures situational conflict within a family conflict framework. In this sense, feminist theorists and gender-inclusive theorists are both correct in that they each measure “real phenomena . . . [but] crucially, they measure different phenomena” (Johnson, 1995; Wiener, 2017, p. 1). Johnson (2008) expanded on this notion, proposing four types of IPV: intimate terrorism, violent resistance, situational couple violence, and mutual violent control. He argued that intimate terrorism and violent resistance are gender asymmetrical, while situational couple violence and mutual violent control are typically gender symmetrical. Intimate terrorism is characterized by an abusive partner (typically men) engaging in routine violent and nonviolent tactics in order to dominate and gain control over their female partner (Johnson, 2008). In contrast, violent resistance is characterized as the victim’s response to tactics of intimate terrorism, whereby females often perpetrate violence against males as a form of self-defence and protection. Situational couple violence is equally perpetrated by females and males and is unrelated to control or dominance. Rather, it is a physical and aggressive reaction to anger and frustration. Johnson suggested that the violence perpetrated in situational couple violence is less severe, whereas violence committed in intimate terrorism is typically more severe. Finally, mutual violent control is also symmetrical, and consists of both females and males simultaneously using violence as a tactic to control and dominate the other partner.

Although Johnson's typology of violence has not reconciled the opposing views of feminist theorists and family violence theorists, it has encouraged the IPV community to acknowledge the intricate and multi-faceted nature of IPV, and more specifically that not all IPV is equal (Heise, 2012). Furthermore, both feminist and family violence perspectives offer important insight into the phenomenon of IPV, yet what remains unclear is how to reconcile or bridge these two opposing theoretical foundations in order to promote a practical and applicable typology that is capable of recognizing both "the symmetrical and asymmetrical aspects of IPV" (Winstok & Straus, 2016, p. 933).

### **2.3. Health Consequences of IPV**

Regardless of the type of abuse experienced, IPV has devastating and lifelong consequences for victims, including emotional and psychological trauma, health problems and sometimes death (Campbell, 2002). The health consequences for female victims of IPV have been explored in-depth in the literature, however, according to general population surveys, 40-50% of all IPV victims are men, and as such it is equally as important to gain an understanding of the health consequences impacting male victims (Black et al., 2010; Straus, 1995).

The research on female victims indicates that they are at risk of increased depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following IPV victimization (Coker, Smith, Bethea, King, & McKeown, 2000; Hathway et al., 2000), and the same appears to be true for male victims of IPV (Carbone-Lopez, Kruttschnitt, & MacMillan, 2006; Coker et al., 2002). This finding was further supported in a New Zealand study which concluded that there were no significant differences between increased risk of mental health problems amongst male and female victims of IPV. Instead, both were equally at risk of developing severe depression, dissociation, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Fergusson, Horwood, & Ridder, 2005). Psychological consequences for male victims of IPV are heightened when the abuse experienced is sexual in nature, including the development of identity disorders and difficulty in maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships (Tsopelas et al., 2012). Some studies have found that male victims of IPV characterized by sexual abuse are at a heightened risk of engaging in substance or alcohol abuse as a coping mechanism (McFarlane et al., 2005; Tsopelas et al., 2012).

When compared to samples of non-victimized men, male victims of IPV have higher rates of alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, asthma, smoking, depressive symptoms, and poorer health overall (Black & Breiding, 2008; Parish, Wang, Laumann, Pan, & Luo, 2004; Stets & Straus, 1990). Unsurprisingly, the severity of the IPV is directly related to the severity of the health problems reported, with one study indicating that 8.2% of male victims of minor IPV displayed behaviours associated with PTSD, in comparison to 57.9% of male victims of severe IPV (Hines & Douglas, 2011). When comparing a help-seeking sample of male victims to a population-based sample of males, “the help-seekers were 15.57 times more likely than the population-based sample to score above the PTSD clinical cut off” (Hines & Douglas, 2015, p. 142). Furthermore, the help-seeking sample was at a heightened risk for cardiovascular-related disorders, and reported high blood pressure more frequently, which may have been associated with the stressors related to IPV victimization (Hines & Douglas, 2015).

Overall, it appears that the health consequences (and in particular, psychological conditions) of IPV victimization are similar for male and females (Coker et al., 2002; Fergusson, Horwood, & Ridder, 2005). However, few studies have explored the relationship between IPV victimization and gastrointestinal disorders, sexual health disorders, and sleep disorders amongst male victims, and as such these health conditions cannot be compared to the existing findings amongst female samples. Notwithstanding, male victims of IPV experience significant psychological and physical health problems as a direct or indirect result of IPV victimization, which highlights the importance of both formal and informal help-seeking within the male population.

## **Chapter 3.**

### **Formal Responses to IPV**

Chapter 3 outlines the formal responses to IPV. Firstly, it explores the culture of policing and how that impacts police officers' attitudes and ultimately responses to IPV reports. Secondly, chapter 3 provides an in-depth review of court responses to IPV, more particularly the implementation of specialized domestic violence courts, and 'no drop' prosecution policies. Gender stereotypes within the court system are explored in relation to court initiatives. Finally, the grassroots history behind IPV agencies and support services is considered, as well as the types of services and roles provided by different victim agencies.

#### **3.1. The Police**

##### **3.1.1. Culture of Policing**

The organization of policing, also referred to as the police subculture, has been documented and researched extensively (Heidensohn, 1992; Manning, 1978; Morash & Haar, 2012; Reiner, 1992; Rose, Trina, Unnithan, & prabha, 2015; Silverstri, 2017; Terrill et al., 2003; Westley, 1970), and consists of an additional layer in potential explanations to formal help-seeking. The police subculture consists of specific norms and expectations placed upon officers, particularly with regards to their "work ethic, interaction techniques, task management, and general sentiment toward other criminal justice professionals as well as the public" (Rose, Trina, Unnithan, & Prabha, 2015, p. 279). Much of the existing research focuses on the police organization as a monolithic entity (Terrill et al., 2003; Crank, 2010). Additionally, research has explored how officers cope with the stress associated with their occupation and its environment (Brown 1988; Herbert, 1998; Reiner 1985). The culture of policing emphasizes and encourages solidarity amongst officers as well as "unmalleability, which leads it to be extremely resistant to change" (White, Vernon, & Robinson, 2014, p. 260).

Another persistent theme identified in the literature on police culture is masculinity (Crank, 2010; Rawski, 2018; Skolnick, 1994; Wilson, 1968). Through a

process of socialization, officers are expected to partake in a 'masculinity contest culture' (MCC) (Rawski, 2018). The MCC expects officers to constantly demonstrate masculine attributes such as aggression, competitiveness, bravery, and strength. Furthermore, emotions other than anger are discouraged and viewed as a weakness, and as such "police officers may overemphasize their masculinity and repress emotions to avoid appearing vulnerable or feminine and being isolated by their peers" (Rawski, 2018, p. 610). Acker (1992) places importance on the way gender operates within the organizational culture of policing, arguing that organizational processes and beliefs are saturated with the imagery of men and masculinity, and the organization of policing "provide[s] opportunities that facilitate, perpetuate, and sustain the construction of gender differences" (as cited in Silvestri, 2017, p. 294).

Given the pervasiveness of hegemonic masculinity embedded within the organizational structure of policing, it is plausible and even likely that the norms and behaviours encouraged amongst police officers may lead to differential treatment of male victims and female victims of crime, particularly in cases of IPV. Some studies have explored male victims' experiences reporting their victimization to police, and the results indicated that they were by and large dissatisfied (Apsler, Cummins, & Carl, 2003; Leisenring, 2012; O'neal, 2017; Stalans & Finn, 2000; Wolf et al., 2003). These studies will be explored more in-depth throughout the literature review. However, when considering the police as a formal response to IPV, it is imperative to also consider the organizational culture under which they operate as this can have a significant effect on victims' experiences or decisions to seek formal-help.

### **3.1.2. Formal Actions of Police**

#### ***Specialized Domestic Violence Units***

Specialized Domestic Violence (DV) Units in police departments across Canada and the United States have been created in an effort to recognize the unique needs of victims and perpetrators of IPV, as well as to address the issue of domestic violence (Friday, Lord, Exum, & Hartman, 2006; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008). The main role of Specialized DV Units is to provide a "coordinated community response" to IPV, mainly through "ensuring the implementation of departmental policies for domestic violence, coordinating the service and enforcement of warrants and protection orders . . .



and engaging in proactive criminal and/or community intervention strategies" (Exum, Hartman, Friday, & Lord, 2014, p. 1002), although exact responsibilities vary between police departments.

Regrettably, there is a significant lack of research that exist on the topic of Specialized DV Units and their effectiveness, and the few studies that do exist were conducted in the United States or in the United Kingdom. Several of these studies have questioned the ability of Specialized DV Units to lower recidivism rates (Davis, Maxwell, & Taylor, 2006; Farrell & Buckley, 1999; Garner & Maxwell, 2008), although a more recent study found that cases processed through the Specialized DV Unit in Charlotte, North Carolina had significantly lower rates of recidivism across the 18 to 30-month follow-up (Exum, Hartman, Friday, & Lord, 2014). Despite this uncertainty, a 2004 study indicated that victims of IPV are generally satisfied with the response of Specialized DV Units (Lane, Greenspan, & Weisburd, 2004).

Additional studies have suggested that Specialized DV Units have been successful in several ways. For instance, the Cleveland Police's Specialized DV Unit had a significantly positive impact on ensuring misdemeanor IPV complaints moved forward in the court process when compared to complaints processed by police departments lacking in Specialized DV Units (Regoeczi & Hubbard, 2018). Specialized DV units recognize that the traditional practice of placing the onus on the victim to meet with Prosecutors is ineffective, and as such a major role of these units is to meet with the victim at a time and place convenient to them (Regoeczi & Hubbard, 2018). Importantly, this study also found that a much larger number of IPV investigations occur and result in charges in cities or districts with Specialized DV Units (Regoeczi & Hubbard, 2018). Evidently, more studies need to be conducted on the effectiveness of DV units, and whether they lead to an increase in victim satisfaction or not.

### ***Mandatory Arrest and Primary Aggressor Policies***

As a result of significant lobbying and rising political pressure to take IPV more seriously and to prosecute batterers (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1993), various jurisdictions across the United States adopted mandatory arrest policies (Eitle, 2005). In 1989, a total of thirteen states had implemented provisions related to mandatory arrest (Houston, 2014). In 2007, the number increased by an additional seven states (Houston, 2014). Mandatory arrest policies require police officers to arrest suspected perpetrators of

abuse if there is probable cause that IPV has occurred (Mills, 1998). A victim's consent or willingness to press charges is not taken into consideration, and police no longer use their own discretion (Zorza, 1992). Mandatory arrest policies were expected to deter future violence, and this assumption was supported by the findings of the Minnesota domestic violence arrest experiment which found a specific deterrent effect for mandatory arrest (Sherman, Schmidt, Rogan, Smith et al., 1992).

However, more recent empirical data has suggested that with some batterers, mandatory arrest policies may increase the violence (Mills, 1998), particularly if the batterer is unemployed (Berk et al., 1992; Sherman, Schmidt, Rogan, Smith et al., 1992). Replication studies also found that the deterrent effect of arrest decreased significantly over time (Sherman, Schmidt, Rogan, Smith et al., 1992). Furthermore, this policy led to a large increase in number of women arrested compared to men, and an increase in the number of dual arrests, particularly in 'situationally ambiguous cases' whereby it is unclear who is the victim and who is the perpetrator (Durfee, 2012; Hirschel & Deveau, 2017). This reality has been a cause for concern for feminist advocates and scholars who believed that women only assaulted their male partners in episodes of self-defense (Finn & Bettis, 2006; Hamel, 2011). As such, they cautioned that mandatory arrest policies would lead to an increase of female victim arrests (Saunders, 1995; Zorza & Woods, 1994). Instead, advocates have suggested that IPV intervention strategies should be individualized to suit the needs of each victim and perpetrator (Mills, 1992; Sherman, Schmidt, Rogan, Smith et al., 1992).

In order to limit the unjust arrest of victims, advocates encouraged the implementation of primary aggressor laws, designed to ensure that police officers effectively distinguish between defensive and offensive injuries on victims and perpetrators (Hirschel & Deveau, 2017). Thus, when determining which party is the primary aggressor, police officers are expected to consider context and abuse history in order to ensure that the victim is not wrongfully arrested (Hamel, 2011; Hirschel, Buzawa, Pattavina, Faggiani, & Reuland, 2007). Although little research has explored the impact of primary aggressor policies, McMahon and Pence (2003) found that the female arrest rate did in fact decrease when implemented in Duluth, Minnesota.

Some researchers have argued that mandatory criminal intervention policies such as mandatory arrest and primary aggressor policies are especially problematic in

that they "reflect a distinctly feminist interpretation of domestic violence as a patriarchal force", effectively disregarding family violence perspectives and IPV perpetrated by women against men (Houston, 2014, p. 271). In this sense, IPV has been largely interpreted through a feminist lens, ultimately rejecting alternative theories of IPV which better explain violence against men (Houston, 2017).

Additionally, Hamel (2011) argues that primary aggressor policies "may be prejudicial to men" (p. 228). For instance, police are trained to consider factors such as weight and height of the parties in making their arrest, but they are not expected to consider their actual use in causing physical damage in a given case (p. 228). Men are typically bigger and stronger than women, and thus, "may have the *potential* of causing greater physical damage, but this factor is irrelevant unless he actually uses this to his advantage" (p. 228). Furthermore, primary aggressor policies require the police to determine which party displays 'more fear' (Hamel, 2011). However, not only is the determination of fear subjective, once again men are placed at a disadvantage because they are "socially conditioned not to express vulnerable feelings such as fear" (p. 229). As such, mandatory criminal intervention policies have faced criticism for their inability to effectively distinguish between victim and perpetrator, in addition to being gender biased against men (Hamel, 2011).

### **3.1.3. Police Attitudes and Frustrations Regarding IPV Calls**

Although it is important to gain an understanding of behaviours and actions of police officers that lead to satisfaction of victims of IPV, it is equally as important to explore the frustrations experienced by police officers when responding to these calls, simply because the frustrations likely prompt their attitudes and overall responses when dealing with victims. In this sense, attitude and responses of the police are interconnected with the apparent frustrating nature of IPV calls (Gover, Paul, & Dodge, 2011).

According to one study, the main sources of frustration for police officers responding to IPV calls include the time and effort involved when compared to other types of calls (84%), the difficulty of identifying the primary aggressor (44%), as well as the frequency of repeat calls to the same address (93%) (Gover, Paul, and Dodge, 2011). Interestingly, victim behaviours were a strong cause of police frustration in a

study completed by Johnson (2004). Police expressed frustration particularly with victims who were uncooperative with the police, victims who asked the police to not lay charges on the abusive partner, and victims who repeatedly called the police but did not leave their partner (Johnson, 2004). These appear to be common frustrations experienced by police officers, as an interviewed officer in a study by Horwitz et al. (2011) explained that repeat calls to the same residence are "almost like . . . wasting our time" (p. 622). Evidently, officers who may express their frustration during these calls will non-surprisingly impact the satisfaction of the victim, regardless of their gender.

## **3.2. The Courts**

### **3.2.1. Specialized Domestic Violence Courts**

Alongside specialized DV police units, jurisdictions across the United States have established specialized DV courts as an additional mechanism of responding to IPV (Tsai, 2000). Currently, more than 300 DV courts operate throughout the United States (Keilitz, Guerrero, Jones, & Rubio, 2000), and more than 50 exist in Canada (Quann, 2006). These courts are unique in that they respond to IPV cases while operating under a therapeutic jurisprudence and collaborative approach, placing a focus on the rehabilitation of perpetrators and a concern for the experiences of victims (Labriola, Bradley, O'Sullivan, Rempel, & Moore, 2009; Winick, 2000). Mazur and Aldrish (2003) argue that the integration of domestic violence cases into one court system "conserves resources and . . . enables the members of the court to better understand and address the underlying issues in domestic violence cases (as cited in Gover, Brank, & Macdonald, 2007, p. 605).

Overall, specialized DV courts have been well received, and empirical evidence suggests they have led to a decrease in recidivism rates and an increase in responsiveness in the CJS (Epstein, 1999; Gover, MacDonald, & Alpert, 2003; Karan, Keilitz, & Denaro, 1999). Past studies have explored female victim's satisfaction with specialized DV courts and found mixed outcomes, however virtually no studies take into consideration the perspective of male victims (Coulter, Alexander, & Harrison, 2008; Eckberg & Podkopacz, 2002; Richman, 2002).

### **3.2.2. 'No Drop' Prosecution Policies**

The same mounting social and political pressure that encouraged jurisdictions across the United States to adopt mandatory arrest policies also resulted in 'no drop' prosecution and specialized prosecution units (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1996; Rebovich, 1996). These changes grew from feminist advocates who pushed a social agenda directly tied to the battered women's movement (Nichols, 2014; Schechter, 1982; Shepard & Pence, 1999). No drop prosecution strategies were subsequently complemented by the increase in the number of specialized DV courts, with the overall aim to "promote consistency in sentencing and efficiency in processing" IPV cases (Cissner, Labriola, & Rempel, 2015, p. 1103).

