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A CONSTRUCTIVIST STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF BATTERED WOMEN IN
A SHELTER SETTING

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Robyn Noyes
Michelle Guymon

June 1995


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Approved by:




Dr. Teresa Morris, Project Advisor,
Social Work

6/14/95
Date



Dr. Teresa Morris, Chair of Research Sequence,
Social Work



Patricia Overberg, MSW, Executive Director,
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ABSTRACT

This is a non-profit agency study that explores the experiences of the battered woman and various participants involved in the battered women's shelter. Data was gathered through face-to-face interviews and a literature search.

The goal of this project was to study how shelters impact the lives of the residents and to determine the shelters role in stopping the violence against women.

Content analysis was used to categorize data and findings consistent with current literature. Results suggest that the experiences and treatment issues encompassing domestic violence, along with independent living skills, and community education are issues this shelter are necessary in helping the battered woman.

The results also state that aftercare is a vital part to the long term success of the battered woman, which was suggested to this agency.

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

This was a joint research project where the authors collaborated throughout the project. However, for each phase of the project, one of the authors took the assigned leader role, while the other author worked with her on the project. These responsibilities were assigned as follows:

1. **Data Collection:**

Assigned Leader: Michelle Guymon

2. **Data Entry and Analysis:**

Robyn Noyes and Michelle Guymon equally shared responsibility.

3. **Writing Report and presentation of Findings:**

a. **Introduction and Literature**

Assigned Leader: Robyn Noyes

b. **Methods**

Robyn Noyes and Michelle Guymon equally shared responsibility.

c. **Results**

Robyn Noyes and Michelle Guymon equally shared responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

Focus of Inquiry

The battered woman has been in existence since there have been men on earth. There has been slow progress in eliminating the problem. Shelters were created for abused women in the early 1970's, but it has been nearly twenty five years since any new approach has been created to support the victim or alleviate the problem. According to Noelle (1988), many observers claim that shelters are the most important resource for women caught up in violent relationships (page 236). Information on how shelters impact the lives of residents is needed to determine in their role in stopping the violence against women.

This research project focused on battered women, those who work with them, the literature research, and understanding circumstances surrounding the abusive experience. We also looked at services offered to the battered woman. A battered woman has few options available to her. There are shelters for her to stay in but if she has children over 12 most shelters will refuse her. According to Blackman (1989), "...if a woman has too many children, or older male children, she is likely to be refused a place in the shelter..." (page 324). Shelter life is not a stable or permanent situation for the battered woman. The majority of shelters have a maximum stay of 30 days. This is just a

short-term refuge from the violent relationship. This allows the woman to obtain necessary restraining orders, separation or divorce papers and contact legal assistance, but allows no time to make long term plans.

The stay in the shelter gives the woman very little time to develop self-esteem. Self-esteem is crucial and is needed for the battered woman to make it on their own and to make changes in their behavior to live independently and not accept abusive behaviors in their life. Because of her low self-esteem, a woman may perceive herself as incapable of securing a job. Therefore, Johnson (1992) states, "...she stays in the relationship despite the abuse..." (page 169). The victim's perception of herself is a good predictor of her decision to return to the abusive relationship. Therefore, a woman with low self-esteem and little income is more likely to return to the abusive situation.

Akerman and Pickering (1989), suggest that "...the batterer uses methods of abuse similar to the torture and brainwashing of prisoners in war camps..." (page 29). These patterns of behavior include:

- * isolation
- * focus on the batter's potential anger
- * exhaustion, dependency, feeling of incompetence
- * threats
- * occasional indulgences
- * demonstration of "superiority" or power

- * degradation and humiliation
- * enforcement of trivial demands

By using these methods the abuser can gain complete control over the victim.

The laws have changed over the past twenty years to help the battered woman. According to Costa (1983), the police, in the past, "...when called out to abuse situations would routinely walk the husband around the block to "cool" him down, and then send him home..." (page 301). Before the battered women's movement made the public aware of the enormous problem in the 1970's, there was a "five stitch" rule the police officers used. Costa (1983) states, "...an arrest did not occur unless an injury required five or more stitches..." (page 306). The laws and attitudes have changed towards a more positive approach to domestic violence in the last few years. But, because so many women return to the batterer, many in law enforcement are frustrated and offer little support or understanding to the woman, leaving the woman, again, feeling alone and isolated.

Because of the woman's inability to find a job, having no support systems, and finding shelter life lacking in many ways, the options for many battered women is to try and "make it work" for her back in the abusive situation. According to Johnson (1992), "A battered woman with few or no marketable skills or access to employment may perceive her alternatives inside the marriage as being more rewarding and less costly

than alternatives outside the relationship, even though she is being subjected to severe abuse" (page 169).

The intent of this research was to provide an understanding of the battered woman and how services being offered address the appropriate concern of those involved in this social problem. If effective solutions to domestic violence are to be implemented, resources need to be directed toward providing the victim with the necessary skills and services needed to start a life of independence.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Method

There have been battered women's shelters since the early 1970's. Most research done on battered women in the past have used questionnaires including closed ended questions which, in many cases, are too rigid to grasp the nature of the problem of battered women. With the problem focus in mind, there may be a different way to better serve the battered woman or understand the problem. Replicating traditional research will not lead in this direction or give new answers. Traditional research, according to Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, Allen (1993) "...assumes that there is a single objective reality..." (page 11). By asking broader, more general questions, people will be allowed to name experiences which would not have been recorded in studies

using more restricted research methods.