The no-drop prosecution policy was implemented in an effort to ensure that more cases of IPV were prosecuted in court, ultimately resulting in a higher prosecution and conviction rate for perpetrators of IPV (Goodman & Epstein, 2008; Robbins, 1999). Much like mandatory arrest policies, no-drop policies ensured that charges could not be dropped at the victim's request, and they limited the prosecutor's ability to use discretion when dropping a case (Robbins, 1999). Instead, under this policy, prosecutors are required to move each case forward to trial unless they can prove a significant lack of evidence exists (Robbins, 1999). Regrettably, little research has been conducted on the topic of male victim experience regarding the implementation of no drop policies, and as such it is difficult to discern whether a gender-bias exists in its application. However, explored next is the gender bias that exists within the court system more generally.

### **3.2.3. Gender Stereotypes within the Court System**

Social beliefs and perceptions surrounding IPV and the severity of individual cases are deeply connected with overarching gender stereotypes and norms within society (Dutton & White, 2013; Machado, Santos, Graham-Kevan, & Matos, 2017). Because legal professionals working within the courts (such as court psychologists, social workers, mediators, attorneys, and judges) live within the same society, researchers have suggested that it is likely that legal professionals are also influenced by gender biases despite efforts to overcome them in their professional lives (Hamel, Desmarais, Nicholls, Malley-Morrison, & Aaronson, 2009; Machado, Santos, Graham-

Kevan & Matos, 2017; McCarrick, Davis-McCabe, Hirst-Winthrop, 2016; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005).

For instance, in 1993, a study conducted by Sagi and Dvir found that court social workers in Israel favoured maternal custody even when the best interests of the child would suggest that the father should receive full custody. In North-America and Europe similar biases are revealed. Despite recent research indicating that men and women perpetrate IPV at similar rates, the 2012-2013 UK Crown Prosecution Service convicted 3231 female perpetrators, in stark comparison to the 49,289 convictions of male perpetrators (Mankind Initiative, 2013; McCarrick, Davis-McCabe, Hirst-Winthrop, 2016). In Canada, from 2005-2011, males convicted of IPV were twice as likely to receive a custodial sentence (33%) than females convicted (14%) (Burczycka & Conroy, 2015).

In the United States, Basile (2005) found that male plaintiffs in court were four times as likely to have their request for protection deferred to a later date than female plaintiffs, often "discouraging [men] from further pursuing their request" (p. 175). Additionally, female requests for protection were denied only 1% of the time, compared to 16% of the time for males. Overall, males acquired Abuse Prevention Orders 71% of the time while females acquired the same 94% of the time (Basile, 2005). Despite there being no differences in the level of violence experienced by victims in a study by Muller, Desmarais, and Hamel (2009), it was found that judges were 16 times more likely to grant a temporary restraining order to a female plaintiff against her male partner than they were to grant it to a male plaintiff against his female partner. These findings further suggest that "courts are not immune from social norms . . . [and] exhibit differing tendencies when responding to male vs. female requests for protection" (Basile, 2005 p. 178).

### **3.3. IPV Agencies and Support Services**

#### **3.3.1. Types of Services and Their Roles**

Due to the widespread issue of IPV and the serious impact it has on victims and communities, various support services for victims have been established throughout the United States and Canada. These services include shelter programs, support groups, IPV hot-lines, transitional housing, counseling services, and advocacy services (Sullivan,

2018, p. 123). IPV agencies first began to emerge in the 1970s as feminist activists articulated their beliefs surrounding domestic violence while taking part in public demonstrations and establishing various crisis hotlines (Schechter, 1982, p. 29; Stark, 2007, p. 27). Perhaps the most influential change that came out of the domestic violence movement was the creation of shelters, often led by grassroots feminist initiatives and individual women inviting abused women into their private homes as a means of establishing safety and security (Fraser, 2014, p. 43; MacLeod, 1989; Stark, 2007, p. 26). From the beginning, shelters offered a victim-centered and community-based space where women could remain secure from physical violence as well as regain the “capacity for independent decision making their partners had usurped” (Stark, 2007, p. 78).

While the concept of shelters and transition homes became international in the 1970s, the first ones to open their doors in Canada began operating in 1973 and included cities such as Vancouver, Toronto, Calgary, and Saskatoon (MacLeod, 1989). As of 2014, there are a total of 627 women’s shelters across Canada, highlighting the impact the domestic violence movement had on the expansion and growth of these initiatives (Beattie & Hutchins, 2015; Stark, 2007, p. 35-36). Due to these initiatives being led by the feminist wave in the 1970s, it is important to recognize that non-traditional victims, such as men, are frequently underserved by IPV agencies.

The role of IPV agencies and support services are varied and depend on the individual program activities offered. However, the typical goals of these agencies are similar and include advocating for legal, economic, and social justice as well as renewing the personal autonomy and freedom of victims of abuse (Sullivan, 2011). In addition, IPV agencies seek to restore the emotional well-being of victims, while improving both their physical and psychological safety (p. 355). To achieve these goals, certain programs may focus on increasing their clients' knowledge surrounding the legal system or the dynamics of abuse. Many programs also seek to teach their clients important skills, such as budgeting or applying for jobs (Sullivan, 2011, p. 355).

## **Chapter 4.**

### **Male Victims' Experience with Formal Help-Seeking**

Chapter 4 provides an in-depth exploration of male victims' experience with formal help-seeking. In doing so, it begins with an overview of two major theories, the gender paradigm and stigmatization theories, which help contextualize the nature of formal help-seeking amongst male victims. Afterwards, it considers the reported barriers that prevent men from seeking formal help from the police, the courts, and IPV victim agencies. Finally, chapter 4 reviews the existing literature on the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of male victims upon seeking formal help from these same agencies.

#### **4.1. Theories of Formal Help-Seeking Among Male Victims of IPV**

##### **4.1.1. Gender Paradigm**

In various different works (Dutton & Corvo, 2006; Dutton, Corvel, & Hamel, 2009; Dutton, Hamel, & Aaronson, 2010), Dutton and his colleagues outlined the macro level concept of the 'gender paradigm'. The gender paradigm holds that IPV is almost exclusively perpetrated by males against females in the defense of the patriarchy and ultimately as a means of ensuring that social power remains under the control of men (Dutton, 2010). In fact, the gender paradigm has largely dominated the discourse on IPV and has held a strong influence over social and criminal justice policy (Dutton, 2006a; Dutton, 2006b).

Dutton and Nicholls (2005) explain that researchers within the field of social sciences can be influenced by traditional societal norms in the same way that professionals, such as police and court agents, are influenced. As such, social scientists in domestic violence research, in particular those upholding the radical feminist paradigm, have frequently aligned themselves with contemporary societal notions of social justice concerning women's rights and feminism, focusing entirely on male violence and minimizing or rationalizing female violence. Furthermore, data that may deviate from current societal beliefs and expectations regarding male domination,



aggression, and violence, are effectively ignored or discounted (Dutton, Hamel, & Aaronson, 2010). Ultimately, the practice of trying to mold their research to the feminist objectives of social justice "increas[es] the risk of straying from objective reporting of data" (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005, p. 682). This phenomenon led to the creation of the gender paradigm, in which many domestic violence researchers dismiss or ignore research findings that suggest perpetrators of domestic violence are not exclusively male (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005). Although this perspective may have initially sought to achieve formal equality for women, Dutton and Nicholls explain that in reality, the result of the gender paradigm "has been to misdirect social and legal policy, to misinform custody assessors, police, and judges, to disregard data sets contradictory to the prevailing theory, and to mislead attempts at therapeutic change for perpetrators" (2005, p. 682).

Overall, the authors argue that the gender paradigm is a narrow-minded view of IPV, which serves to misrepresent and distort current IPV literature and research, while largely disregarding the negative effects of male victimization in intimate relationships. Put simply, it is "a re-enactment of the age of denial displayed to female victimization in the early 1970s" (2005, p. 707). Evidently, the gender paradigm permeates regular social life as well assessments and decision-making processes by professionals in the field of IPV. As such, it is likely that this macro level theory significantly impacts a male victim's decision to seek formal help (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005).

#### **4.1.2. Hegemonic Masculinity and Stigmatization Theories**

The gender paradigm and social construction of masculinity are intrinsically linked to stigmatization theories and, ultimately, patterns of help-seeking in men. Typical hegemonic masculine norms encouraged in Western society include emotional control, dominance over women, and self-reliance, with "socialization practices [rewarding] men for being stoic, emotionally restrictive, and denying physical or mental vulnerability" (Berger, et al., 2013, p. 433). Yet, the consequences of adhering to hegemonic masculinity norms include significantly higher psychological distress and a reluctance to seek help (Levant & Richmond, 2007).

Stigmatization theories suggest that male victims are faced with a differential degree of stigma than female victims, and as such are reluctant to receive formal help

for victimization because doing so would prevent them from adhering to traditional hegemonic masculinity norms (Mansfield, Addis, & Mahalik, 2003; Rickwood & Braithwaite, 1994; Tsui, 2014). In fact, O'Neil (1990) argued that a failure to meet or conform to traditional masculine requirements can result in men experiencing severe psychological conflict and personal strain. As the gender paradigm theory suggests, male victims are not viewed by society as ideal victims, and it is not unreasonable to suggest that this pervasive sentiment may be internalized by male victims. Thus, as a result of stigma and the fear of being ridiculed, shamed, and humiliated, men avoid seeking formal help (Hines & Douglas, 2009; Steinmetz, 1980).

Arnocky and Vaillancourt (2012) explored how men and women viewed abuse against males, and the authors found that male victims are not only stigmatized by society significantly more than female victims, but that they minimized their experiences and perceptions of abuse, considering fewer acts as abusive than female victims. Furthermore, they concluded that males are encouraged by societal expectations of masculinity to embody 'emotional invulnerability', likely further discouraging them from self-identifying as a victim or seeking help.

Overstreet and Quinn outline the IPV Stigmatization Model which considers cultural stigma, anticipated stigma, and stigma internalization as factors preventing victim help-seeking (2013). Although originally applied to female victims out of sample convenience, the authors concluded that the model could be applied to male victims as well. Cultural stigma is closely linked to the gender paradigm previously discussed, and touches on the negative stereotypes and beliefs about IPV that permeate society. Anticipated stigma is the concern over how the victim will be treated or viewed if their abuse is revealed to others. In contrast, stigma internalization is the belief that the "negative stereotypes about [a victim's] stigmatized identity might be true of themselves" (p.111). Overstreet and Quinn argue that cultural stigma directly "influence[s] the experience of IPV stigmatization at the individual and interpersonal levels" (p. 111). In this sense, male victims of IPV experience anticipated stigma in their fear of being ridiculed and labeled weak for not conforming to traditional masculine expectations. In addition, internalized stigma is seen when men express shame and embarrassment over their experiences of victimization, ultimately hindering their willingness to seek help. Finally, Overstreet and Quinn argue that cultural stigma can impact the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of professionals who provide resources and formal support to victims of

IPV, further displaying the link between the gender paradigm and stigmatization theories. The authors conclude by suggesting that men are not typically viewed as victims within dominant IPV discourse, and as such it is likely that their experiences of stigmatization within this model would be intensified in comparison to female victims.

## **4.2. Barriers to Formal Help-Seeking Among Male Victims of IPV**

### **4.2.1. The Police**

#### ***Male Victim Barriers to Reporting Abuse to Police***

Unsurprisingly, the barriers male victims of IPV face with regards to reporting their victimization to police are different from the barriers faced by female victims. In the North American context, victimhood is mostly incompatible with the dominant societal notions of masculinity, especially with regards to female perpetration of abuse (Hall, 2012). In fact, Wallace (2014) argues that the words "domestic violence" produce, for the majority of people, the sole image of a male perpetrator and a female victim. Sorenson and Taylor (2005) conducted a study which found that society perceived actions to be more physically or psychologically abusive when performed by men compared to women. The gender biases and beliefs surrounding masculinity that exist not only within society but also within the academic research on IPV undeniably discourages and deters men from reporting female-perpetrated abuse (Machado, Davis-McCabe, Hirst-Winthrop, 2016). While the domestic violence revolution recognized and created awareness surrounding female victims of abuse, it failed to recognize and acknowledge male victims and the realities they face as victims of IPV. As such, male victims are far more underserved in the community - shelters and other domestic violence resources typically only provide support to women (Drijber, Reijnders, & Ceelen, 2013; Nicholls and Dutton, 2001; Vernon, 2017).

By failing to acknowledge the male population of victims, men experience extreme stigmatization, isolation and little support (Machado et al., 2017). Due to deep-rooted and sexist stereotypes, women are typically depicted as the vulnerable 'ideal victim', leading male victims to fear calling the police (Machado et al., 2017). In several studies, men have expressed concerns that if they were to report their victimization to police, they would not be believed or taken seriously (Cook, 2009; Douglas, Hines, &

McCarthy, 2012). Men have also been reluctant to report the abuse to police out of fear that upon arrival, the police would arrest them and accuse them of perpetrating violence (Barkhuizen, 2015; Cook, 2009; Douglas, Hines, & McCarthy, 2012; Shuler, 2010; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Tsui, 2014; Tsui, Chung, & Leung, 2010). Evidently, male victims of IPV experience a powerful struggle with society's view that men cannot and should not be victims of IPV. In fact, many have reported feelings of embarrassment and shame, as though they were less of a man (Johnson, 2012). As a result, male victimization remains vastly underreported (Hines & Douglas, 2009; McCarrick, Davis-McCabe, Hirst-Winthrop, 2016; Shuler, 2010), and the number of male victims reported by the police are likely not representative of actual male victims. The results of the Canadian General Social Survey on Victimization that examined the self-reported rates of victimization experienced by men and women support this claim. The GSS found that Canadian men were more likely than women to report physical and emotional victimization in their intimate relationship (Lysova, Dim, & Dutton, 2019).

The fears experienced by male victims of IPV have been supported by several studies and proven to be real. Hall (2012) found that in the United Kingdom, male victims were far more often ignored by the police, and female perpetrators were released from police custody far more quickly than male perpetrators. In Australia, male victims have reported that responding police officers told them to "grow some balls" (para. 31). Barkhuizen (2015) interviewed male victims in South Africa who experienced belittlement by the police, stating the female abusers were always believed over male victims. However, similarly to female victims, male victims appear to be more likely to report their victimization to police when they suffered a severe assault requiring medical attention (Douglas, Hines, & McCarthy, 2012; Drijber, Reijnders, & Ceelan, 2013; Machado et al., 2017). Despite the identified studies reporting significant findings with substantial implications, far more studies on the topic of female victims exist, suggesting that further research on the experience of male victims of IPV is important.

### ***Factors Influencing Male Victim Satisfaction with Police***

Although many victims of IPV choose to never involve the police, of those that do, satisfaction with the response received has yielded mostly negative results. As previously discussed, male victims of IPV are often not recognized and acknowledged in society, and this reality appears to also be reflected in academic literature. The majority

of quantitative and qualitative research conducted on IPV has been highly gendered, whereby only female victims were included as part of the study sample. Research containing samples of male victims is extremely inadequate and limited as it is (Paul & Paul 2015), however this section will review the literature that does exist and its findings.

While mixed results were identified in studies on the female perception of the police response to IPV, male victims have reported being mostly dissatisfied (Apsler, Cummins, & Carl, 2003; Leisenring, 2012; O'neal, 2017; Stalans & Finn, 2000; Wolf et al., 2003). It is important to note that the reasons men were dissatisfied with the police virtually all mimic the reasons why men fear calling the police in the first place. In a more recent 2017 study, Machado et al. conducted qualitative interviews with Portuguese male victims of IPV who had called the police to report their abusive female partner. The overwhelming majority of participants described the police response as unhelpful. Male victims expressed that they felt revictimized by police, in that they were treated differently than female victims. As previously discussed, male victims avoid reporting their victimization to the police for fear of being mocked. In this case study, the men experienced ridicule and mockery, further suggesting that the fears male victims have are very real. One participant was told by police that he was "worthless" for not standing up to his female partner. In many other instances, participants stated that the police never responded to their call. One man reported having called the police for assistance "at least 6 or 7 [times]! And nothing (...) they didn't respond" (p. 519). A 2013 study concluded similar findings, in which 33 of the men surveyed stated that when they tried to report their victimization to police, the police refused to do anything (Drijber, Reijnders, & Ceelan).

At times, victims report feeling that they experienced injustice in that the police dismissed them and did not believe their stories. A British man interviewed in a study on male victimization stated that "if you're male, you're a perpetrator, if you're female, you're a victim" (McCarrick, Davis-McCabe, & Hirst-Winthrop, 2016, p. 208). Overall, these victims expressed an intense rage towards not only their abusive female partners, but towards responding police officers for not acknowledging the impacts psychological abuse and physical abuse had on them.

In a different study, male victims of female perpetrated IPV discussed the quality of the help they received and rated calling the police as the least helpful resource, while

receiving medical assistance was the most helpful (Douglas, Hines, & McCarthy, 2012). Using bivariate analyses, it was further discovered that men who had experienced sexual abuse as children and had suffered severe abuse as a result of IPV were more likely to rate their experience with police poorly (Douglas, Hines, & McCarthy, 2012). Additionally, male victims rated their police experience more favorably if their female partner was treated as the primary aggressor and/or arrested by police.

Gay and bisexual men's perception of police helpfulness in response to IPV is overwhelmingly negative as well, albeit for different reasons (Finneran & Stephenson, 2013). These victims explained that the police frequently made homophobic remarks and engaged in discrimination, and they argued that a hypothetical police response to a heterosexual female victim of IPV would likely be more positive. This study also stressed that gay and bisexual men underreport abuse to the police for fear of experiencing rejection, ridicule, and discrimination (Finneran & Stephenson, 2013).

#### **4.2.2. The Courts**

##### ***“An Arena for Abuse”: Male Victim Satisfaction with the Courts***

Recent developments in IPV research have documented a modern phenomenon of abuse that has historically been absent from traditional definitions of IPV: legal and administrative (LA) aggression. Tilbrook, Allan, and Dear (2010) were the first to coin this form of abuse, and described it as occurring when "some perpetrators manipulate legal and administrative resources to the detriment of their male partners", such as filing false accusations of abuse, causing men to spend too much money and time proving their innocence in court (p. 20). Furthermore, the authors stipulated that this occurred because of the prevailing stereotypes that men are always the abusers and females are always the victims. Since being acknowledged as a form of abuse, several researchers have included this phenomenon in their studies measuring IPV (Hines, Douglas, & Berger, 2015; Machado, Santos, Graham-Kevan, & Matos, 2017; Tsui, 2014).

Before being officially identified as legal and administrative aggression, Cook (2009) discussed how male victims often lost their homes and custody over children as a result of false claims of abuse made by their female partners. In other instances, female partners made false claims of sexual abuse committed by fathers against their children as a method of gaining full custody. Even in the case where male victims had sufficient

proof that their female partner was violent, and that they were not, they still lost visitation rights and custody of their children. Overall, the men involved in Cook's case studies believed that they were treated differently within the judicial system on the basis of gender, suggesting that "the burden of proof for male IPV victims may be especially high" (as cited in Douglas & Hines, 2011, p. 474). Hines and Douglas (2010) found that male victims of IPV and legal and administrative aggression perceived the courts in a negative light, primarily as a result of undergoing false accusations with virtually no repercussions or punishments awaiting women who filed the false claims. In their study, 67.2% of male victims reported being falsely accused of beating their female partners, 48.9% falsely accused them of physically abusing their children, and 15.4% falsely accused them of sexually abusing their children. In an earlier study conducted by Hines, Brown, and Dunning (2007), a male victim was once again accused of being the perpetrator, stating:

She stabbed me with a knife, and I didn't even defend myself, and after I got out of the hospital two weeks later, the court tells me to go to a group they say is for victims. It turns out to be for batterers and I am expected to admit to being an abuser and talk about what I did to deserve getting stabbed. (p. 68)

At times, false accusations result in charges and convictions. A male victim interviewed by Machado et al. (2017) explained that his female partner "mutilated and scratched herself and made up that I had run her over . . . since that incident I was charged of DV . . . I was notified to present to the court . . . identified, and prohibited to leave the country" (p. 517). In another interview, a male victim reported gender-stereotyped treatment: "The mother of my daughter was there and talked maybe almost 2 hours . . . and I was heard for 10 minutes . . . the judge heard only her version, and chose a side" (p. 519). The majority of male victims in the study conducted by Machado et al. (2017) rated the judicial system as especially unhelpful for men, complaining of secondary victimization perpetrated by judicial services (p. 521). Although more research on this topic is essential, existing literature has consistently found that male dissatisfaction with the court system is inherently connected to the overarching gender stereotypes and double standards that are present.

### **4.2.3. IPV Agencies and Support Services**

#### ***Male Victim Barriers to Seeking Help from IPV Agencies***

Despite the alarming rates of IPV against men, the male population continues to be widely underserved and systemically excluded by domestic violence support services (Cheung, Leung, & Tsui, 2009; Dewey & Heiss, 2018). In instances where agencies do offer their services to men, it has been argued that the branding strategies of agencies are not inclusive of non-traditional IPV victims, and as such male victims frequently feel uncomfortable reaching out to these services (Dewey & Heiss, 2018). Additional barriers experienced by male victims ultimately prevent them from seeking the support services of IPV agencies and organizations. Although there exists a paucity of research on this topic, a few studies have found that men are less likely to seek the help of IPV agencies than women for virtually the same reasons they are unlikely to report their abuse to police. In particular, society's gendered notions of male and female roles in relationships allow very little space, if any, for men to identify as victims and seek help. When asked why male victims did not seek formal support from IPV agencies, they most often reported feelings of embarrassment and shame, and a fear of not being believed, supporting the notion that a stigma is attached to men who seek help (Barber, 2008; Cook, 2009; Dewey & Heiss, 2018; Johnson, 2012; Machado et al., 2017).

Perhaps the greatest barrier preventing men from seeking help from support agencies lies in the fact that many agencies do not consider men to be acceptable or credible victims (Cheung, Leung, & Tsui, 2009; George, 1994). In fact, Hines and Douglas (2011) found that 86.9% of IPV support services were less likely to offer their legal services to men than to women. In addition, shelter services were least available to the male population.

Evidently, the lack of IPV support services targeting male victims presents a serious external barrier for men seeking formal help. Several authors argue that the intentional exclusion of male victims from PV services is likely a result of the original feminist movement that argued that PV was the result of a patriarchal society, and as such encouraged society to recognize and condemn violence against women (Ashcraft, Muhr, Rennstam, & Sullivan, 2012; Bent-Goodley, 2005). Hines, Brown, and Dunning (2007) go further in stating that the majority of academics and researchers in the field of IPV either "deny that [male victims] exist" or believe that male victimization by women is



not a significant social problem (p. 64). By focusing solely on female victims, it is evident that "a lack of attention to the needs and life experiences of male identified survivors from [IPV] services has created a systematic, insinuated exclusion of men from [IPV] services" (Dewey & Heiss, 2018, p. 1430).

### ***Factors Influencing Male Victim Dissatisfaction with IPV Agencies***

While male victims of IPV face a significant number of barriers when seeking formal help from IPV agencies, the experience of those that overcome the aforementioned barriers and use the support services available are primarily negative. Furthermore, the reasons for their negative experience directly parallel the barriers that prevent men from seeking help from IPV agencies in the first place: namely, men are dissatisfied due to being ridiculed by staff, being turned away or told the agencies only help women, and being blamed of perpetrating the violence and referred to batterer intervention programs.

In fact, in a sample of 302 men, close to two-thirds of male victims who contacted a domestic violence agency or hotline reported that the service was not at all helpful, and instead they were openly ridiculed and mocked by the staff (Hines & Douglas, 2011). Men in different studies also reported similar experiences of being laughed and sneered at by the agencies' staff (Cook, 2009; Douglas, Brown, Dunning, 2007).

In other cases, male victims reported that IPV agencies and hotlines turned them away (Hines, Brown, Dunning, 2007). In fact, 49.9% of men who sought help from IPV agencies and 63.9% of men who sought help from IPV hotlines were told that they only helped women (Douglas & Hines, 2011). One male stated that when he tried to research domestic violence agencies online, he "found mostly female help sites and was turned down by several so [he] gave up" (2011, p. 480). Male victims in Dutton and White's study recounted similar findings, more specifically that IPV services work exclusively with female victims, leaving male victims with unmet needs (2013).

An additional factor that understandably leads to male victim dissatisfaction is being accused by IPV agencies of perpetrating the violence (Cook, 2009; Douglas, Brown, & Dunning, 2007). Douglas and Hines (2011) found that in their sample of 302 help-seeking men, 40.2% were accused by IPV agencies of being the batterer. In

addition, 32.2% of men were accused of the same by IPV help hotlines. Douglas, Brown, and Dunning found that when one male victim called the Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men, the supervisor answered the phone and questioned him, stating: "why would a man call a helpline if he were not the abuser" (2007, p. 69). Not only are men frequently accused by these agencies of being abusers, many of them are subsequently referred to programs for batterers instead of victims (Cook, 2009; Douglas, Brown, Dunning, 2007; Douglas & Hines, 2011).

In order to acknowledge and gain a better understanding of the negative experiences of male victims seeking help from support services it is essential to consider and draw comparisons with the experience of female victims and IPV support services. Overall, the literature indicates that female victims report primarily positive help-seeking experiences with IPV agencies. Studies have found that female residents utilizing shelters and transitional housing have "an overwhelmingly positive perception of shelter services", despite certain limitations such as restrictive rules, policies, and procedures (Haj-Yahia & Cohen, 2009; Wood, Cook, Voyles, & Kulkarni, 2017, p. 2). In addition, shelter services and hotlines for women have been associated with positive victim experiences following IPV, more specifically an increase in victim safety, and a decrease in depression and other mental health symptoms associated with IPV (Bennet, Riger, Schewe, Howard, & Wasco, 2004).

Similarly, a total of 79% of women who attended an IPV support group stated their experience had been "excellent", while the remaining 21% stated it had been "good" (Molina, Lawrence, Azhar-Miller, & Rivera, 2009, p. 467). More specifically, the support group allowed women to feel supported, protected, and understood, and provided them with the opportunity to make friends with similar life experiences. Once the support group meetings ended, victims described feeling happy, relieved, calm, and liberated (p. 468).

Evidently, there is a glaring disparity between male and female victims of IPV and their help-seeking experiences with IPV agencies and support services. Unfortunately, very few IPV agencies offer their support services to male victims, and in the rare case where they do, the literature indicates that male victims are left more dissatisfied than female victims, as they are often not believed, and instead are shamed, ridiculed, or accused of being the perpetrator of violence.

## **Chapter 5.**

### **The Current Study**

The existing literature on IPV indicates that male victim satisfaction with formal resources is alarmingly low. This thesis expands on the existing literature and research on male victim help-seeking in several important ways. First, the existing literature is extremely gendered, whereby samples of victims are predominantly female or only female, despite recent research showing that men are victims of IPV just as frequently as women. Although some studies have restricted their sample to male victims, they are sparse in the overall literature on IPV. Furthermore, most existing studies on male victims have been quantitative in nature, and thus unable to explore male victims' subjective experiences and narratives in-depth. By engaging in a thematic analysis of an open-ended survey question, the sample size of this research study will be significantly larger than qualitative studies conducted in the past, while still maintaining the richness and in-depth nature of findings in traditional qualitative research. Overall, the focus of this thesis is to explore the subjective experiences, perceptions, and thoughts of formal help-seeking male victims of severe IPV perpetrated by females. In doing so, it is hoped that a better understanding of the multifaceted reasons behind male victim satisfaction is developed.

To achieve transparency, chapter 5 presents a detailed outline of the research methodology used in this thesis. I begin with a justification of my research design, introduce my research question, and discuss the purpose of the study. Next, I describe sampling strategies and participant recruitment with regards to secondary data and explain data collection through an online questionnaire. From there, I explain the analytic process, particularly with regards to coding and analyzing the participants' unique stories, as well as efforts to achieve reliability and validity in qualitative research. Finally, I conclude with a consideration of the ethical issues surrounding research with a high-risk population, with a focus on the importance of confidentiality in research.

## **5.1. Research Design**

This thesis will be informed using a qualitative description framework that is both exploratory and descriptive. The literature on qualitative methodology indicates that this research approach is useful in capturing knowledge and experience of a specific phenomenon in which there is little or no previous knowledge, thus providing participants a chance to have their voices heard (Dantzer & Hunter, 2012). In gathering data to provide a description of a specific experience or event, qualitative description allows the researcher to stay close to the data (Sandelowski, 2000). In this sense, qualitative researchers, particularly those employing a qualitative description framework, avoid 'insulating' themselves from the data (Becker, 1996). The findings produced by qualitative description can be useful in producing future theories (Sandelowski, 2000).

A qualitative description framework allows one to gather information from expert knowledge with the aim of increasing an otherwise unexplored phenomenon or context (Sandelowski, 2000). Although prior research on this topic exists, it is very limited, and all qualitative studies contain small sample sizes of twenty participants or less. As a result, we still have limited knowledge on the perspectives and lived experiences of male victims, and this framework can assist in exploring and better understanding this phenomenon.

## **5.2. Research Question**

Rather than choosing a research approach based on personal preference, a research approach should be chosen based on careful consideration of the research question that is to be answered (Liamputtong, 2010). An exploratory and descriptive design is most appropriate given the guiding research question: "How do male victims who experience severe IPV perpetrated by their female partners perceive the formal help-seeking response after reporting the abuse?" Specifically, the objectives of this study are the following:

1. To better understand the context of severe violence that drives male victims to seek formal help.
2. To examine the experiences of male victims with formal help-seeking. It is expected that most of the male victims in this study who sought

help will report negative experiences as a result of societal expectations surrounding gender roles and hegemonic masculinity.

3. To examine the lack of formal help-seeking among male victims of IPV. It is expected that most of the male victims who did not seek formal support will report internalized stigma, shame and embarrassment in their reasoning.

It is important to stress that this thesis does not intend to test the gender paradigm theory and stigmatization theories, but rather, these theories are used only to help inform the discussion of the results. Additionally, for the purposes of this thesis, IPV will be operationalized as any acts of physical violence, sexual violence, emotional and psychological abuse, and controlling behaviours between dating partners, romantic partners, and former or current spouses (including common-law spouses). Controlling behaviours include isolating a person from family or friends, stalking and monitoring a person's movements, controlling access to basic necessities such as food, sleep, sex, and transportation, restricting access to financial resources, employment, medical care, or education.

### **5.3. Men's Experiences with Partner Aggression Project**

The data used for the current research study was originally collected for an ongoing project entitled Men's Experiences with Partner Aggression (MEPA). The project was undertaken by Primary Investigator Dr. Denise Hines of Clark University and Co-Investigator Dr. Emily Douglas of Bridgewater State University. Funded by the National Institutes of Health, the main purpose of the project was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of men who have sustained IPV perpetrated by a female partner. As discussed in the literature review, recent evidence suggests that men experience abuse in relationships at rates similar to women, yet male victims remain an under-studied area in the research on family violence. The MEPA Project attempted to address this gap in the literature.

#### **5.3.1. MEPA Sampling and Participant Recruitment**

The MEPA project consisted of two different samples of recruited male participants. The first was a help-seeking sample of physical IPV victims, and the second consisted of a population-based sample. Participants were recruited between January

2012 and April 2013, and in order to be eligible for the study, certain requirements needed to be met. First, for both samples, victims had to be male, speak English, live in the United States, and be between the ages of 18 and 59. Additionally, participants must have been involved in an intimate partner relationship with a female for at least 1 month during their lifetime. For the help-seeking sample, male participants had to have experienced a physical assault from their female partner during their relationship, and had to have “sought assistance for their partner’s violence from at least one of the following sources: medical doctor or dentist, domestic violence agency, domestic violence hotline, the Internet, a lawyer, the police, a clergy member, a family member, a friend, or a mental health therapist” (Hines, Douglas, Berger, 2015, p. 298).

Recruitment strategies differed between the two separate samples. The help-seeking sample was recruited through a variety of different means and sources. For instance, the primary investigators posted advertisements on the Internet, including the MEPA project page and Facebook page, as well as webpages and Facebook pages of agencies that focus on male health, male victims of IPV, divorced men’s’ issues, and fathers’ issues. Furthermore, they emailed an announcement of the project to all parties who had signed up to be on their website email list, which included researchers, practitioners, and some participants. All advertisements contained a link to an anonymous online questionnaire, in which the first two pages included screening questions to assess whether participants were eligible. The final help-seeking sample consisted of 611 men.

Participants in the population-based sample were recruited using Knowledge Networks (KN), an online survey research firm. KN consists of 43,000 adults that are representative of the U.S. populations. Panel members are randomly recruited by telephone and households using random digit dialing sampling and are provided with Internet access if needed. Panel members are invited to participate in surveys using a points program as incentive. For the purposes of the MEPA project, KN’s recruitment provided extra incentives and sent emails to panel members three times a month during the data collection process. Emails were sent only to panel members’ who met the eligibility requirements of the study. A total of 3536 men were invited to participate in the study, and 2174 (61.5%) began the survey. Of those who began the survey, 90% consented to participate, and of those who consented, 82.5% were eligible to complete the full survey (Hines, Douglas, Berger, 2015, p. 299). The final population-based

sample consisted of 1601 men. Demographics of both the population-based sample and the help-seeking sample can be found in Table 1.1.

**Table 5.1. Demographic and other differences between MEPA population-based sub-sample and help-seeking sample**

	<i>Population-based sample (n=1,601) % or M (SD)</i>	<i>Help-seeking sample (n=611) % or M (SD)</i>	<i><math>\chi_2</math> or t</i>
<i>Demographics</i>			
Age	41.77 (11.35)	43.89 (9.18)	4.52***
White	76.5%	75.5%	0.28
Black	10.2%	4.1%	21.09***
Hispanic/Latino	11.8%	4.9%	23.57***
Asian	1.9%	4.3%	10.16***
Native American	1.4%	2.9%	5.54*
Income (in thousands)	48.5 (27.6)	47.7 (27.7)	0.63
Educational Status <sup>1</sup>	3.68 (1.83)	4.71 (1.63)	12.90***
<i>Relationship demographics</i>			
Currently in a relationship	86.5%	26.3%	730.93***
Relationship length (in months)	150.09 (122.86)	112.33 (87.62)	8.05***
Time since relationship ended (in months)	6.55 (29.91)	45.17 (54.33)	16.63***
Minors involved in the relationship	0.79 (1.12)	1.12 (1.03)	6.58***
<i>Victimization from partner aggression (% ever)</i>			
Minor psychological aggression	76.9%	99.7%	163.34***
Severe psychological aggression	24.3%	95.8%	514.94***
Legal/administrative aggression	12.9%	91.4%	1,191.87*
Any physical aggression	23.6%	100.00%	580.14***
Minor physical aggression	22.6%	98.8%	1,028.59***
Severe physical aggression	9.4%	86.0%	1,215.04***

	<i>Population-based sample (n=1,601) % or M (SD)</i>	<i>Help-seeking sample (n=611) % or M (SD)</i>	<i><math>\chi^2</math> or <i>t</i></i>
Any sexual aggression	11.3%	48.1%	179.26***
Minor sexual aggression	11.5%	44.2%	286.97***
Severe sexual aggression	2.8%	41.3%	571.47***
Any injuries	5.7%	72.3%	522.48***
Minor injuries	6.1%	72.3%	1,049.01***
Severe injuries	2.6%	41.3%	571.47***

Note: <sup>1</sup>Educational Status: 1, less than high school; 2, high school graduate, 3, some college/trade school; 4, two-year college graduate; 5, four-year college graduate; 6, at least some graduate school.