There are many theories about what causes battering, who the abuser is likely to be, and how to operate a battered woman's shelter. However, there are few studies which explore the experience of a battered woman from her point of view. Doing constructivist research on the subject of domestic violence will allow areas of discovery that may be missed by conventional paradigms. Limiting the focus to one aspect of the experience of abuse in relationships, eliminates many dimensions of the problem. Erlandson et al., indicates that "...isolating one aspect from its context destroys much of its meaning..." (page 37).

There is an abundance of research on the battered woman already published. Duplicating or replicating these studies would only emphasize or verify existing theories. New problem areas need to be addressed regarding domestic violence. There has not been a decline in the occurrences of domestic violence since the inception of shelters. More than 195,000 incidents of domestic violence were reported in 1990, according to a Bureau of Justice study. This study also states: nearly one-half of the violent crimes against women were not reported to police; one woman is beaten every fifteen seconds; and over four million women are battered each year; more than one million women seek medical assistance of injuries caused by battering each year; thirty percent of female homicide victims were killed as the result

of a domestic dispute; fifty percent of all homeless women and children in the country are fleeing domestic violence; and in the United States; four women are killed every day by their husbands or boyfriends. FBI studies indicate that in 1991, twenty-eight percent of all female murder victims were slain by their husbands or boyfriend. As the problem of violence in the home continues in every community, without decreasing, a different approach to gathering information may yield new information on the subject.

Positivist research relies on prior research to formulate questions and hypothesis. A bias is then patterned into the research. New constructions need to be developed to add dimension and discovery to the problem of the battered woman. Using traditional research methods could clearly hinder or stifle the discovery process needed to add new understanding and information about the battered woman.

Data Collection

The Hermeneutic Dialectic Circle includes those involved in the battered women experience at the Valley Oasis Shelter in Los Angeles County. This shelter opened its doors in September of 1981 with two home-like cottages housing twelve residents. Today, the shelter has the capacity to house 104 residents which include children and boys over the age of 12. The shelter assists approximately 450 residents yearly and facilitates anyone who is battered, including men, therefore, is one of the most sought after shelters in the county.

The respondents from the shelter who participated in this study were: the shelter executive director, battered women, shelter workers, therapists currently working with the battered women, the literature, and the researchers.

Mellon (1990) notes that there are three types of respondents which are, key informants, representative respondents and special respondents. Key informants provide direct assistance to the researcher in establishing and maintaining the research relationship with the situation being studied. They provide the initial information about the study site and the administrative hierarchy controlling it. They also help to identify possible respondents. The key informant for this study was the director of the battered women shelter.

Representative respondents are those who appear similar to the population. According to Mellon (1990) representative respondents think, feel, or behave similarly in relation to the phenomenon under study. The representative respondents for this study were the battered women. Of these women, some were currently residing at the shelter, those who were living away from their abuser but have previously sought refuge from the shelter, and those women who continue to live with the abuser.

Special respondents were selected because of their unique position within the population under the study. They provided information that could not be provided by

representative respondents. Included in this category were the shelter workers, therapists currently involved with those in domestic violence situations, literature on domestic violence and the evaluators.

To start the process, a member was chosen to begin the interview. He/she was interviewed by the researcher in an open-ended interview. Each person was asked essentially to describe the experience of the battered woman, as they know it. They were asked to tell about concerns, issues, and observations they have in regards to the battered woman.

Each member was asked to suggest another member who may have different views on this subject. This new person then became R2 (respondent 2), R3, and so on. To ensure a wide range of information, effort was placed on identifying members who contributed different and new ideas.

As each respondents' (member) interview was concluded, the session was evaluated by the researchers and constructions were formulated before interviewing the next respondent. R2 was then interviewed and when R2 finished discussing their ideas, R1's information was introduced. R2 was asked to comment on R1's construction. Information from this interview was evaluated and construction 2 (C2) , then formulated. R2 was asked to suggest R3, and this process was repeated until the "information became redundant and fall into three constructions that remain at odds" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

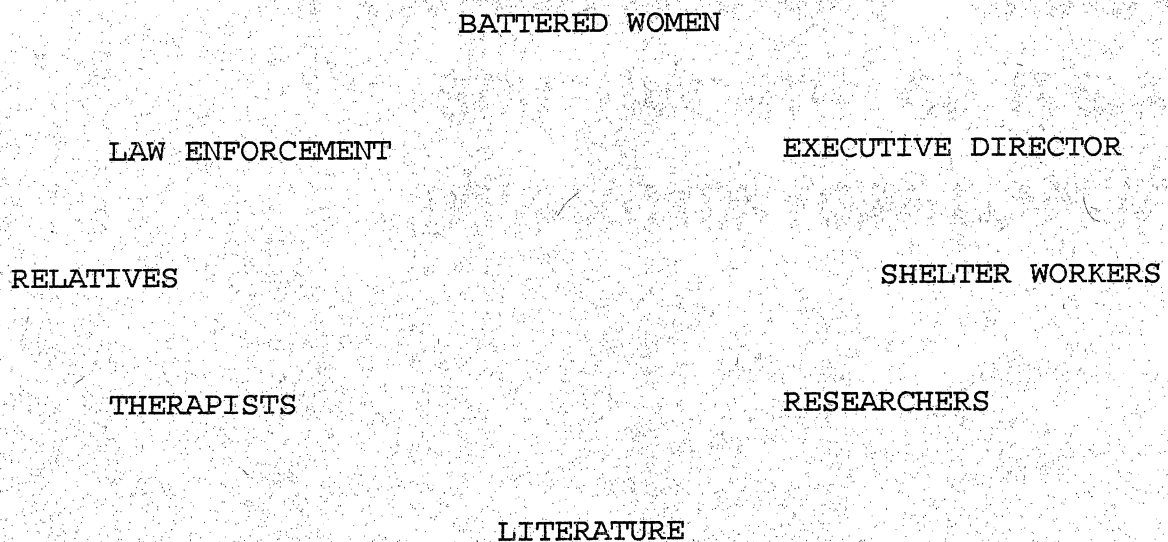
As the number of members interviewed increased, the interview itself changed. As the constructions emerged, the questions became more focused.

The Hermeneutic Dialectic Circle

The hermeneutic dialectic circle serves as a visual construct of those who participated in the study. Figure 1 represents the proposed hermeneutic dialectic circle.

Figure 1

The Initial Hermeneutic Dialectic Circle

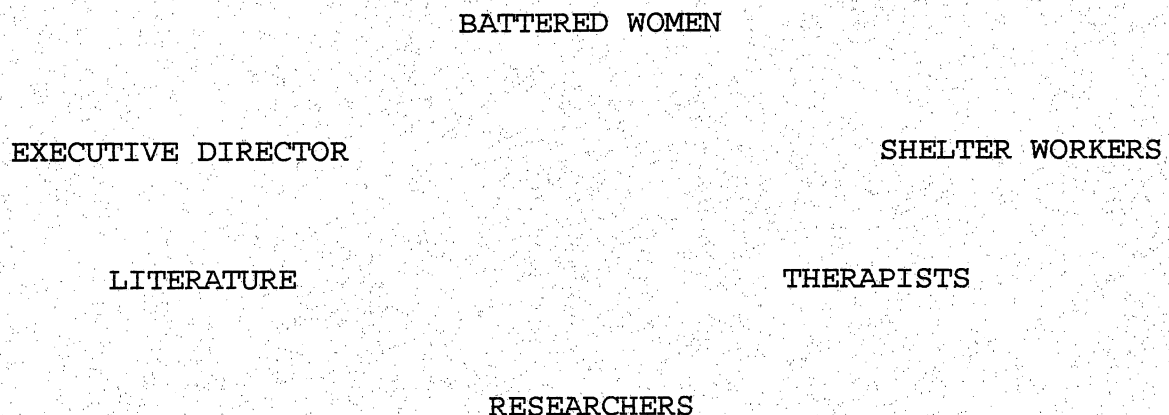


Originally there were eight identified stakeholder/participant groups in the circle. As the

interviews were underway, it became apparent that relatives of the battered women and law enforcement participants were unavailable to take part in the research. Therefore, a decision was made to eliminate these stakeholders from the circle. A modified circle was then identified. Figure 2 reveals these changes.

Figure 2

The Modified Hermeneutic Dialectic Circle



Phases of Inquiry

The topics the research generally focused on were, the experience of battered women, the problems of the battered women and what was needed to help them. At the beginning of the research, the researcher's own construction was monitored. Before each interview the researcher recorded her own construction, then again recorded her developing

construction as it changed. This helped to keep the focus off the original construction and allowed room for new information.

While going around the circle for the first time, the literature research and the researcher's own construction was developed. As the number of members interviewed increased and the circle became bigger, the interview itself changed. As the constructions emerged, the interviewer asked more focused questions.

Since most of the literature on battered women generally agrees that help for this group needs to be focused on helping the woman raise her self-esteem, and find a job or job skill and financial help, it was expected that those in the Hermeneutic Dialectic Circle would have some of the same opinions. It was the researcher's hope that in exploring this subject, it will be able to create alternative ways to help the battered woman and her family.

During and after each interview, the researcher verified what the respondent said. Before interviewing the next member it was imperative that the information given was understood correctly by the interviewer. This "member check" allowed the researcher to assess intent and gave the member a chance to add additional information. It also put on record that the researcher "got it right". This was also the first step toward analysis of the interview.

Determining Instrumentation

Being sensitive to the respondent ensured a successful interview. The quality of the interview was critical in acquiring accurate data. Oakly (1990) indicates that, "...an interview is not a conversation, but a "pseudo-conversation... creating rapport with the member was crucial. For the interview to be successful it was important to have all the warmth personality exchange of a conversation with the clarity and guidelines of scientific searching..." (page 24). The idea was to put the respondent at ease so he/she would talk freely, and fully.

Gaining mutual respect for each other was also needed. Going about the research project was a collaborative approach, rather than regarding the project as the researchers, which maintain respect for the respondent. The researcher and the respondent saw their roles as a joint effort. Explaining the purpose of the study to the respondents enabled them to feel a part of the study, not just as the person being studied. The respondents were told that they would be informed of the results and have access to the report after completion. An informed consent form was presented to the respondents to alleviate doubts on what was expected of them and that ethical values was adhered to.

Both researchers spent time at a domestic violence shelter each week. One of the researchers was unfamiliar with the issues of domestic violence. This helped balance

the researchers and provided objectively.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) indicate that while doing literature research is important to sensitize the researcher to the subject matter, the researcher does not want to be so steeped in the literature as to be constrained and stifled in terms of creative efforts by the knowledge of it.

Planning and Collecting Data

Both researchers for this project were involved in each interview. In the first round of interviews broad questions were initially asked. Interviews were recorded and field notes were also taken by both researchers. By having both researchers taking notes and jotting down observation on body language, facial expression, gestures and interaction between the researcher and the respondent, more detail was caught.