\* $P < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

### 5.3.2. MEPA Methods

The MEPA project utilized a quantitative research methodology through the administration of a survey. The strength of survey research lies in its ability to examine and test various hypotheses involving multiple variables in interaction (Babbie, 1990, p. 41). Both the help-seeking sample of male victims and the population-based sample were provided a link to the anonymous online questionnaire which took approximately thirty minutes to complete. Upon confirming consent, the survey opened with questions designed to collect demographic information on participants and their partners. Participants provided information on their age, height, weight, race/ethnicity, yearly income, and education level. Participants also reported on the current status of their relationship, the length of the relationship, the time since the relationship ended (if applicable), and whether minor children were parented in the relationship, and if so, how many. The quantitative questions in the survey included a mixture of dichotomous scales, categorical scales, Likert-scales, continuous scales, and check all that apply question formats.

The survey ended with a final qualitative open-ended question designed to gain additional detailed insight into the experiences of male participants. Participants were encouraged to share any additional information on their relationship or overall situation. The responses to the final qualitative question will be discussed in further detail and analyzed for the purposes of this thesis.



### **5.3.3. Secondary Survey Data**

The current study utilizes the final qualitative survey question data originally collected by Hines and Douglas for the purposes of the MEPA Project. Permission to use their data was granted by both principal investigators. The literature on secondary data use in research identifies and explores three main purposes of secondary data analysis. Firstly, secondary data analysis allows for the investigation of new or additional research questions (Goodwin, 2012). In fact, Lipset and Bendix (1959) stated that secondary data analysis is particularly useful for studying "specific problems through [the] analysis of existing data which were originally collected for other purposes" (as cited in Glaser, 1962, p. 71). The second function of secondary survey analysis is the verification, rejection, and/or refinement of the findings of primary studies. In other words, re-analysis of the data allows researchers to either validate or contest the results of the existing research (Goodwin, 2015; McArt & McDougal, 1985). The third and final function of secondary data analysis lies in synthesis, which is the collection and organization of knowledge arising from existing studies for the purpose of meta-analysis (Goodwin, 2012; Jensen & Allen, 1996).

There are many advantages to engaging in secondary data analysis. Firstly, the administration and collection of quantitative and qualitative data is often time-consuming and costly. Thus, secondary data analysis is a time-saving and cost-effective approach for secondary data researchers (Goodwin, 2012). Furthermore, large-scale data collection is often the subject of secondary data analysis, allowing researchers access to improved data quality and quantity. Large survey samples allow for better generalizability and "make it feasible to research groups of individuals that are uncommon in the population" (Goodwin, 2012, p.142). Importantly, Goodwin (2012) also acknowledges major drawbacks to secondary data analysis. Firstly, it is often difficult for researchers to find or gain access to studies on a particular population of interest. Additionally, the data collected by primary researchers may not always include questions on the key variables required for the secondary data analysis.

## **5.4. Study Sample**

Although the data collected for the purposes of the MEPA project was primarily quantitative in nature, there was one qualitative open-ended question included on the

closing page of the survey questionnaire. This open-ended qualitative question allowed survey participants to discuss their relationship or situation as desired. The question was worded as follows: "Aside from what was covered in this survey, please use the space below to tell us anything you would like about your relationship or situation. We will use this information to craft future research projects". While 611 help-seeking men participated in the survey, a total sample of 425 answered the final qualitative question, and 389 responses were long enough to analyze and produce meaningful results. Some responses consisted of several sentences in length, while other responses were richer and consisted of several pages in length.

Demographics for the 389 men who responded to the single qualitative question can be found in Table 5.2. The mean age of male respondents was 44.4, and 83.3% were white. The average respondent was a 2-year college graduate with a yearly income of \$46,700. A mean of 1.1 minors were involved in the relationship, whereby 92.4% were the biological child of the male, and 45.8% were the biological child of the female. Overall, men reported significantly higher victimization rates than they did perpetration rates when considering several different forms of abuse such as psychological, physical, sexual, and others. In fact, the demographic information indicates that participants in this study were primarily victims of severe IPV. For instance, 87.2% of the participants reported experiencing severe physical abuse, and 43.2% or almost half of the participants reported severe injuries. Furthermore, 95.9%, almost the entire sample, experienced severe psychological abuse in their relationship, and 94.8% experienced controlling behaviours. 91.9% of participants were threatened with forms of legal and administrative abuse, while 81% experienced actual legal and administrative abuse. Slightly more than a quarter (28.6%) of the sample were victims of severe sexual abuse, while 50.1%, or half of the sample, were victims of any level of sexual abuse. In contrast, the two most common forms of abuse perpetrated by the participants against their female partners included controlling behaviours (36.8%) and severe psychological abuse (30.7%). 87.4% of participants sought some form of formal help for their victimization, while 12.6% only sought informal help. Overall, 42.4% of participants contacted the police, 53.5% contacted a lawyer, 23.7% contacted a domestic violence agency, and 25.7% contacted a hotline. A total of 20.6% of participants discussed their experiences of IPV with a doctor, while 69.2% discussed it with a therapist.

**Table 5.2. Demographics and partner violence victimization of help-seeking sub-sample (n = 389)**

	<i>Help-seeking sub-sample</i> % or M (SD)	<i>Perpetration against female partners</i> % or m (SD)
<i>Demographics</i>		
Age	44.4 (9.3)	41.3 (9.3)
White	83.3%	73.8%
Black	4.4%	3.3%
Hispanic/Latino	4.9%	11.3%
Asian	4.4%	6.4%
Native American	4.1%	1.0%
Middle Eastern	1.0%	1.3%
Income (in thousands)	46.7 (29.1)	36.9 (28.4)
Educational status <sup>a</sup>	4.7 (1.7)	4.1 (4.0)
<i>Relationship Characteristics</i>		
Currently in the Relationship	22.8%	-
Relationship length (in months)	116.44 (89.9)	-
Minors involved in the relationship	68.2%	-
No. of minors involved in relationship	1.1 (1.0)	-
<i>Demographics of oldest child (n=259)</i>		
Age	10.3 (4.8)	-
% Female	51.7%	-
Help-seeker's biological child	92.4%	-
Female partner's biological child	45.8%	-
<i>% Victimization from IPV</i>		
Controlling behaviours	94.8%	36.8%
Threatened legal/administrative abuse	91.9%	10.3%
Actual legal/administrative abuse	81%	8.7%
Severe psychological abuse	95.9%	30.7%
Minor injury	74%	18.8%
Severe injury	43.2%	8.9%
Any injury	75.5%	21%
Minor physical abuse	74%	18.8%
Severe physical abuse	87.2%	14.2%
Any physical abuse	96.1%	42%
Minor sexual abuse	44.2%	11.6%
Severe sexual abuse	28.6%	2.6%
Any sexual abuse	50.1%	12.9%

	<i>Help-seeking sub-sample</i> % or M (SD)	<i>Perpetration against female partners</i> % or m (SD)
<i>Help-seeking Characteristics</i>		
Sought informal help only	12.6%	-
Sought any formal help	87.4%	-
Contacted police	42.4%	-
Contacted lawyer	53.5%	-
Contacted DV agency	23.7%	-
Contacted hotline	25.7%	-
Contacted doctor	20.6%	-
Contacted therapist	69.2%	-

Note:<sup>a</sup>Educational status: 1 = less than high school, 2 = high school graduate or GED, 3 = some college/trade school, 4 = 2-year college graduate, 5 = 4-year college graduate, 6 = at least some graduate school

## 5.5. Data Analysis

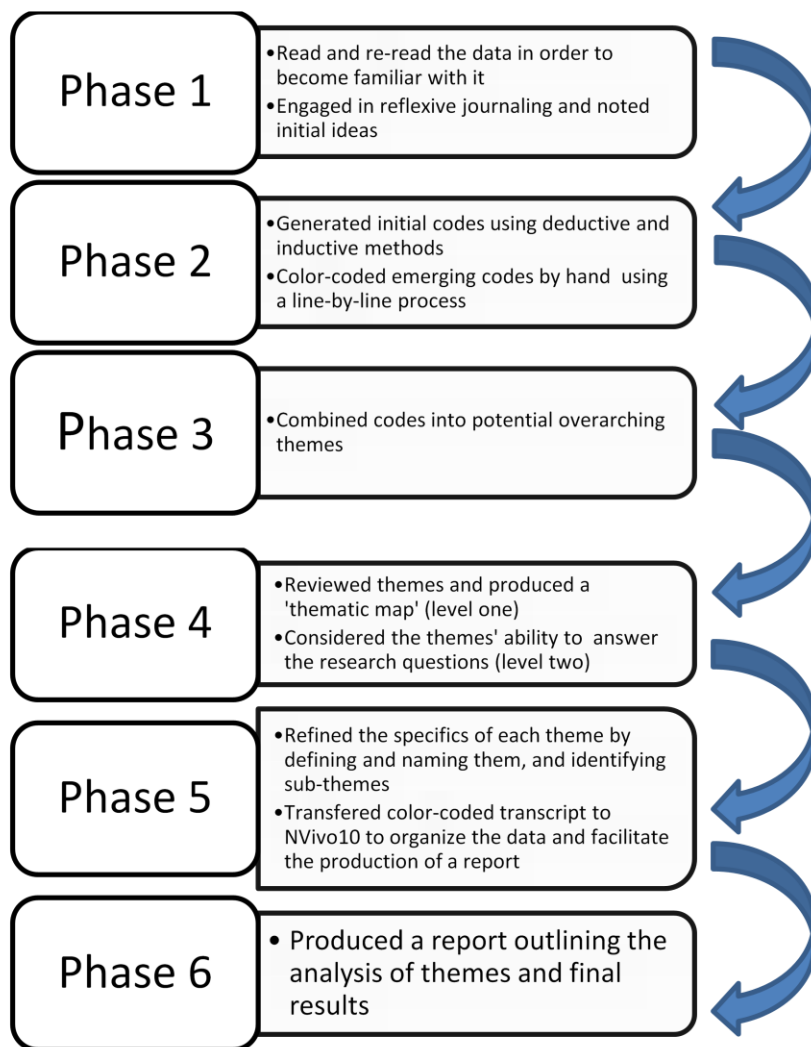
### 5.5.1. Thematic Analysis and Coding

Thematic analysis is the method of analysis chosen for this research study. This technique is considered a foundational method of analysis within the qualitative research framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and is particularly helpful for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data” (p. 79). In this sense, thematic analysis differs from content analysis in that it is more concerned with identifying "repeated patterns of meaning" that are important to a phenomenon as opposed to quantifying the numerical presence of certain words or concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86; Liamputtong, 2009). Thematic analysis is particularly useful and advantageous in that it encourages the researcher to take on an active role, while offering an "organic approach to coding and theme development" (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297). Therefore, thematic analysis allows for improved flexibility within qualitative research, particularly relating to the research question, sample size, data collection method, inductive and deductive analyses, and overall interpretation, but also with regards to accessibility (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 298). As a result of its' flexible nature, thematic analysis is a good introductory method for novice qualitative researchers (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 298).

My application of thematic analysis was heavily informed by Braun and Clarke’s 2006 ‘Phases of Thematic Analysis’ as they offer a practical framework with clear

guidelines to follow (see Figure 5.1). Phase one involves familiarizing yourself with the data. In accordance with suggestions by Braun & Clarke (2006), I read through all 389 narratives once before beginning to list ideas and themes, and then actively read through the narratives a second time, with the goal of writing down early impressions regarding emerging patterns. Re-reading the data was particularly important as I was not involved in the initial collection of the data, and therefore was even less familiar with it than if I had collected and transcribed it. Thus, immersing myself in the data through repeated reading aided in my overall familiarization.

Phase two involves the generation of initial codes. Coding refers to arranging the data into meaningful clusters, which are more numerous and specific than themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this phase, I generated over 40 preliminary codes using a combination of both deductive and inductive methods. An inductive approach is *data-driven*, in that it identifies and generates themes that are strongly linked to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Patton, 1999). In comparison, a deductive approach involves the coding of themes and patterns shaped by pre-existing research and is therefore *theory-driven* (Braun & Clarke, 2006). My initial codes were at times informed by the findings of my literature review and the research on the gender paradigm theory and stigmatization theories, but I also felt it was important to remain open to recognizing and listing new codes that emerged from my data. In this phase, I color-coded emerging codes by hand using colored pens and highlighters. In the margins, I made additional notes to differentiate the various codes.



**Figure 5.1. The Application of Braun & Clarke's (2006) Phases of Thematic Analysis**

Phase three involves the interpretative analysis of codes, a process achieved by organizing and collating initial codes into tentative overarching themes. This process is referred to as axial coding, which allows researchers to “make connections between a major category and its sub-category” (Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008, p. 280). To help facilitate this process, I created what Braun and Clarke (2006) coined a 'mind-map', that is a visual representation of initial codes and the relationship between codes and themes. In the end I identified numerous codes that appeared to be related and collated them into an overarching theme. For example, several codes related to men's perception

of the police response to IPV. I collated these codes into the broader theme of Dissatisfaction with Police Response. The initial codes then became sub-themes within the overarching theme.

Phase four involves reviewing themes by either combining, refining, separating, or discarding the themes identified in phase three (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this phase I re-read the entire data in order to determine whether any themes were missed, as well as to ascertain if the identified themes helped in answering the research questions. Thus, I merged some initial themes together as they appeared to overlap significantly. Alternatively, some themes were eliminated entirely as they did not serve to answer my research question.

Phase five involves defining and naming each theme and identifying potential sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this phase I drafted a written analysis in my notebook exploring the relationship between different themes and the accompanying sub-themes. Additionally, although not required by Braun and Clarke's six phases of thematic analysis, I transferred the color-coded transcript to NVivo10 in order to better organize the data and facilitate the production of a report in phase six. Doing so assisted in helping me retrieve texts far quicker than sorting through the printed data that was coded by hand. Although I mostly followed the six stages in a linear fashion, importing the transcript to NVivo10 allowed for certain phases to over-lap as I returned and reviewed my work in previous stages.

Phase six is the final step and involves the production of a report outlining a description and in-depth analysis of the themes in relation to the research question. In this phase, my goal was to "tell the complicated story of [my] data" and convince "the reader of the merit and validity of [my] analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). To do so, I chose vivid and clear extracts that assisted in further supporting the prevalence of the identified theme. After, I engaged in an analytic narrative that lead to the production of an argument given the identified research questions.

### **5.5.2. Interrater Reliability and 'Trustworthiness' in Qualitative Research**

Reliability and validity within qualitative research require an examination of the research process (Silverman, 2010). Recommendations in the literature on qualitative

research encourage researchers to evaluate their own analysis of the data, and as such I engaged in a process of interrater reliability and researcher triangulation (Barbour, 2011; Hallgren, 2012; Liamputtong, 2009; Marques & McCall, 2005). In doing so, I sought peer or 'expert' checking on my interpretations of the data (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pederson, 2013; Liamputtong, 2009). Peer checking is a method of keeping the researcher honest, while reducing their personal bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, both my supervisor and I separately read and coded twenty randomly selected narratives. Afterwards, we discussed the emerging themes that we each identified and reached an agreement on significant and appropriate codes. This process of interrater reliability resulted in 95-100% agreement. Importantly, the involvement of several researchers in the coding process "can be seen as an advantage as their different perspectives can enrich the research process" (Carpenter & Suto, 2008, p. 153).

Trustworthiness is an equally important facet of reliability in qualitative research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Trustworthiness involves being fully transparent with the reader and providing the rationale for why the researcher selected a methodological strategy (Liamputtong, 2009, p.24). To achieve trustworthiness, my chapter on methodological recommendations reports the aim of my research and the rationale for my research procedure, research design, and coding process. Furthermore, in the results section I consistently engage in data triangulation by presenting evidence to support my interpretation in the form of multiple quotations from the participants' narratives (Liamputtong, 2009).

## **5.6. Ethical Issues and Considerations**

### **5.6.1. Research with a High-Risk Population**

Throughout this study, emphasis was placed on the importance of protecting vulnerable populations from exploitation within a research context. Vulnerable populations should only be included in a research study if they are the only appropriate group to answer the research question (Shaké, 2014). Due to the nature of the study, alternative populations would be unable to accurately answer the research question. As such, male victims of female perpetrated IPV who had the desire to contribute to the study were considered by the primary investigators.



Even so, it is continuously of importance to seek a victim-centered approach to ensure that our research methods and strategies do not serve to imitate the dominant power relations once used by abusers to disempower participants (French, 2009, p. 105). Thus, it is unethical to extract research and stories from victimized populations only then to "just walk away" when we have finished our research (Mander, 2010, p. 269). Similarly, Pittaway, Bartolomei, and Hugman (2010) consider the various unethical research practices in which researchers can further victimize and injure already oppressed and vulnerable populations. These authors recommend engaging in the concept of reciprocal responsibility – that is, helping the individuals being researched as much as possible.

In order to respond to these challenges, I regularly took part in what I would like to term engaged research. Although the initial goal of this research was to understand and examine participants lived experiences and subjective realities, taking part in engaged research allowed me to go a step further in ensuring that my research has the potential to lead to change or action within society. In this sense, engaged research should not only be attempting to contribute to existing literature, but also to lessening the inequality and suffering of the participants.