After each interview was completed, the researchers wrote their notes from the interview so they were properly understood. Also, at this time the researchers analyzed the collected data and combined it with the already existing data which was analyzed later. As the study continued to progress, the researchers refined the interview process which allowed for less redundant note-taking, and to where a checklist could be established. Also at this time, the literature findings was utilized as a part of the data.

Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using the constant comparative method described by Lincoln & Guba (1985).

Categories which emerged during analysis was labeled in the first step. After each interview, the researchers began the process of identifying themes. These theories or themes that emerged, were put in categories that the researchers generated. The themes that emerged were put into index cards and as each interview was analyzed this way, the index cards were coded and placed in the appropriate categories.

Initially, the categories were temporary, containing cards which appeared to fit into the undetermined category. As more data was collected, the categories were refined by the researchers as often as necessary. This helped to ensure quality control. Properties of the data, were reviewed, identified and placed in appropriate categories. New categories were added as needed.

As the interviews continued, it become apparent that no new information or constructions were being identified. This was the signal to the researchers, that it was time to stop the data collection and begin writing the theory based on the themes, categories and joint constructions that were continually analyzed by the researchers.

Logistics

The data gathering time frame which included, literature review and interviews, began in November 94' and ended in February 95'. Data analysis was completed by the end of March 95'. The final phase included reporting back to the respondents, writing the report, closure/termination was

completed by the beginning of May 1995'.

The researchers scheduled interviews once a week and were conducted on a one to one basis. Time for the interviews generally was one hour. This allowed time after the interview for the researchers to write-up each interview. The interviews were held in a neutral, comfortable setting, as it was important that the respondents feel at ease and relaxed during the interview. The domestic violence shelter was used for these interviews.

There was a weekly meeting with the two researchers to discuss notes and integrate data. We also discussed the next set of interviews or any problems that arose. After the 1st round was completed, we began the literature review and the second round of interviews.

After the final analysis we began the closure and termination phase. The final report was a team effort. Reporting back to the agency was conducted by the researcher that is affiliated with the agency.

Quality Control

There are several methods of making sure the study is of good quality. Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest three approaches to judge the quality of a constructivist study, trustworthiness, quality of the Hermeneutic Dialectic Circle, and authenticity criteria.

Trustworthiness refers to internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity. To control of

internal validity, the researchers need to be certain that the constructions are what the respondents say they are. This can be done by contacting each respondent a second and third time to verify and or change their thoughts on the subject. By taking the time with each respondent, rapport can be established. Understanding the person's view will help increase the probability that what is said is actually that person's reality.

The second approach controls for judging reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that researchers will need to look within the process itself. The constant and continuing analysis of the data gathered is repeated back to the respondents. Incorrect data is controlled in this way. This method and that of not putting any more value on the researchers' construction will help control the quality of the "process".

The third approach addresses objectivity. This method is called authenticity criteria or fairness. Fairness is judged on how data or constructions are valued by the researchers. When there was a conflict, a discussion on the conflict was explored and how values were used to come to terms with the conflict.

During this study, the researchers brought many respondents of the Hermeneutic Dialectic Circle together to review how decisions were made regarding battered women and their experience in the shelter.

It was our desire that bringing these people together and sharing the different constructions, provided a much clearer understanding of these women. We as the researchers, attempted to represent each persons construction to the other, the quality of our study was secure and the end result brought new areas of understanding and awareness of this social problem.

THE EVALUATOR'S CONSTRUCTION

It was thought by the evaluators that there may be some aspect being overlooked or under utilized in programs developed to help the battered woman. Aside from the fact that there is never enough funding for battered women's shelters, it was felt that just sheltering battered women was not the impetus for change. Some women were successful in transforming their lives from their abusive existence into a productive life, and other victims return to their abuser or chose another abusive relationship.

It was also thought by the evaluators' that shelter's might offer the most valuable help to those being abused. The literature also supports the evaluator's belief that shelters are the most important resource for women caught up in a violent relationship. Rosen (1993), however, states that "...shelters are valuable but do not rate as high as other intervention modes such as restraining orders, to stop

the violence..." (page 430). While there is controversy over the helpfulness of a shelter that uses the same authoritarian model over the victim, as in the relationship they left, it is an alternative for victims. We as evaluator's wanted to understand what programs would be helpful to empower, educate, and prevent further abuse. As we collected data we found the shelter was a place for many women to begin to heal from the trauma of abuse. Along with this we also saw the reality of the limitations in reaching the goal of stopping the violence completely.

The evaluator's felt that creating more success stories lies in finding out what helps the battered woman alter their lives. In the process of questioning our respondents, their answers began to point to some indications of which areas to explore. We began to find that each woman had a different story but have similar patterns surrounding their story.

The data revealed, one, that it is imperative that in helping the battered woman it is necessary to understand the circumstances surrounding her; two, to help to stop the violence and change the victims life, there needs to be certain treatment issues inherent in program development; three, there needs to be a variety of services offered to the battered woman meet her needs.

CONSTRUCT 1 - UNDERSTANDING THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE BATTERED WOMAN

Study participants agreed that women who are battered have a variety of problems which make their choices difficult and limit their options. Those options are frequently narrowed to a dilemma about whether to stay in the relationship or move to a shelter.

The Theme of Choosing a Shelter as Their Resource

Respondents felt that choosing a shelter was a last resort and only hope. "I was sick and alone and wanted him not to find me", told one respondent who was a resident of the shelter. "I got to a point where I started thinking one of us was going to die. This scared me. I knew I had to get out and I had nowhere else to go but to a shelter", recounted another resident. "There's a very fine line between life and death in these type of relationships", explained a therapist at the shelter. A woman always holds on to the hope that things will change, but when faced with the possible death of her or one of her family, she realizes that things have to change. "I always hoped things would change, this time I knew different", stated a new resident to the shelter. Another resident echoed this feeling, "I got comfortable with the relationship, always hoping things would change. I began to see a pattern of abuse and was afraid it would never change if I stayed". Another resident stated she was afraid to stay with her abuser but was more afraid of what the

shelter would be like. It was only when her boyfriend threatened her with a knife that she fled to the shelter.

While most of the residents felt going to a shelter was an act of desperation, some studies indicate that desperation is not a part of the decision making process. Rosen (1993) indicated that "...some women chose the shelter as an act of defiance not of desperation..." (page 430).

The Place Children Fit into the Decision to go to a Shelter

Many studies indicate that employment status and lack of educational skills were the leading factors that affect the decision to stay or leave. But each resident respondent in the study, indicated that it was their children that was the important factor in finally leaving the situation. Children were also a major factor when deciding what options were available to them. One staff, who now works with battered women, stated that she went into the shelter with her kids. However, if she could have found a safe place for her children she would have preferred working on her issues without them. This respondent went on to say, "It was hard for me to talk about what I really wanted to because of the kids always being with me".

"Because this shelter accepts children of both sexes and all ages, this is a unique resource for battered women. The majority of shelters will not accept children over the age of ten", stated a staff respondent. Schectner (1982) suggests one reason for this decision is based on the assumption that

"...the oldest male child will take the role of the abuser when separated from him..." (page 481). "I did not want my son to grow up thinking he could abuse people, or my daughter growing up thinking that's what she had to take from a man. But I didn't know if the shelter would provide better alternatives for them", declared a former resident. "The main reason I left was so my child did not have to live everyday in fear and confusion, never knowing what's going to happen when he gets home. My son is afraid to do anything wrong," was another response from a resident. "My kids were always scared, withdrawn and afraid of people, I did not want to raise my kids this way anymore," asserted a resident.

The evaluator's concluded that the majority of residents felt that having their children with them was important, while many of the staff felt that working with the women in isolation would be more helpful to them.

Regardless of all other factors surrounding the woman's decision to leave or stay in an abusive relationship, this study clearly indicates that the children play an important role in this decision.

The Theme of Substance Abuse Related to Domestic Violence

Many times a woman will excuse the abuse by stating that the abuser was under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Battered women's shelters were first formed by religious groups and alcoholic rehabilitation groups. Costa (1983) states that "...the problem of domestic abuse was first

linked with alcohol in order to better elicit help from the public..." (page 104). By pairing alcohol and abuse together, men did not have to "take" the blame and society had an easier time offering help and support to victims with their defense of abusing because they were under the influence. Also, by associating the abuse with the alcohol, women are able to keep their hope alive that the abuse will stop when the substance abuse stops. It is when the violence occurs without the substance that women come to understand their denial of the situation. One resident commented that alcohol played a "big" factor with the abuse. "When he was drunk the abuse occurred". Herbert (1991) states, "Women who perceive the relationship as having positive aspects will tend to stay in abusive relationships", (page 319). Women who only saw the abuse occur when the abuser was under the influence of alcohol or drugs, appear to see the positive in their relationship.

"The first time he abused me was one month into our marriage. He was drunk and he broke my collar bone and wrist. The last time he abused me, he was sober; this time scared me. I always excused the abuse when he was drunk, I had no excuse when he was sober", a resident told the evaluator. One staff member commented that alcohol and drug use by the abuser was a familiar trait that women discussed in groups.

When the abuser was under the influence of drugs or

alcohol the battered women in this study excused the abuser from having done harm to them. Only when the violence was done outside of a substance did the residents see they were in a dangerous abusive situation that they needed to escape.

CONSTRUCTION 2 - TREATMENT ISSUES

There were two apparent themes that emerged when discussing treatment issues. It was decided by the evaluators to handle treatment issues separately from services offered because of the volume of response in this area. The themes included the treatment groups offered and the significance of the generational cycle of abuse.

Treatment Groups

The need for changes in a battered women's life is of importance because without it the abuse will continue. There are many treatment strategies for helping to stop the cycle of violence. Strauss (1980) divides these strategies into 4 groups: personal, community, legal and professional counseling. The personal component is discussed in this section. It was agreed by all respondents that there must be help given to all parties involved in the domestic violence. One staff counselor felt that the "whole family needs treatment. The perpetrator needs group along with individual treatment. Also, the perpetrator needs family treatment if family preservation is the goal". This shelter does include

an anger management group for the abuser.

Groups are used to a great extent in this shelter. Women's adult groups, children's groups, peer group counseling, and as stated above the anger management group are run by the shelter.

Adult Groups

It was felt by all the respondents that the peer groups were very helpful in a variety of ways. "I felt that for the first time ever, I was not alone, others were going through the same thing (abuse) as me", one respondent declared. A group counselor put it this way, "Having women talk about the abuse helps eliminate their isolation". "I don't feel crazy anymore", relayed another respondent. Literature indicates that women who 'keep the secret' increase their isolation and prohibits their creating a support system. Although every respondent agreed that peer groups were helpful for the women. Horton (1993) indicates that the majority of those who used a support group were those who remained in the relationship. "The group helped me to focus on my positive traits", reported one resident. "I became known as the strong one", recalled another resident, thus giving a positive identity and strength to herself. "Women learn to trust themselves again during the group process", noticed a staff counselor.