Although disclosing private and traumatic events experienced can be distressing for participants, past studies have indicated that victims of IPV have found that telling their story can be cathartic, helpful, and empowering, providing a sense of relief to finally be acknowledged and heard (Abrahams, 2007; Baird, 2012; East et al., 2010). To ensure that participants in this study would have the same positive experience, it was crucial that I carefully analyzed the participants' stories, thus providing them with a platform to tell their stories free of judgement. Finally, to reduce risks associated with potential psychological harm from participation in the study, the primary investigators provided participants with information on various free support services including counselling services, referral services, and telephone helplines. Participants were encouraged to take advantage of the available support should they feel it would benefit them.

### **5.6.2. Confidentiality**

The methods for the study conducted by the primary investigators were approved by the Clark Committee for the Rights of Human Participants in Research and Training Programs (IRB) at Clark University. Participants were provided with the name and phone number of the IRB Chair should they have any questions concerning the ethics approval of the study. Additionally, no identifying information was collected from participants, and the study assured the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Participants were required to complete the online survey in one sitting and were advised that they could skip any survey question should they not feel comfortable answering it. Participants were also notified that they could drop out of the study at any time and their responses would not be recorded. As previously discussed, the primary investigators encouraged participants to take the survey in a private, safe, and secure location, and to clear their browser history upon completion. Directions for deleting internet browser history were provided on the study's webpage. Finally, participants were notified of potential risks associated with participation in the survey, and they were provided with information about obtaining help for victimization and psychological distress.

In accordance with a provision of TCPS4 (Article 2.4), the current study was not subject to research ethics review as it relies exclusively on secondary data which, when originally collected, did not collect any identifiable information from participants.

## **Chapter 6.**

### **Study Results**

This chapter presents six major themes and subsequent sub-themes that emerged during the data analysis process. In addition, relevant direct quotes from the participants' narratives are included to better demonstrate the presence of these themes. The primary themes include the context of help-seeking and severe IPV, negative help-seeking experiences with law enforcement agencies, the court system, and domestic violence organizations, and barriers preventing the informal help-seekers from seeking formal help.

#### **6.1. Primary Theme 1: The Context of Help-Seeking and Types of Severe IPV**

In order to better understand help-seeking, it is important to know the types of severe IPV inflicted on the men in this sample. While discussing help-seeking, men frequently provided context by narrating specific examples of the severe IPV they experienced. The types of abuse that emerged in the data included instances of intimate terrorism and controlling behaviour, and a combination of severe psychological abuse, severe physical violence, and sexual abuse.

##### **6.1.1. The Fallacy of Gendered Intimate Terrorism**

The quantitative survey data indicated that participants experienced intimate terrorism in the form of controlling behaviors (94.8%), severe psychological abuse (95.9%), and severe physical abuse (87.2%), and the analysis of the qualitative narratives further supports this finding. As such, the first sub-theme within the context of help-seeking was men as victims of intimate terrorism – more importantly, that men can be, and often are victims of female perpetrated intimate terrorism and tactics of power and control. Participants frequently described a range of minor to severe forms of intimate terrorism, coupled with acts of physical violence, which ultimately encouraged them to seek formal help. No participant described their experiences of victimization as

isolated episodes, but instead as constant and continuing throughout the duration of the relationship.

### ***Suicidal Threats***

Suicidal threats are often present in relationships characterized by intimate terrorism. Importantly, suicidal threats were commonly discussed by participants in this study as a means in which female partners could manipulate and gain control over their significant other. In fact, one male explained that “threats of suicide . . . [were] a recurring theme in my relationship with her”. Often, suicidal threats were ultimately used to encourage male victims to return to the abusive relationship or to prevent them from leaving in the first place. After having been stalked, obsessively monitored, and held hostage, one male stated: “When I left she would threaten suicide”. Another participant acknowledged that the constant suicidal threats made by his abusive female partner “[were] just manipulative”.

In another example, a participant described an experience in which their female partner would place the blame for her behaviour on her partner, and use threats of suicide in order to impose fear and gain additional control over her partner and child:

One example was when she threatened to kill herself in front of our kid, he was 5 at the time. She told him that she was going to blow her brains out with a gun, and when he and his dad (me) got back, the walls would be covered with blood and brains . . . She knows no boundaries, she claims I am guilty of her behaviors, claims to everyone that she is the victim of my abuse, has tried to have me fired, has tried to undermine my relationship with my son and with my current wife. Don't know what else to say, she is my family's personal terrorist.

Overall, several participants outlined that threats of suicide were a common tactic used as a means for their female partners to intimidate and guilt victims into staying in the abusive relationship. Suicidal threats served as tactics of manipulation designed to instill belief in the victim that they are responsible for their abusive partner's actions and mental health should they choose to leave them.

### ***Using Children as a Weapon of Control: Intimate Terrorism and Parental Alienation***

Intimate terrorists often involve the children in the relationship to further support their control, also known as parental alienation (Johnson, 2008; Harman, Kruk, & Hines,

2018). Children may be used "to back [the abuser] up" and "to make [the victim's] humiliation more complete by forcing them into the room to assist as [they] confront [the victim]" (p. 16). Additionally, intimate terrorists may convince their children that the other parent is "incompetent or stupid or immoral" and may threaten to take the children away (p. 16).

Similar tactics involving children were reported by the male participants who took part in this study. For example, female partners frequently insulted and physically abused the male victim in front of their children. These events served to humiliate the male and promote parental alienation by convincing the children that their father is useless and weak. For example, one participant discussed enduring physical abuse in the presence of their children:

I was physically beaten by this woman on four different occasions in a one-month period. These were unprovoked and were not just slaps to the face but beatings to the head, kicks to the groin. As God is my witness, I never touched the woman. I would clasp my hands behind my back and endure the beatings. The most horrible part of these beatings was the woman, during two of the beatings, would intentionally pick up the two- and one-half year-old beautiful baby girl and hold her on her hip while beating the father. This woman would beat on me and then go and get the child from her bed and continue the beating.

In another incident, a participant recounts how his female partner physically abused him and intentionally lied and blamed him for her actions in front of their children:

I remember one time when she threw a television remote control at me and hit me in the head with it. The remote control broke into several pieces when it hit my head. She immediately called the children into the room and showed them the pieces of the remote control on the floor and told them that I broke the remote control when I was in a rage. This was more painful for me than any physical assault that she ever made.

In the absence of physical abuse, some female partners shouted at, swore, and psychologically abused their male partners in the presence of their children. According to one participant, his wife "called [him a] 'motherfucker', 'asshole', and comparable things many times in the presence of [their] child". In another instance, the female partner regularly engaged in "the brainwashing of the children that their dad is no good and that he doesn't love them". One father's children were alienated from him when his ex-wife made claims that "[he is] out to kidnap them and keep them from their mother".

Evidently, these behaviours promoted further parental alienation and, in some cases, encouraged the children to support their mother by also engaging in abusive behaviour towards their father:

I was playing my guitar quietly in my room one evening for stress relief and she told the kids I was like some 17 year old hiding in his room - not a real man . . . I cannot raise any issue of disagreement without her getting angry and loudly calling me names like "loser", "asshole", "Psycho" in front of the children. Ultimately, they all blame me for her scenes - I.E., "what did dad do to upset mom" . . . Further my wife regularly has family discussions with the kids tell[ing] them I am a loser and I am responsible for their unhappiness. I used to hug and smile with each of these beautiful kids - now they barely talk to me.

She still controls my time with my children and threatens me by allowing my kids to use abuse as well. She tells our kids that it is ok to tell me that unless I come home then they do not have to see me and that they do not want me around.

Finally, some intimate terrorists will threaten to remove the children from the care of the other parent in order to maintain control or ensure the victim complies with the abuser's orders (Johnson, 2008). This is also a common tactic seen in instances of parental alienation (Harman, Kruk, & Hines, 2018). One male in this study explained that his wife would demand sex from him or "she would ban me from seeing our children (a threat which she actually followed through with)". Others explained that their female partners would control access to their children as a means of keeping the male from leaving the relationship, to "punish him for leaving, or to use as a lever to control him to get what she wants".

### ***Obsessive Monitoring, Jealousy, and Forced Isolation from Family and Friends***

Intimate terrorism also encompasses obsessive monitoring, constant jealousy, and forced isolation from those close to the victim, including family and friends. The isolation may be physical, such as moving away from family and friends, or it can be psychological isolation - that is, harassing and insulting the partner until they avoid contact with their family and friends (Johnson, 2008, p. 22). In this study, male victims frequently reported that their female partners stalked them and monitored their texts and emails. For example, one participant recounts:

In my experience with this woman, she had very little respect for boundaries. I had been stalked; I had her sit outside my apartment for hours on end uninvited. I have had obsessive phone calls over 200+ and text messages when I tried to leave and remove myself from dangerous situations. I have had my privacy violated when she had gone through my computer and cellphone, she would sit in the middle of room and refuse to leave my apartment or house. I was held hostage when I tried to leave saying she would cut herself and call the police if I left and tell them I did it. When I left, she would threaten suicide, threaten to call the police take me to court.

Furthermore, men reported how their female partners constantly accused them of infidelity when no evidence of such existed, and ultimately prevented them from speaking with female friends, fulfilling the jealousy and forced isolation component typical in cases of intimate terrorism. One male explained that his wife “controls who [I] see, who I talk to, what I do with my time, and all our money (I have to hand her my checks)”. Another male elaborated on his partner’s constant monitoring, jealousy, and eventual isolation:

I was shunned from my female friends. My partner would call them whores, sluts or bitches. My phone activity was monitored, and my text messages were monitored. My Facebook was monitored. I was always being accused of cheating. Arguments were always being about who I was talking too. I was accused of wanting to sleep with every female that walked by. When out with friends she could socialize but I had to keep to the table and not look around because I would be accused later at home of wanting to sleep with whoever it was. So I would just look at the table to keep a fight from starting later on.

By controlling the social activity of a male partner, that is who they speak with, where they go, and even how they spend money, female partners can gain further power and control over their victim by weakening their support networks. It is in this environment that a combination of psychological abuse, gaslighting, and physical violence can flourish.

### **6.1.2. The Coexistence and Interaction Between Psychological Abuse, Physical Abuse, and Sexual Abuse**

As is typical in intimate terrorism, psychological abuse is rampant and frequently accompanies physical abuse or sexual abuse. Psychological abuse can include constant insults, attacking a partner’s self-worth, and convincing the partner that they are worthless and no one else cares for them. In the quantitative survey, 95.9% of

participants reported experiencing severe psychological abuse, which is further supported in the participant narratives. One male explains how his female partner encouraged his depressive and suicidal behaviour when he turned to her for help:

During our relationship, I fell into a state of deep depression and experienced suicidal ideation. When I confided this to my wife and described my strong belief that suicide would be impossibly difficult to commit, she contradicted me and suggested hanging as an easy and efficient means of killing myself.

Another man explained that his wife constantly degraded and humiliated him, and ultimately “convinced me I was so much worse than just worthless [and] that I should be dead, that would be better for all. I attempted suicide as ordered”. Several men reported that when they attempted to leave their female partners, they were told that they had no friends and the only person who truly cared about them was their abusive partner.

Alongside emotional and psychological abuse, intimate terrorists will often minimize or completely deny their abuse, and instead “blame [the victim] for what is going on in the relationship” (Johnson, 2008, p. 16). In doing so, abusers normalize, rationalize, and ultimately minimize their own abusive behaviour: “To this day, my ex-wife not only doesn’t apologize for her abuse of me but also justifies it and even says [!] deserved it”. Abusers may also employ ‘gaslighting’ games designed to convince the victim that they are irrational or crazy. Consider the following example, when a man discovered his spouse was having an affair:

She would make me feel as if I was the wrong one, I was crazy and psychotic. [She] continued with her insults of me being a fat American and stupid. During this time, she talked about me being poor in sex and started being very secretive about her computer use. When I tried to talk about all of it to her, she would get angry and violent and call me names. she would try to make me feel as if I was wrong and crazy for even thinking that she was cheating . . . I was frequently insulted and called crazy - the majority of the time this was directly in front of the kids.

Often, female partners would blame their male partners for their actions, once more minimizing and rationalizing their own behaviour: “she would cheat on me then tell me it was my fault”. In many instances, the previously discussed tactics of psychological abuse, physical abuse, and forced isolation occurred simultaneously:



Nearly all of the abuse I experienced was emotional abuse - constant criticism, loss of self-worth, abandonment on multiple occasions, constantly being blamed for my partner's faults and mistakes, being yelled at, pushing me, kidnapping then abandoning my child, turning her entire family against me, alienating me in front of my family, never showing any remorse for her actions, frequent withholding sex/intimacy.

A total of 28.6% of participants reported experiencing severe sexual abuse, while 44.2% reported experiencing minor sexual abuse. Sexual abuse was further discussed in the qualitative narratives, providing additional context for help-seeking. Although withholding sex was occasionally discussed, more men experienced sexual coercion and sexual abuse on behalf of their female partners. One participant explained that he underwent “months of coercive sex”, while another stated that his partner “repeatedly attempted to get me to impregnate her and, if I didn't, she would attack me”. Finally, one participant’s narrative demonstrated how the different types of severe IPV are linked and often occur simultaneously:

While outside she shoved me downstairs in [the] snow and ripped open 400 stitches in my chest and refused to take me to [the] hospital. She also shoved me down outside while feeding dogs with tubes for chemo and radiation in me. She took an axe and axed my door and threw all my possessions in the basement to be urinated on by cats she let roam there. She brought my hairbrush to [the] cancer doctor and asked if she could get cancer from it or me. She banged on my door at ALL HOURS . . . She throws things constantly at me and the scars I have on my chest from illness. I fear she may poison my food.

Asking the doctor if she could catch cancer from the male participant’s hairbrush was clear evidence of a relationship characterized by mental cruelty, degradation, shaming, and humiliation. Additionally, throwing his possessions in a basement and allowing cats to urinate on them constitutes terrorizing and physically abusive behaviour.

In past studies on female victims of intimate terrorism, it was noted that the physical abuse was not as damaging as the constant psychological abuse and imposition of control. Interestingly, the male victims in this study expressed similar sentiments: “At some point the brain sees emotional [and] mental abuse almost on par with physical abuse. The result of the emotional [and] mental abuse is still a broken person”.

Upon reading the narratives of male participants, we gain a better understanding of the many experiences of abuse and the context in which men of severe IPV seek formal help. Equipped with the knowledge of men's experiences of victimization, the following themes surrounding men's help-seeking experiences may be better discussed and understood.

## 6.2. Primary Theme 2: Dissatisfaction with Police

The following theme examines the male victims' perception of the police as a help-providing agency in cases of intimate partner violence. A total of 42.4% of participants sought help from the police, and the overwhelming majority expressed frustration with regards to their experience. The reasons for their dissatisfaction were varied, and overall four patterns emerged from the data (see figure 6.1). Firstly, male victims who called the police experienced a misplacement of blame in such a way that upon arrival the police arrested them rather than the female perpetrator. Secondly, female perpetrators engaged in legal and administrative abuse by making false accusations to the police, ultimately leading to the male victim being arrested and charged. Thirdly, male victims reported that the police were skeptical and often failed to believe that they were victims. Finally, male victims felt that the police trivialized their trauma by ridiculing them or not taking their experiences seriously.

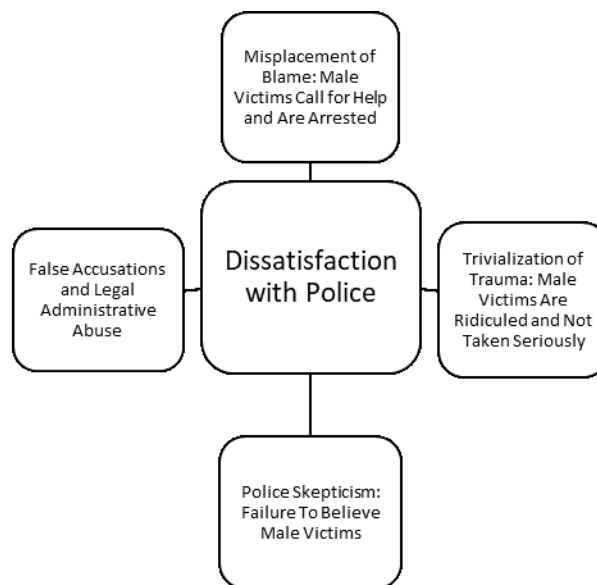


Figure 6.1. Dissatisfaction with Police

### **6.2.1. Misplacement of Blame: Male Victims Call for Help and Are Arrested**

Participants reported that they were dissatisfied with the police response because when they called for help, they often ended up being arrested. Charges and arrest of the male occurred even in instances where male victims presented with clear physical injuries:

I was viciously attacked in my house, knocked out, concussion, thrown through the front window of my residence. I had my ass kicked and the police arrested me for second degree assault even though I was not the aggressor!

My wife and daughter pushed me down a flight of stairs, beat me up, smashed my cellphone, then conspired to have me arrested when I called the police. The police did arrest me.

Men reported feeling as though the police automatically placed blame on the men, even in instances where the male had physical injuries and the female did not. In fact, one participant stated that after calling for help and being arrested, he truly believed that “[l]aw enforcement is almost completely biased” in believing that only women can be victims of IPV. As seen in the following sub-theme, misplacement of blame also occurs because of rampant false accusations and legal and administrative abuse made by female perpetrators of IPV. False accusations appear to be frequent and negatively affect male victims’ interactions with the police.