Children's Group

According to Cummings (1989) children from homes of

domestic abuse are found to be preoccupied with anger, more likely to abuse their siblings, and their own spouse in the future. Other behaviors noted by Guilette (1987) include, aggression against themselves, eczema, soiling and failure to thrive, under-achievement in school, fatigue and withdrawn behaviors that become disruptive. Also Ball (1977-1978) found that, "...female children from domestic violence are described as "docile, submissive, non-assertive, conforming, dependent and selfless..." (page 549). These female children grow up to be the perfect mate for an abusive spouse. Lenore Walker (1984) states that the female child's "...identity is founded on being pleasing to others..." (page 247).

One study indicated that there are six lessons children are likely to learn from violent parents: 1) violence is an appropriate form of conflict resolution; 2) violence has a place within family interaction; 3) if violence is reported, there are few consequences; 4) sexism, as defined by the inequality of power, decision making ability and roles within the family, is to be encouraged; 5) violence is an appropriate means of stress management; and 6) victims of violence are to tolerate the behavior and examine their irresponsibility in bringing on the violence (1989, Wilson, S).

There has been little attention focused on the needs of the children from these families. The children's group at Valley Oasis Shelter puts the focus on prevention and

education. In the children group, children are exposed to effective problem solving techniques and responsibility for their behavior.

In discussing children at the shelter, one child therapist stated that "many are suicidal. They withdraw and don't want to be touched. They really do want to be touched. It's painful to watch them". Another counselor observed "they need someone to be there for them and listen to them because they don't get that at home. They're always being told to sit down, shut up and go away. They need attention". All of the professional respondents agreed that the children are the victims too and that what is needed is to work with the children on their acting out behaviors towards themselves and others.

One shelter resident described the difference between her son's behavior before coming to the shelter and after, "He's talking now. He never talked at home. He doesn't bite or hit others now". One respondent expressed her feelings about the children as, "the mothers are in so much denial that the children get hurt the most". Again, it was agreed on by all respondents that working with the children in a group atmosphere was beneficial in helping the child cope with his feelings and behaviors.

The Generational Cycle of Domestic Violence

As was discussed earlier, children from homes of domestic violence are likely to carry on the legacy of

domestic violence. Victims of domestic violence tolerate the violence and perceive it as normal behavior. Johnson (1990) found that the children's perception of violence towards them is attributed to the fact that many were raised in violent homes..." (page 172). Men from domestic violence homes grow up learning to solve problems through intimidation and violence. According to Browne (1993) children who witness domestic violence increase their risks for involvement in abusive relationships as adults.

The theme of the generational cycle of violence was noted by every respondent. A male counselor noted "domestic violence gives the message to kids that this is the way to handle problems". "I see patterns from my childhood, I accepted the abuse because it was already acceptable", one resident shared. Her own parents were in a violent relationship which she observed as a child and learned to accept violent behavior from her role models. "My husband's childhood caused his being violent", recalled a respondent. "He was tied up for his first two years".

"Domestic violence stems from how a child was raised", echoes another counselor. "We were taught. Society taught us to accept violence", recounts another resident. She witnessed her parents alcoholism and violent marriage. "I used to hide in the closet. I wanted to be everything my parents weren't, but I became everything they taught me. My mother is still verbally abusive to me". "No victim is a

passive victim. They are carrying a set of internal messages that takes them into abusive situations", one respondent commented. One therapist had an interesting thought regarding the generational cycle, "Domestic violence has gone into the streets as we see in gang violence".

Every respondent was in agreement to the thought that abusers and victims come from violent homes and abuse is a learned behavior that is perpetuated through the family.

Individual Treatment

In understanding treatment for the battered woman it is important to understand the symptoms. Browne (1993) indicates that "...survivors of domestic violence have high levels of depression, suicide ideation and suicide attempts..." (page 78). Walker (1984) also states that "...some women respond by abusing drugs or alcohol, experience chronic fatigue, intense startle reactions, disturbed sleep and eating patterns, and nightmares..." (page 98). According to Bard (1986) "Women of domestic violence may also become dependent and have difficulty making decisions or goal planning. They may also exhibit emotional numbing, extreme passivity and helplessness" (page 15).

Browne (1993) states that "...Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is found at a high rate in women of domestic violence..." (page 311). PTSD was initially used to explain the reaction patterns in survivors of natural disaster and combatants in war. The DSM-3-R (1987) describes an aspect of

PTSD as "a serious threat to one's life or physical integrity or a serious threat or harm to one's children..." (page 247). Battered women describe these same reaction patterns.

Many of the respondents talked about how individual counseling has helped them or can be used to gain insight into many of the problems attributed to the battered woman. "Women need to realize that they can depend on themselves and get rid of the dependency on others", stated one male counselor. "You need to go within yourself to work on your self-esteem", stated another staff member. "These women are very co-dependent. They need individual counseling on looking out for them self", remarked a respondent. In describing this co-dependant feature one resident explained, "The man makes you feel so dependent by his manipulation, that it's hard to come out of the fog".

Dependency and self-esteem were the two areas most respondents felt needed addressed in therapy. With higher self-esteem, it would allow them to get out and not accept the abuse", expressed a therapist respondent. "Because their self-esteem is low, they gravitate towards abusive relationships", another staff member stated.