### **6.2.2. False Accusations and Legal and Administrative Abuse**

Participants reported that their interactions with the police were negatively affected by false accusations made by female partners. For example, one participant stated:

I called police for help and she retaliated by falsifying a police report and saying I pointed a gun at her and threatened to kill her. She later admitted falsifying the report, but was never charged. In a 4th incident she attacked me when I insisted on a divorce and told the police I tried to strangle her. I was arrested for attempted murder and convicted of misdemeanor assault.

It is clear that even when it is the male calling for help, one false accusation can lead to his arrest. In fact, even when the female admitted to falsifying the report, there were no punishments or consequences to making a false report to police. Therefore, a false accusation can impact a man's life in tremendously negative ways but lying to police is of little consequence to women. In the following narrative, a male explains how a false accusation led to him being forced to leave his home and lose his child. Despite his wife physically assaulting him in the presence of police officers, she was not arrested, and it was deduced that the male victim likely deserved it:

When my ex wife physically attacked me (while married), I eventually got my child and I out of that abusive environment by leaving our home for a moment. Ex wife called police claiming "some guy just kidnapped my kid" - immediately after I had left with our child. Police were immediately at our residency, I was forced to the ground, despite my obvious physical injuries accrued by my ex (she stabbed me with a knife to my back). The ex then kicked me in the face and ribs while police attempted to apprehend me on the ground. Police politely asked her to step away and that I must have deserved what she did to me (one police said I must have deserved it out loud). Our child had also been physically assaulted by his mother and had blood coming from the side of his lip from mother slapping and backhanding. Despite mine and my child's physical injuries, the police never once asked if we needed medical attention. But I was surely forced out of the home or go to jail; were my options. Police gave our child back to the mother, and I was forced to leave.

In the above scenario, even though the male victim and the child had evidence in the form of physical injuries, the police took the false accusations made by the female partner seriously and dismissed any accusations made by the male partner. Clearly, it appears that the burden of proof is much higher for male victims than it is for female victims, as recounted in one story: "I called the police. She lied and said I attacked her. I was arrested and charged. I recorded the event where she attacked me. The police refuse to listen to the proof". Therefore, even in cases where the male partner has proof of his victimization, the female is still considered the victim.

Men also recounted instances of legal and administrative abuse involving the police. As previously discussed, legal and administrative abuse occurs when perpetrators purposefully manipulate the legal resources at their disposal in order to negatively affect their male partner. It is believed that legal and administrative abuse occurs because of existing stereotypes of men as abusers and women as victims. One male recounts being told by his partner "hit me hit me so I can call the cops". Thus, this

participant explained that one false accusation can be extremely detrimental to men, as they are left trying to prove their innocence without necessarily having any evidence or resources.

Furthermore, one participant explained that he too called the police for help and was arrested. Once the police left, his female partner told him that “this is not her first rodeo and she knows what to tell the police”. Another male reported being told “hit me hit me so I can call the police”. In these extracts it can clearly be deduced that the female partners knows how to manipulate the policing system in order to benefit them and harm their male partners. Likewise, another male recounted that he “was the victim but she as a woman lied about the events. She said that she doesn’t mind lying to the police because they will always believe anything she says. She’s done it before”. Once again, this female partner knowingly admitted that the police were more likely to believe her false story over that of her male partner, and as such exploited the biases of responding police officers in order to gain an advantage.

### **6.2.3. Police Skepticism: Failure to Believe Male Victims**

The previous themes of misplacement of blame and false accusations naturally lead into the next sub-theme: participants reported that the police are often skeptical and fail to believe men’s stories, naturally leading to more dissatisfaction with the police. In some cases, men called the police for help but upon arrival, the police provided the female perpetrators with advice on how to protect themselves: “The police confiscated my firearms, and left my wife [with] info on how to obtain a protective order, even though I’m the one who called for help”. Other men reported that the police automatically believed the female partner’s story, and “wouldn’t even take [the male’s] statement”. In some cases, police officers doubted the male’s story and engaged in victim blaming: “When my ex-wife tried to kill me, I went to the police. Instead of their helping, they . . . said that I must have done something to provoke her”.

The majority of the participants who expressed dissatisfaction and frustration with the police felt that the police skepticism and overall negative treatment stemmed from the fact that the victims were men. In this sense, they argued that there was an institutional belief engrained in law enforcement agencies that men cannot be victims of IPV, ultimately leading to the disparity in the way they were treated. One male stated

that the “[p]olice bias regarding domestic violence is very bad. The man is always guilty. The woman is the victim”. Likewise, others argued that the police “ignore or fail to believe what a woman can and will do to a man”. This hypothesis of gender bias in policing is supported by the literature. In fact, “attitudes such as gender prejudices appear to be more prevalent and encouraged in a male-dominated culture such as the police” (Gracia, Garcia, & Lila, 2014, p. 1200). Overall, it appears that the police are skeptical of victim stories and vulnerability in cases of female perpetrated IPV, possibly due to societal and organizational stereotypes of masculinity.

#### **6.2.4. Trivialization of Trauma: Male Victims are Ridiculed and Not Taken Seriously**

Finally, participants explained that their dissatisfaction with the police was partially rooted in experiences in which the police ridiculed, laughed at, or failed to take male victims of IPV seriously. One male explained that the worst part of seeking help was “the reactions . . . They all laughed at me, refused to help and even told me I was responsible for her abuse”. In another instance, a male showed the police an injury to his neck, at which point he “was asked with a smirk if [he] needed medical attention, they left and waited just down the road”. In this case, the female perpetrator was not arrested and the police did allow the male victim to file a report. This narrative further exemplifies that male victims’ concerns and injuries are ridiculed and not taken seriously, possibly because the police are unable to understand how a male can be fearful of a female partner.

In several instances, men reported that rather than remove the abusive female partner from the home or arrest her, the police questioned why the men stayed with their female partner. In fact, a male cancer patient recovering from chemotherapy treatment reported being abused and was told by police to “just move”.

Out of 389 narratives analyzed, only one participant spoke positively of the police, stating “in my own case, the police acted appropriately whereas the family court system failed miserably”. Even in the instance where a participant had one positive help-seeking experience, it appears to be tainted by negative experiences nonetheless. Overall, male victims of IPV are dissatisfied with the police response because they feel

that they were belittled, ridiculed, and that their experiences of trauma were trivialized and not taken seriously.

### 6.3. Primary Theme 3: Dissatisfaction with Courts

The following theme further examines the help-seeking experiences of male victims, particularly with regards to the judicial system. Similarly to their experience of reaching out to police, the participants reported that they were largely dissatisfied with their experiences within the court system as well as with the final decisions made by the judge or jury. Four patterns emerged from the data discussing the main reasons for their dissatisfaction (see figure 6.2). Firstly, male victims believed that the courts failed to believe their narrative, and automatically believed the story of female perpetrators. Secondly, the courts favoured mothers in child custody cases and required little evidence in making their decision. Thirdly, there were few consequences for female partners who made false accusations against male partners in court. Finally, male victims felt that the courts enabled female perpetrators to engage in legal and administrative abuse, and as such the courts were perceived as being complicit in male victimization.

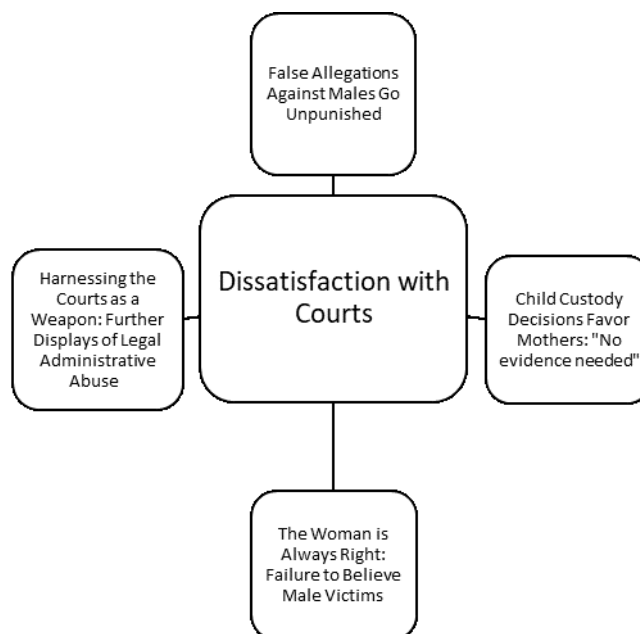


Figure 6.2. Dissatisfaction with Courts

### **6.3.1. The Woman Is Always Right: Failure of Court Officials to Believe Male Victims**

Overall, participants noted that much like the police, court officials often failed to believe male victims and instead believed the story of female perpetrators, suggesting that treatment differed significantly based on gender. Several men stated that it was evident the courts automatically assumed men were the perpetrators and women the victims in child custody cases and cases of intimate partner violence:

I am so frustrated by the unfair, biased and uninformed judicial system. Men are always assumed to be the perpetrator or if not a "perpetrator in waiting". It seems that no one will listen and no one will believe our stories as victims.

Several participants noted that they were "ridiculed and portrayed as the abuser" in court. As such, men reported that the gender-stereotyped treatment and skepticism surrounding male victims only served to further victimize and abuse them, rather than help as was initially expected:

The Courts and unjust laws are greatly responsible for abuse against males. My ex used the courts and laws to threaten me and keep me from responding to or fleeing the abuse. . . The courts were just waiting to give my life to her. It didn't matter that she abused me.

My situation ended up in court, with a full trial to determine custody. The courts believed her lies and made it illegal for me to have ANY time with my children, which is still true today. EVERY court officer believed her lies and believed me to be a liar. And there were many.

It appears that the gender stereotypes that permeate society are replicated within the court system, at which point a double standard exists regarding male and female aggression. Male participants even noted that professionals within the judiciary system warned them of the differential treatment and apparent denial of female aggression and violence within the courts:

An attorney advised me there is almost nothing I can do, as family courts are very partial to women . . . [I was told] that even if I could prove she tried to kill me, it's just evidence of my alleged physical abuse of her and she was just defending herself.

Further adding to the frustration, male participants reported that the courts failed to believe their stories even when they provided substantiating evidence:



I tried to press assault charges for the incident, but the [Assistant State Attorney] had them dismissed, despite neighbor's testimony, DNA evidence of my own blood on my clothes, her history of abuse and false claims, and other evidence which corroborated my version of events.

I also experienced prejudice in the courts – they believed every word she said and all the lies – despite all the documentation I have on her abuse toward me and her uninvolvedness with the kids. I became the one that was suspect, I became the one that was considered the abuser . . . . I feel this has been very one sided and mainly because I am male . . . . I feel like I am continually being abused.

According to the narratives provided by participants, it appears that male victims of intimate partner violence who enter the courtroom are at an immediate disadvantaged due largely to gender-stereotypes surrounding abuse and female aggression. As a result, court officials fail to believe the stories of male victims, even when evidence is provided, ultimately contributing to the overall dissatisfaction with the courts.

### **6.3.2. Child Custody Decisions Favor Mothers: “No Evidence Needed”**

Male participants reported further evidence of differential treatment, in that they believed that the courts favoured mothers in child custody cases with no evidence required. This is in stark contrast to the experiences of male victims who were met with doubt even when they could provide evidence of victimization. According to one participant,

[My ex] conspired with her boyfriend to take me for everything I have. Including my children. Despite overwhelming evidence of her guilt for some of her own accusations against me, her conspiracy to defraud me, paternal alienation, and overwhelming evidence of my innocence, the courts gave her everything and took everything away from me.

Several men explained that their female partner’s allegation was sufficient evidence for the courts to award the mother with child custody, suggesting that the courts ruled on allegations alone:

In family court an allegation is pretty much all you need with no facts, even if the plaintiff claims (as in my case) that she was stabbed in the chest with a knife . . . . There was no REQUEST FOR FORENSIC PROOF by the JUDGE, just her word was enough.

Men complained of women needing to provide little or no evidence to the judge. Yet, it appears as though male participants were rarely awarded child custody even when they provided significant evidence against their female partner:

She used the system against me since no one believes the man. Even though I have a domestic violence order against her, several police reports, statements of harassment, pictures of vandalism, she got my kids . . . I have proof of her committing 23 violations of the domestic violence order. I am frustrated at the system and can't believe she was able to get my kids in the divorce with accusations and no proof.

This statement suggests once more that the burden of proof in court appears to be significantly higher for men than it is for women, particularly in cases surrounding child custody.

### **6.3.3. False Allegations Against Males Go Unpunished**

Male victims reported that false allegations made by female partners in court were a common occurrence and ranged from filing frivolous lawsuits to making false reports of partner abuse and child sexual abuse. A significant source of frustration stemmed from the fact that there were no direct consequences or punishments when court officials realized that female partners had falsely accused male partners:

My wife falsely accused me of abusing our children and abusing her in court, several times, yet with a good lawyer, I was able to win sole custody of my children. The same judge heard everything. That judge never considered putting sanctions on her due to her lies about me.

In another case, a male participant explained that his ex-wife accused him of domestic violence in family court. The allegation was proven to be false and as such the “judge dismissed it, however [they] did not prosecute [her] for making false accusations”. Instead, the male goes on to explain that his wife was awarded sole custody of their children, suggesting that not only do false allegations go unpunished, in some cases women are still awarded child custody.

Some participants argued that by failing to punish women who make false allegations, the family courts are complicit in instances of male victimization and “designed to reward [female] misconduct”. Logically, if there are no consequences for

lying in court, it makes sense for female perpetrators of abuse to make false allegations in an attempt to see if it benefits them. This concept leads to the final sub-theme that touches on the presence of legal and administrative abuse within the court system.

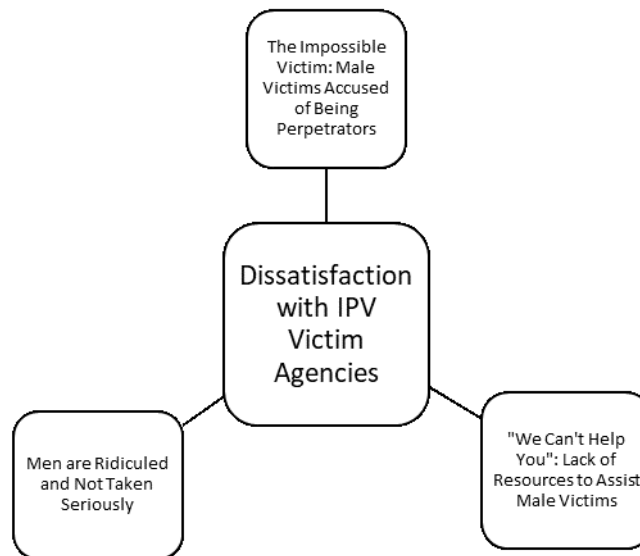
#### **6.3.4. Harnessing the Court as a Weapon: Further Displays of Legal and Administrative Abuse**

Male victims reported that their female partners recognized the courts' differential treatment based on gender, and purposely used this to their advantage either by way of making false allegations, or to threaten their male partners into submission. In this sense, legal and administrative abuse was only possible because of the courts' stereotypical belief that men are perpetrators and women are victims. One man reported that the mother of his child "regularly threatens [him] to go to court to get more money [from him] . . . and in the past has gone to court and lied about abuse to gain the court's favor". Evidently, it is not difficult to manipulate a system which is less receptive and sympathetic to male victims. In other instances, men reported women threatening to withhold access to their children, claiming they will be "backed up by the court system".

Some female perpetrators went so far as to make false claims of child sexual abuse, ensuring that the father would lose custody of his children. One male explained that he's "endured three false child abuse reports" and that he overheard his partner's lawyer tell her "you are exactly where I want you to be and that's in the drivers' seat". Evidently, some female perpetrators harness the court system in an effort to maintain ongoing control, harassment and abuse. Comparatively, the court system enables this type of abuse to occur and fails to protect male victims: "My ex always told me she could use the courts to destroy me at her whim and pleasure – and she did". Thus, male victims report dissatisfaction with the courts for failing to protect them from legal and administrative abuse, and for providing their female partners with a platform to engage in it. It is worth noting that of the 389 narratives analyzed, no participant reported a positive experience with the courts.

## 6.4. Primary Theme 4: Dissatisfaction with IPV Victim Agencies

The last formal help-seeking resource discussed in the male narratives were intimate partner violence victim agencies, most notably hotlines, shelters, and domestic violence centers. Overall, male victims were largely dissatisfied with the help, or lack thereof, provided by these agencies. Three sub-themes were identified in the analysis of the survey responses. Firstly, male victims were frequently accused of being the perpetrators of abuse, suggesting that men do not fit the image of the 'ideal' IPV victim. Secondly, much like with the police and the courts, male victims were ridiculed and not taken seriously by the employees of domestic violence agencies. Finally, male victims who sought help were turned away from these agencies, stating that they lacked the resources and knowledge to properly assist them (see Figure 6.3). Ultimately, no narratives discussed positive experiences with IPV victim agencies.



**Figure 6.3. Dissatisfaction with IPV Victim Agencies**

### 6.4.1. The Impossible Victim: Male Victims Who Seek Help Are Accused of Being Perpetrators

Numerous male participants reported that when they tried to seek help from IPV agencies, they were frequently accused of being the perpetrator of violence. After calling the police on an abusive female partner, one male received a pamphlet in the mail

advertising help for victims of intimate partner violence. He recounts the following story when he attempted to call the number provided on the pamphlet:

[I] was DENIED help . . . I called to get help and the woman on the phone yelled at me saying she was not going to tell me anything and not to call there. Then I realized she thought I was the abuser.