"I didn't realize I had a part in the abuse", remarked a resident respondent. "By understanding I have a responsibility in this, I feel that maybe I can have a healthy relationship with somebody else". Resident respondents felt that they did have some power when they

realized there were ways that they could change. "I am responsible for my recovery, that means I can do some thing for myself", stated on resident.

A few of the therapists felt like domestic violence is a disease. "It is a disease. It's progressive and terminal. We die from it", viewed a respondent. Another therapist stated, "We need to see it (domestic violence) as an addiction to behaviors and an addiction that is multi-generational reinforced in the culture. They need to learn to be abstinent from the source of addiction".

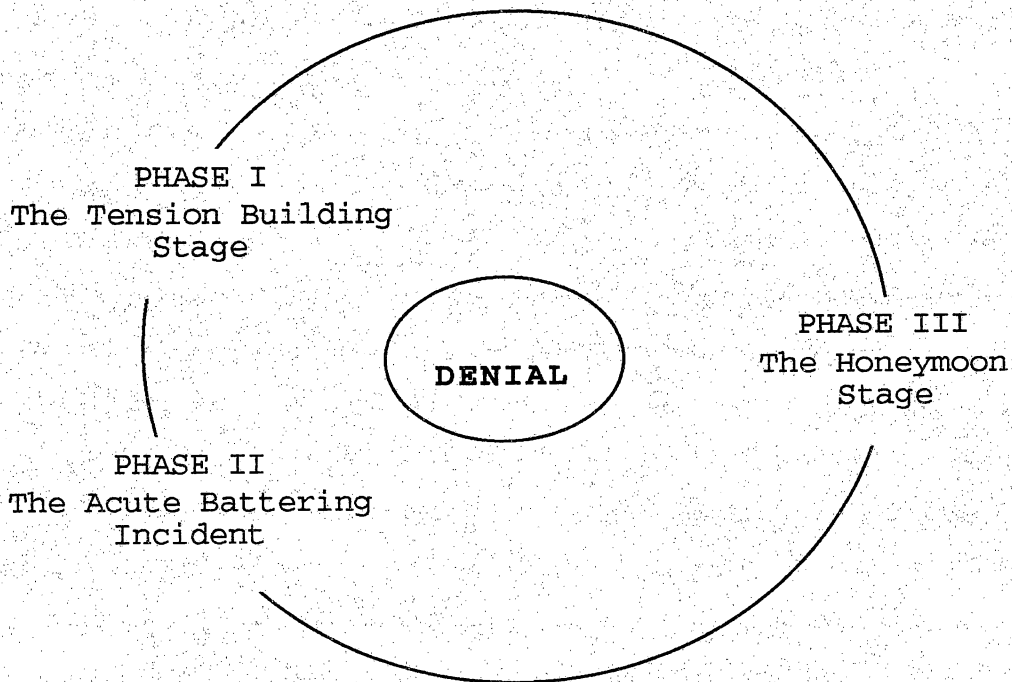
Helping the victim with dependency issues, raising the level of self-esteem and treating domestic violence as a disease was seen by most respondents as what is needed for individual treatment.

Understanding Battered Women's Syndrome

Under the construction of treatment issues, evaluators' formed perceptions by the respondents that did not seem to fit with any categories already recognized. These perceptions thus became a category. These perceptions when further analyzed were what Lenore Walker (1984) coined, "Battered Women's Syndrome." (BWS). BWS, described by Walker (1984), consists of the cycle of violence, demonstrated by a circle of three parts. The sections are labeled: tension building stage, violence, and the honeymoon stage. A smaller circle labeled denial, is what keeps the cycle going.

Figure 3

THE CYCLE OF BATTERING



During the tension building stage, the victim feels responsible for keeping the batterer happy. She feels the tension and fears the abuse that will soon erupt. The next phase is the abuse acted out. During the honeymoon phase the batterer states he is sorry for the abuse, or offers kindness, affection and/or gifts to his victim and tells her it will never happen again. The denial is continuous throughout each phase. The victim denies she is trying to stop abuse from happening by her behavior. She minimizes the abuse when it happens and she believes the abuser when he says it will never happen again.

Another aspect of BWS is learned helplessness. According

to Herbert (1991) "...abused women feel trapped in their relationship by a variety of psychological and/or economic factors..." (page 312). A woman who feels she is without option to change her situation feels helpless, eventually gives up trying to change her situation and comes to accept her life and the abuses heaped on her. Wharton (1985) suggests that "...the longer a woman experiences the abuse, the more helpless she will feel and the less likely they will be to extricate themselves from the relationships..." (page 51).

In the literature, Walker (1984) states that "The domestic violence victim is isolated from society, exhausts her energy on appeasing the abuser, feels humiliated and degraded, and hopes for an occasional indulgence by the abuser" (page 56). "I spent all my time trying to keep the kids quiet so he wouldn't explode. Then he expected me to have the energy to have sex with him", explained a respondent who recently left her abuser. She went on to state, "My friends quit coming around because he made it miserable for me when they did. I was given time limits to go to the store and to pick up the kids. I never got to do anything special for me. It was just about doing for him". Another resident commented on these same issues. "I wasn't even allowed to see my relatives. We never had a phone, so it was hard to keep in contact with people because we lived way out of the way". One counselor commented on a previous resident who had not been

allowed to go to the grocery store with out her husband for five years.