Some men stated that employees from domestic violence agencies accused them of lying, because they were “male and they stated that men are never the victims”. In other instances, male victims were referred to different organizations, only to discover that those services were to assist batterers. Evidently, men reported feeling angry that domestic violence agencies dismissed their experiences of victimization. Reaching out for help in the first instance was difficult given various barriers men experience, however upon being blamed or denied assistance, participants felt extremely isolated and further withdrew from future attempts to receive help. As such, men concluded that “abused men . . . are the most non-sympathetic groups in this country”.

#### **6.4.2. IPV Organizations Ridicule Men and Fail to Take Them Seriously**

Not only were male victims accused of being perpetrators of domestic violence, several reported being ridiculed by employees of domestic violence agencies and helplines, which only served to heighten their shame and embarrassment in seeking help. One male explained that upon calling a hotline advertised for victims, they “laughed at me telling me only men abuse”, while another stated the “domestic violence organizations literally chuckled at me when I called for help”. Most participants who sought formal help from these agencies felt that they were not taken seriously:

I feel that legal and other resources for men in situations where abuse is not extreme doesn't exist . . . [they] don't take male victims of persistent but not injurious abuse seriously.

One participant stated that IPV organizations and services could be helpful for male victims, but that they needed to hire employees “who take you seriously, not laugh or dismiss it or blame you”. In this sense, the services provided by the agencies are mostly appealing to male victims who want help, but the behavior and attitudes of employees prevent men from accessing the advertised services. Clearly, male victims of IPV

experience gender-stereotyped treatment when seeking help from various agencies and organizations. By failing to take the abuse seriously and acknowledge the diversity of IPV victims, men experience secondary victimization by a system that upholds dominant gender stereotypes and double standards.

#### **6.4.3. “We Can’t Help You”: Lack of Resources and Knowledge to Assist Male Victims Escaping Abuse**

The final sub-theme highlights the constraints of the domestic violence system. In particular, multiple men noted that domestic violence agencies and hotlines turned them away, noting that they were unable to help them due to a lack of resources and knowledge surrounding male victims of intimate partner violence. Instead, the only resources that existed for men consisted of batterer programs: “Every 'organization for men' I contacted . . . [were] all designed to help abusive men rather than abused men. I could not find one group designed to help male victims”. Even in the rare instance where a service did exist, it was typically cancelled due to a low turnout rate:

There is no active men's group in my state for male victims; I was able to go to two sessions, but I was the only participant and the 'group' was cancelled . . . This group was held at a gay/lesbian outreach center, which may have discouraged heterosexual male victims from attending. In my opinion, male victims are severely undeserved, and the frequency of males being physically abused . . . is seen as almost nonexistent.

Importantly, a low turn-out rate does not necessarily indicate that the service is unrequired, especially given the increasing knowledge surrounding the existence of male victims, but rather that additional barriers likely exist ultimately preventing men from attending. For example, one male explained that being told time and time again that domestic violence services were exclusively for women and that men could not be victims, he felt that he was in a “culturally abusive situation . . . which encourage[d] non-participation and discourage[d] men from seeking help”. Additionally, male victims reported that being abused by a female partner, and having society deny the existence of that victimization, was an attack on their own masculine identity. In this sense, it is unsurprising that male victims of female perpetrated abuse may feel uncomfortable attending a victim group held at an outreach centre designed for members of the LGBTQ community, particularly when professional agencies within the CJS base the treatment of male victims entirely on societal gender-stereotypes and double standards.

## 6.5. Primary Theme 5: The 'Iceberg' of Unreported Victimization: Barriers to Formal Help-Seeking

Although the purpose of this study was to explore the formal help-seeking experiences of male victims, 12.6% of participants sought informal help only due to various perceived or real barriers. Furthermore, men who sought formal help (87.4%) from at least one agency frequently reported the various barriers that prevented them from seeking additional formal help from another agency. As such, the barriers to formal help-seeking became a theme that was important to address in order to fully understand the experiences of men who seek help. While female victims face barriers as well, it is interesting to note that some of the barriers experienced by men are unique and directly tied to the overall gender-stereotypes present in western society. In addition, the barriers identified are identical to the reasons men report being dissatisfied with formal services, suggesting that the fears associated with reporting their victimization are legitimate and rational (see Figure 6.4).

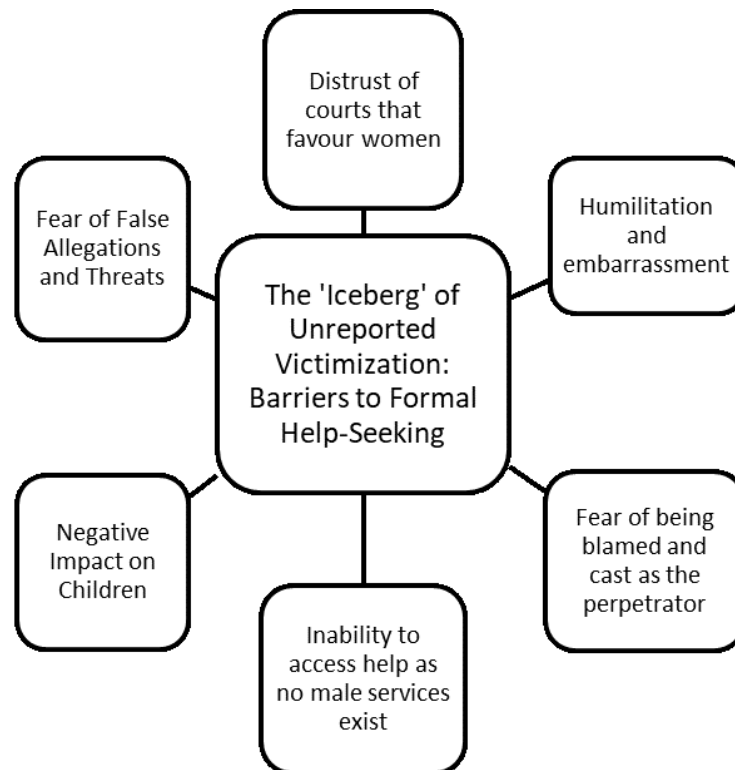


Figure 6.4. The 'Iceberg' of Unreported Victimization: Barriers to Formal Help-Seeking

### **6.5.1. Humiliation and Embarrassment Tied to Social Expectations of Men**

Participants explained that the social expectations of men made it challenging for them to reach out to formal services for help. Traditional gender norms encourage and expect men to be strong, unaffected, and unemotional, ultimately making it far less likely for them to disclose their abuse to formal services. Men explained that they were too humiliated and embarrassed to admit their victimization due to presiding social stigmas, particularly when the victimization was perpetrated by a female partner. In fact, one male noted that if a man revealed he was abused he would be portrayed as “a wimp, [because] what guy can’t take a girl punch?”.

Additionally, a participant explained that “as a man it is extremely hard to talk about a situation such as this. Most people find it hard to understand how a man can be submissive to a woman and tolerate such behavior”. Several men explained that they never called the police during episodes of abuse because they were too embarrassed and ashamed, and thought the police would never believe them. In another instance, a male victim was brought to court by his ex-wife but was “afraid to tell the judge about [his] wounds fearing . . . [he] would be mocked in open court and not believed”. As a result of these fears, men were often arrested and charged as the perpetrator, or the abuse simply remained unreported. Evidently, masculine norms were internalized by male participants, preventing them from seeking formal help. In instances where men had already sought help from one formal agency and were ridiculed, they would avoid receiving help from another agency for fear that their negative experience would occur once more.

### **6.5.2. Fear of Being Blamed and Cast as the Perpetrator**

An additional barrier to formal help-seeking was the fear that male victims would be blamed and accused of being the perpetrator of partner violence. In particular, this fear stemmed from the belief that formal resources would perceive males as more capable of inflicting injury on females. As such, male participants believed that attributed blame would be driven primarily by gendered assumptions and stereotypes of aggression and victimhood. One male explained that:



I was afraid to say anything to anyone because I was afraid no one would believe me . . . I was also afraid to defend myself because the police would never believe that a man of my size and stature would be a victim of abuse from someone of her size and stature.

In this narrative, the participant believed that females would automatically be perceived as the victim, due to biological differences in size and weight, but also due to gendered assumptions that females are unlikely or unable to perpetrate injury against males, and that in the unlikely occurrence that they do, female-on-male violence is less serious than its counterpart. This fear also helped to explain why some men remained in abusive relationships: “That had a lot to do with my fear of attempting to leave her - the knowledge that no matter what happened, if she chose to involve the police, I would end up in jail, regardless of any evidence”.

As previously discussed, men who did attempt to seek formal help from the police, the courts, or domestic violence agencies reported they were dissatisfied with the response received because they were often accused of being the perpetrator of violence and not taken seriously. Evidently, the fear of being blamed or cast as the perpetrator of violence is a very rational and legitimate reason for men to abstain from seeking formal help, as that appears to be a common occurrence.

### **6.5.3. Fear of False Allegations and Threats by Female Perpetrators**

Another common barrier experienced by men was threats made by female partners to lie to the authorities if their male partner sought formal help. Men were afraid to receive help from the police, the courts, and domestic violence agencies because they knew their female partner would lie about the male being the perpetrator of violence, and that the authorities would be more likely to believe her:

She repeatedly threatened me when I said I was going to call the cops on her. She threatened she would tell them I tried to rape her or that she would have me killed if I went to the cops and told them what she was doing to me. She said they would believe her and not me, because she was the woman and I was the man. In the end, this is exactly what she did.

In some instances, men avoided seeking formal help until the abuse became frequent and too serious to hide. Often, their fears of their female partner following through on their threats were realized. One male explained that his partner had

previously threatened to make false allegations to authorities, and when he called the police, he stated: “she attacked me when I insisted on a divorce and told the police I tried to strangle her. I was arrested for attempted murder and convicted of misdemeanor assault.” Others reported that when they finally decided to involve the police, the police provided the female perpetrator with information on how to obtain a protective order.

Once again, a clear pattern of legal and administrative abuse can be seen. Female partners threaten to lie to the authorities to discourage male victims calling for help, knowing that the authorities are more than likely going to believe the female and not the male. For instance, one male stated, “I don't dare go to the police because she said she'll lie to them about the abuse; and that they'll believe her because she's a woman and she's much smaller than I am”. It appears that when men do decide to seek formal help, they are more likely to involve the police at first. Because that experience has largely been negative, men reported that they were “afraid to pursue legal help after since [they] saw how easy it was to get away with making false claims”.

#### **6.5.4. Distrust of Courts that Favor Women**

Although men were hesitant to involve the police and domestic violence agencies, they were particularly distrustful of the courts, believing that they were biased and favoured women over men. As such, men feared that if the courts became involved, they would be accused of being the perpetrator, and would subsequently lose their homes, their assets, their children, and ultimately experience further victimization at the hands of the court system. Consider the following narrative:

She would get the kids, the house, half of our assets and outrageous child support and alimony. She would soon thereafter move away, with court permission, poison the kids against me and would eventually replace me with another man in the children's lives. Basically total destruction. I would rather put up with the abusive situation I have now, than enter a much more abusive situation after divorce . . . I have no interest in legal fees, child support, alimony and enslavement to a tyrant. So called "family court" would see to it that my family and I were completely destroyed.

As we can see, the participants in this study did not feel that involving the courts would benefit them. Instead, they felt they were at a disadvantage due primarily to their gender. In some instances, men preferred leaving their partner without fighting for their belongings or children in court: “I left my wife and children to remove myself and the

children from violence. If I chose to have the children I doubt very much the system would be in my favor”.

Many participants also refused to involve the courts due to the fear that they would lose their children to a system that prioritizes and favors maternal custody:

My wife has repeatedly verbally and physically abused me. If it weren't for my son, I would leave the bitch tonight. But she is so emotionally unstable, and the courts favor mothers over the fathers, that I would fear her getting custody of our son.

Participants judged that the abuse they were experiencing was preferable to the possibility of losing custody of their children: “I feared that being a male I would lose my sons and treated negatively in divorce court so I kept dealing with the abuse and I kept quiet on the things she was doing”. Overall, a major barrier to formal help-seeking included an overall distrust of the court system, and the fear of losing their children to their abusive female partners.

### **6.5.5. The Negative Impact on Children**

In addition to the fear of losing custody of their children, men feared that reaching out for formal support would have a negative impact on their children. In many instances, female partners were abusive towards the male partner and the children. As such, fathers feared that if they involved the authorities and lost access to their children, their partner would continue to abuse them, and no one would be present to witness it and protect them. One father explained that he “was afraid to leave [his] son alone with her since she would drink and drive with the kids and abuse them as well”.

Men also avoided calling the police on their female partner in order to abstain from upsetting their children: “I did not want my daughter to see the police take her mother away...I wanted to keep these problems from my daughter so it would not be upsetting to her”. Other men feared that if they called the police their partner would go to jail: “I didn't want her to lose her job or make my daughter have to know her mom was in jail”. Overall, men explained that they did not involve the authorities because they felt it would negatively impact the children more so than if they stayed and dealt with the abuse themselves.

### **6.5.6. A Lack of Male-Oriented Services and the Inability to Access Help**

The final barrier to formal help-seeking included a lack of male-oriented services and the overall inability to access help, even though they may have wanted it. When attempting to find resources for help, men reported that domestic violence agencies only offered female-oriented services and provided no information for male victims. In fact, their websites, campaigns, and pamphlets were entirely exclusive of male victims as an existing population and instead focused on women as victims. As such, men were often uncertain about where to seek help or how to seek help:

I tried looking for help but there was nobody out there – what little I heard was that a guy who claims abuse is not believed and they take away your kids and remove you from the house even if I was the one calling the police.

A shortage of male friendly resources was also identified as a reason some men did not leave their abusive female partners: “Maybe if I had more resources, I wouldn’t be afraid to leave”. As previously discussed, men who did reach out for help from domestic violence agencies were more often than not turned away or accused of being a batterer. As such, it is not difficult to understand why male victims would fear reaching out to them in the first place.

## Chapter 7.

### Discussion

The current study has provided unique insight into male victims' lived experiences of severe IPV and their subsequent help-seeking experiences. The previously identified themes are contextualized and discussed in relation to the gender paradigm theory, stigmatization theories, and existing literature on the topic of male victims of female perpetrated IPV and their formal help-seeking experiences.

Firstly, this study sought to explore the context in which men sought formal help for severe IPV. Multiple types of severe abuse were discussed at length, in particular instances of controlling and jealous behaviour, severe psychological abuse, severe physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Furthermore, the descriptions provided by participant narratives indicate that men can be considered victims of intimate terrorism, as has been suggested in previous research on this topic (Hines & Douglas, 2010; Machado, Santos, Graham-Kevan, & Matos, 2017). This was demonstrated through numerous participant narratives describing instances of threats, controlling tactics, stalking, gaslighting, and severe emotional, sexual, and physical abuse. This finding challenges traditional beliefs and frameworks of IPV as a gendered phenomenon caused by patriarchal forces, and suggests that feminist explanations for IPV can no longer be considered as the driving theory to explain IPV or to guide formal policy and practice as they are unable to account for all forms of victimization (Hines & Douglas, 2018, p. 622).

Much like female victims of IPV, the men in this sample reported constant and on-going patterns of violence and abuse that did not always end when the relationship ended. Instead, behaviours such as stalking, obsessive monitoring, and engaging in legal and administrative forms of abuse continued after the relationship had ended, sometimes for years at a time. Oftentimes, the abuse did not only impact the male victim, but was also extended to children involved in the relationship, whereby female perpetrators engaged in tactics of parental alienation. Although the intended effect is often to harm the male partner, parental alienation can lead to vicarious victimization as it undoubtedly affects children by damaging their relationship with the targeted parent (Martinez-Torteya, Bogat, Von Eye, & Levendosky, 2009).

Unsurprisingly, the physical and psychological impact of severe IPV on men in this sample was consistent with existing literature on male victims (Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014; Carbone-Lopez, Kruttschnitt, & MacMillan, 2006; Coker et al., 2002; Fergusson, Horwood, & Ridder, 2005). When recalling particular instances of severe violence, participants also described their physical injuries (recall that 43.2% reported severe injuries), and explained that constant and on-going abuse frequently lead to suicidal ideation, hopelessness, depression, symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and an eventual difficulty in trusting women and having relationships with them. Additionally, it was not uncommon for participants to describe how they suffered from sleep deprivation and a loss in self-worth and joy in living. In exploring the context of severe IPV experienced by participants, it is not surprising that the majority (87.4%) sought formal help, given that the literature states men are more likely to seek formal help when the violence is more severe (Douglas, Hines, & McCarthy, 2012; Machado, Santos, Graham-Kevan, & Matos, 2017).

The second objective of this study was to examine the formal help-seeking experiences of male victims through the gender paradigm lens. The overwhelming majority of male victims reported being highly dissatisfied with their help-seeking experience. Importantly, the reasons for their dissatisfaction were directly tied to the suppositions of the gender paradigm theory, which suggests that societal beliefs surrounding IPV are driven by feminist agendas with regards to the battered women's movement and violence against women (Dutton & Corvo, 2006; Dutton, Corvel, & Hamel, 2009; Dutton, Hamel, & Aaronson, 2010; Dutton & Nicholls, 2005). These beliefs strongly influence criminal justice policy and professionals within the CJS, such as police and court officials. As the gender paradigm continues to dominate the discourse on IPV, male victims of IPV fail to receive the help they need, ultimately causing their help-seeking experiences to be overtly negative. The findings of this study are consistent with existing literature on help-seeking, whereby men report receiving "gender-stereotyped treatment and dual criteria behaviour from professionals and services" (Machado, Santos, Graham-Kevan, & Matos, 2017, p. 521).

Much like female victims, men in this study consistently reported being revictimized by the very systems and agencies they expected to receive help from, a common complaint explored in studies of a similar nature (Cook, 2009; Douglas & Hines, 2011, Hines, Brown, & Dunning, 2007; Machado, Santos, Graham-Kevan, & Matos,

2017; McCarrick, Davis-McCabe, & Hirst-Winthrop, 2016; Tsui, 2014). For instance, men who called the police were often arrested, laughed at and humiliated, and their stories were not believed. The negative help-seeking experiences with police may be linked not only to the gender paradigm theory, but also to the culture of policing and the organisational emphasis placed on masculinity. Past research has shown that police officers are expected to display qualities such as aggression, bravery, and strength, while concealing emotions that are viewed as vulnerable or feminine, ultimately perpetuating and preserving societal gender differences (Acker, 1992; Rawski, 2018; Silvestri, 2017). Exploring hegemonic masculinity and its deep hold within the culture of policing provides a better context for understanding why most male victims of severe IPV were ridiculed by the police, accused of lying, and effectively treated differently than their female partners.

In the case of courts, the treatment of male victims saw little improvement. Once more, male victims were accused of perpetrating violence, and female perpetrators frequently made false accusations that, even when proven false, went entirely unpunished by the courts. Female perpetrators were repeatedly favoured for child custody with no evidence of their parenting abilities required, providing further evidence of gender-stereotyped treatment and bias discussed by the gender paradigm theory. These findings are consistent with the existing literature on court officials displaying resistance in responding equally to male and female victims of IPV (Basile, 2005; Burczycka & Conroy, 2015; McCarrick, Davis-McCabe, & Hirst-Winthrop, 2016; Muller, Desmarais, & Hamel, 2009), further implying that gender stereotypes relating to IPV victimisation and perpetration are deeply embedded within professional services and institutions. Stereotypes surrounding IPV and gender-appropriate behaviour were also present in IPV victim agencies, resulting in only negative help-seeking experiences. Most notably, male victims recounted that they were accused of perpetrating violence against women and referred to batterer intervention programs. In other instances, male victims were refused help or turned away, under the claim that they had no resources to assist male victims.

Frequent instances of legal and administrative abuse by police and courts provide further evidence of the gender paradigm permeating formal services for IPV. Men reported that female perpetrators frequently threatened them by stating they would call the police or accuse them of IPV or child abuse in court. Female perpetrators

appeared to fully understand that the IPV system would be in their favour due to the gender paradigm which favours women as victims. As such, the gender paradigm impacting formal help-seeking resources has not only ensured that male victims do not receive the help they require, but it has also allowed new forms of abuse to emerge, and ultimately secondary victimization to occur. This finding is important, as participants reported that negative help-seeking experiences and secondary victimisation were traumatizing and resulted in additional psychological consequences such as anxiety, depression, and acute isolation.

Consistent with the principles of the gender paradigm theory, when discussing the participants' experiences, it appears that an ideal victim of IPV exists within both society and formal support services, and the ideal victim is of the female gender. In contrast, the mere suggestion of male victimisation is met with dissonance at both the societal and professional level (Bates, Kaye, Pennington, & Hamlin, 2018). The gender paradigm theory asserts that the IPV system was created, and as such is completely rooted, in dominant views of male hegemony and patriarchal explanations for IPV (Dutton & Corvo, 2006; Dutton, Corvel, & Hamel, 2009). Thus, under the lens of this explanation it is not unreasonable to conclude that the IPV system was never meant to acknowledge or support male victims and will continue failing them until these issues are addressed.

The phenomenon of male victims not receiving help and being turned away has been dubbed the 'feminization of social welfare' (Hall, 2012). The inability to acknowledge the experiences of male victims of IPV has been explained by way of cultural traditions, biases, and beliefs of western society, which then permeate policy and formal practice. Societal beliefs surrounding gender roles anticipate that men are more aggressive and prone to violence than women are, and so western culture fails to accept that women perpetrate domestic violence at rates comparable to men (Black et al., 2010; Hall, 2012, p.15; Lysova, Dim, & Dutton, 2019). When cultural tradition drives policy and practice, victims of domestic violence are prioritized according to the gender paradigm, or "standards of feminization" (p. 20). Ultimately, this practice leads to formal assessments that are both gender-biased and not empirically supported. Services and distribution of IPV resources are then tailored to female victims, ultimately exchanging the focus of eliminating all IPV "for focus upon women as the defining and most urgent victims of the problem" (p. 20). It has been suggested that the resistance to



acknowledging the experiences of male victims of IPV may be rooted in the fear that female victims will become overlooked and oppressed once more, however it is more likely that increased recognition for male and female victims will only lead to better services and improved attitudes for both (Dutton, 2010; Dutton & Nicholls, 2005; McCarrick, Davis-McCabe, & Hirst-Winthrop, 2015).

The third and final objective of this study was to examine the barriers to formal help-seeking through both the stigmatization framework and the gender paradigm lens. The lack of formal help-seeking amongst male victims of IPV can directly be linked back to stigmatization theories (Levant & Richmond, 2007). In a Western societal climate inundated by the gender paradigm, men experience extreme stigmatization with regards to being a victim of female perpetrated IPV, simply because it suggests that they are straying from the typical masculine performance that is expected of them (Berger, Addis, Green, Mackowiak, & Goldberg, 2013).

The IPV Stigmatization model considers three factors that prevent victim help-seeking: cultural stigma, anticipated stigma, and stigma internalization (Overstreet & Quinn, 2013). Cultural stigma refers to the negative stereotypes and beliefs about IPV and male victimization, which permeate the police organization, the courts, and IPV agencies. Ultimately, cultural stigma impacts the beliefs and attitudes of IPV professionals and holds a significant influence over anticipated stigma and individual internalization, demonstrating a clear connection between the gender paradigm and stigmatization theories. Anticipated stigma refers to the victim's concern over how he will be treated or viewed if the abuse is revealed. Multiple narratives revealed a fear of being ridiculed, blamed, and cast as the perpetrator if men admitted to being victims of female perpetrated IPV, and ultimately this anticipated stigma caused them to not seek formal help. Finally, internalized stigma was evident in the numerous narratives in which men expressed shame and embarrassment over their abuse. In this sense, the cultural stigma surrounding male victims leads to anticipated stigma and a deep internalization of shame, ultimately explaining a major barrier to formal help-seeking amongst male victims of IPV. It is both troubling and important to acknowledge that the fears expressed by the men who did not seek formal help were all realized and experienced by the men who sought formal help. In this sense, men who fear seeking help in accordance with the stigmatization framework are entirely justified in having such fears. Evidently, male victims of IPV face both internal barriers to seeking formal help (threat to masculine

identity) as well as external barriers imposed by formal services, exemplifying the important interaction between both the gender paradigm theory and stigmatization theories.

## **7.1. Implications and Recommendations**

Although the topic is under researched, it appears that an underlying theme or pattern continues to emerge from the literature, suggesting that society and professionals are heavily influenced by gender stereotypes, ultimately impacting the available help services and failing to properly serve male victims. This finding has several important implications for policy and practice, particularly with reference to the police, the courts, IPV agencies, and society more generally.

Firstly, the culture of policing is problematic because of its organisational emphasis placed on hegemonic masculinity, ultimately dictating what behaviors are appropriate for men to display (Rawski, 2018). Given the emphasis on masculinity within the police force and police training, it is unsurprising that male victims of IPV are left feeling ignored, disbelieved, and mocked by responding police officers. In order to address this issue, the culture of policing should be dismantled through the implementation of improved training surrounding gender roles and victimization. This training should focus on how to respond to IPV calls even when the victim does not meet society's gendered expectations of the dynamics of IPV. Furthermore, training should include the implementation of educational workshops that provide police officers with a more holistic "understanding of the emotional experience of male victims and encourage a more balanced, gender-informed perspective of IPV" (McCarrick, Davis-McCabe, & Hirst-Winthrop, 2016, p. 212).

Police training should also be altered in order to address the discriminatory nature of primary aggressor policies. Primary aggressor policies have typically interpreted IPV through a feminist lens and framework (Houston, 2014, p. 271), effectively disregarding the research and findings of the family violence perspectives. Training on primary aggressor policies encourage police officers to focus on specific factors in order to measure the likelihood of one partner being the primary aggressor. However, these factors include taking into consideration the height and weight of both partners, regardless of whether height and weight played a role or caused physical

damage during the incident (Hamel, 2011). Clearly, this automatic focus ultimately places male partners at an immediate disadvantage. Similarly, police are trained to observe which partner displays more fear in determining the aggressor, once more placing male victims at a disadvantage given that they are socially conditioned to not show their fear (Hamel, 2011). As such, police training should be reviewed to take into consideration how the focus on certain factors serve to be discriminatory towards male victims.

Research on male victims of IPV has reaffirmed that the police response to male victimization is much more lenient than in cases of female victimization (Hines, Malley-Morrison, & Dutton, 2013). In fact, police officers charge female perpetrators of IPV when injuries inflicted on male partners are far more severe than injuries inflicted by men charged with IPV, indicating that there is a much higher threshold required for women to be charged by police (Hines, Malley-Morrison, & Dutton, 2013). Given the significant health consequences of male victimization, it is crucial that police forces take violence against men as seriously as violence against women by treating the severity of injuries equally. In doing so, it is likely that male victims will be more likely to seek formal help from police, view the police more favourably upon doing so, and ultimately receive the help that they require.

Additionally, this study reaffirmed past findings that gender biases influence legal professionals in court, ultimately contributing to male victim dissatisfaction. The discrimination on the basis of gender is especially evident in studies that indicate women are more likely to be awarded requests for protection (Basile, 2005). Furthermore, the men in this study frequently criticized the court system for enabling legal and administrative aggression by failing to discourage, restrict, or punish attempts by their female partners, ultimately allowing it to flourish. To address this issue, legal professionals should receive additional training to better understand this form of abuse and how it may manifest within the legal institution. Training should focus on how legal and administrative abuse may be used to gain advantages in court, particularly with regards to divorce cases and child custody cases (Hines, Douglas, & Berger, 2015). Furthermore, judges may consider punishing partners who partake in this form of abuse by filing false and frivolous claims intended to harm the other partner (Hines, Douglas, & Berger, 2015; Miller & Smolter, 2011). Doing so may successfully establish that false claims are not tolerated and heavily discouraged.

Furthermore, male victims reported a substantial shortage in male friendly IPV services intended for victim use. This had an impact on their dissatisfaction with IPV services and severely impeded formal help-seeking. To address this issue, there is a dire need to create more male friendly services (such as shelters, hot-lines, and support centres) in order to improve access, provide support tailored to their unique needs, and interrupt the current social exclusion and isolation of male victims (Hines, Malley-Morrison, & Dutton, 2013; McCarrick, Davis-McCabe, & Hirst-Winthrop, 2016). In doing so, services designed for male victims should be publicly advertised, and outreach materials should be gender-inclusive and representative of different types of masculinity in both their wording and their images (Huntley et al., 2019). An additional recommendation is the development of batterer intervention programs designed specifically for female perpetrators of IPV. At this current time, female perpetrators who are convicted of IPV are sentenced to batterer intervention programs designed for male perpetrators (Carney, Buttell, & Dutton, 2007; Hines, Malley-Morrison, & Dutton, 2013). These programs place a strong emphasis on patriarchal explanations for IPV against women (Carney, Buttell, & Dutton, 2007), and although there is some evidence that female perpetrators might benefit from these programs (Carney & Buttell, 2004), female focused programs would likely be more effective at addressing IPV against men.

One of the most important recommendations is to provide additional and on-going training on the diversity of IPV victimization to all personnel working with IPV victims, but more specifically the police, court personnel, and members within victim services and agencies. It is hoped that by increasing knowledge on the diversity of IPV victims, unbiased and gender inclusive services will become the norm (Douglas & Hines, 2011). Equally important is challenging the gender stereotypes that are deeply engrained at the societal level with the overall goal of unravelling stigma, stereotypes, and myths about male victimization, IPV, and help-seeking. To do so, early education, public awareness, and outreach materials surrounding IPV should be gender-inclusive (Machado, Santos, Graham-Kevan, Matos, 2017), and public campaigns should be funded to address perceptions of female aggression, ensuring that it is taken as seriously as men's aggression (Bates, Kaye, Pennington, & Hamlin, 2018). Although impossible for this change to occur overnight, it is hoped that this type of initiative could be as successful at creating awareness as was the violence against women initiative.

Finally, patriarchal theory should no longer be the principal explanation guiding IPV initiatives and policies (Hines and Douglas, 2018). Rather, a gendered-inclusive approach capable of addressing that both men and women can be perpetrators and victims of IPV must be adopted by formal services such as law enforcement, courts, and IPV victim agencies (McCarrick, Davis-McCabe, & Hirst-Winthrop, 2016). In order for this to be successful, formal services and professionals must be aware of cultural traditions and beliefs surrounding gender performances, and work to construct a “more scientific and/or technological social welfare paradigm” (Hall, 2012, p. 9) in which cultural tradition and bias are “not the sole determinant of services” (p. 23), but rather scientific objectivity is.

## **7.2. Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Although the current study offered a unique examination of men’s formal help-seeking experience, the findings must be evaluated in light of the following study limitations. Firstly, this study was based entirely on self-reported information by male victims of IPV. As such, it assumed that the reporting and detailing of specific events would be recalled by victims in a truthful manner. However, there is no way to assess whether participants may have exaggerated or fabricated their narratives. In order to address this limitation, future studies should endeavour to obtain information using multiple informants, such as both the victim and the aggressor, while also addressing the safety concerns that this type of study would entail.

A second limitation relates to the sampling method of the MEPA project. Male participants completed the survey online and remained anonymous, which may have allowed for the same participant to take the survey multiple times. However, the primary investigators mitigated these concerns by programming the survey so that it could only be taken once from the same IP address. Although a participant could complete the survey a second time from a different computer and location, it is unlikely to occur given that the survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete and did not result in any compensation.

A third limitation includes methodological limitations. Employing a survey style study ensured an unusually large sample size in relation to qualitative research studies. However, it also impeded my ability to ask participants any follow-up questions that

would have been possible in a study utilizing interviews. As such, responses that required clarification or additional information could not be thoroughly analyzed. Future studies could mitigate this issue by engaging in a mixed methods research study that allows for additional information or explanations by participants.

Finally, it is important to recognize the limitations on generalizability due to sampling decisions. Male victims of female perpetrated IPV who sought informal or formal help were recruited for this study, even though the majority of male victims do not seek help (Laroche, 2008). Therefore, our study results may not be generalizable to the larger population of male victims of IPV, and results should be interpreted with caution. Furthermore, differences between participants who answered the final qualitative question and those who did not are unknown. As such, the results may not be generalizable to all participants who participated in the MEPA quantitative survey. Finally, the survey was only accessible on the Internet, and as such male participants without access to the Internet were excluded from our sample.

Future research should also explore and compare the victim experience when receiving formal help from regular police agencies versus specialized domestic violence units. Little research has explored this topic, particularly in the area of male victimization, and as such it is important to know whether specialized domestic violence units are more successful in intervening in cases of IPV. Additionally, future studies should explore the attitudes and perspectives of police, legal professionals, and employees of IPV victim services towards male victimization. Doing so would support or reject the findings of this study which only took into consideration the victim perspective.

## **Chapter 8.**

### **Conclusion**

This study was exploratory in nature and sought to understand the formal help-seeking experiences of male victims of severe female perpetrated IPV while considering the impact of the gender paradigm theory and stigmatization theories. While excellent literature exists on the topic of female victims of IPV, this study contends that male victims are equally as deserving and important to consider in research and sampling. Ultimately, the study aimed to fill three important gaps in IPV research. Firstly, very little is known about the lived experiences of male victims because past research has typically included female only samples. Secondly, of the studies that have been conducted, the majority have been quantitative in nature. Though important, quantitative studies are mostly incapable of exploring the subjective experiences and narratives of male victims. Finally, the few qualitative studies that exist have included small sample sizes, which limits generalizability to the larger population of male victims. To address these gaps in the literature, the current study is qualitative in nature and utilizes a large sample size of 389 male victims.

This study first explored the context in which men sought formal help for severe IPV, revealing multiple types of abuse such as on-going controlling behaviors, severe psychological abuse, severe physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Furthermore, the men in this study revealed that they were mostly dissatisfied with their formal help-seeking experience due to gender differential treatment by the police, the courts, and by IPV agencies, lending support to the gender paradigm theory. Additionally, the barriers to formal help-seeking were explored, and it was found that men experience significant stigma for admitting to their victimization and seeking help, as is suggested by stigmatization theories and the gender paradigm theory. Ultimately, cultural stigma and internalized stigma discourage some male victims from seeking formal help.

These findings hold several important implications and recommendations, including changes in training for police, court professionals, and employees of IPV agencies. Training must target knowledge and understanding surrounding the diversity of IPV victimization, in hopes of providing unbiased and gender inclusive services.

Furthermore, there is a dire need to challenge gender stereotypes that are imbedded at the societal level. Early education, public awareness, and outreach materials surrounding IPV should be gender-inclusive, while addressing both male and female aggression. These changes may assist in dispelling the myths, stigma, and stereotypes associated with male victimization.

Overall, it is hoped that this study helps shed light on the silencing and invalidating experiences of male victims of severe female perpetrated IPV, reduces stigma and shame, and improves the recognition that IPV affects both men and women. In doing so, the study provides a strong foundation and direction from which to proceed to future studies on this topic. It is hopeful that this study, alongside others, will lead to improved services and attitudes to victims and perpetrators of both genders.



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