"I was told how stupid I was for so long that I didn't think I could make on my own", related a respondent who goes to the peer support group. "Some times, instead of 'walking on eggshells' I would do things to make him hit me so the tension would be over. I hated wondering when it was going to happen". Some of the respondents who were residents told of their denial. "It was hard to remember the abuse. I started writing in a journal and that was the only way I could remember what happened to me. I completely blocked it out of my mind". Another stated "I always told myself that it wasn't as bad as my mom got. At least I was never put in the hospital". "When he would buy little presents after a beating, I hung on to the feeling that he loves me and it won't happen again, even after nine years of getting hit"!, she continued.

Every respondent had experienced or worked with women who had experienced the pattern of isolation, denial, and the three stages of violence. A counselor commented that "denial makes one not want to work the program. They heal a little and then go back to the abuser because they say, "It wasn't that bad".

CONSTRUCTION 3 - SERVICES OFFERED

Domestic violence is a multifaceted problem. Hamlin (1991) indicates the service needs for this group are often fragmented. Studies suggest a comprehensive community based coordinated network of various agencies are needed to service this social problem. Spouse abuse families may have service needs that span the fields of medical, legal, social services, law enforcement, and employment. Horton (1991) showed that "...friends, professional counselors, and shelters are the most helpful for women who end the abuse. Religious leaders, lawyers, crisis lines, and police are also mentioned as being helpful..." (page 45). Coalitions have been formed and assume the primary responsibility for state domestic violence policies through legislation. According to Davis (1988) "...less well-developed are the social service response that recognizes the unique features of domestic violence. Services designed to enable women to choose whether or not to stay with the abuser is as important as legislation on domestic violence..." (page 16).

Theme of Parenting Skills

Of the many services needed by the woman who is abused, six themes arose during the study. They are parenting skills, safety/solitude, employer/financial, independent living skills, community education, and aftercare.

Hamlin (1991) notes that a family experiencing spouse

abuse is also likely to be experiencing child abuse. The Valley Oasis Shelter teaches victims of domestic violence, non-violent parenting skills. Because many women of domestic violence were abused as children they have not learned appropriate parenting methods. Parenting classes are mandatory at the shelter.

"Victims aren't use to being with their children alone. The abuser usually takes that role while the mother usually takes the back seat in regards to discipline", noted one of the parenting class teachers. Another teacher commented that, "when the victims come to the shelter, they don't know how to take care of the children, because the kids know mom can't hit them. These mothers have little parenting skills".

"My kids don't respect me. My two year old already learned to hit and slap me", reported a resident respondent. Another shelter resident talked about her frustration. "They do whatever they want. I have no control over them". "My husband can get the three year old to mind. I feel like he should have custody. I don't know how to make him mind", stated another overwhelmed respondent.

Most of the respondents in this study commented on the need for parenting skills. Most of the abuse victims felt that they lacked good parenting skills. All of the staff respondents felt that all of the mothers could use a parenting class to teach them appropriate methods of discipline and boundary setting.

Theme of Safety/Solitude

The psychological and physical effects of violence can have devastating effects on the victim. However, making the decision to leave the abuser can be a dangerous risk. Evidence reveals that when a women separates from her abuser, the violence escalates. Hart (1993) states, "Battered women are most often killed when leaving an abusive relationship". If the batterer cannot recapture the battered woman, he may seek retribution for her disloyalty. As many as half of the batterers threaten retaliation when a woman leaves the batterer" (page 626). Hart (1993) also indicates that at least 30% of the batterers inflict further assaults during the predisposition phase of prosecution.

Orders restraining the batterer from coming within contact of the victim only work if the abuser respects those orders or does no harm after the restraining order is no longer in effect. Securing the physical safety of the woman and the child is the responsibility of the shelter.

The subject of safety and solitude was seen as an important aspect for helping the battered women by all respondents. Both staff and resident respondents commented on the effects of the safety and solitude on the healing process. Curiously, there was a lack of comments about the fear of the abuser coming in contact with the victim while living at the shelter.

Three staff respondents state that the shelter was a

safe environment for women and children to "get away from the abuse". "The shelter gives them solitude, peacefulness, and time to think," commented one staff member. She also stated that children were more calm and more at ease after entering shelter life. "They can take a break from the violence", observed a staff counselor. "They can start to express themselves and learn about themselves". "I was given time to make decisions and wasn't pressured to make decisions", stated a previous resident who is now a counselor. "I separated from my husband, but he moved out of the house at first. He continually stalked and harassed me. He was even found to be staying in my attic spying on me. For the first time in months, I can sleep peacefully throughout the night. I didn't realize how close I was to losing my sanity before I came here", described one resident.

"It was good for me to allow myself to get to know myself better. It was good for me to get away from friends and family that wanted me to stay with him. I can focus on myself and I am getting better", reported another resident.

"The shelter provides a quiet home life; the quietest and safest place my children have ever known. It's so safe here. There are no threats of violence", expresses another satisfied resident. Being in a peaceful, safe environment was seen by all respondents as the first step in the victims healing process.

Theme of Employment and Finances

According to Johnson (1991) "...economic circumstances play a major role in the choices facing a woman who is experiencing violence at home. Battered women tend to be unemployed..." (page 170). Okun (1986) found that "...women may tolerate severe abuse in order to maintain financial resources they have been receiving from their abusers to provide for their children.." (page 185). If in leaving a violent relationship, a woman lacks financial resources, she may have to live in an unsafe, crime-ridden neighborhood. Johnson (1990) states "She may have changed only the type of danger from violence from her spouse to violence from strangers" (page 172).

Women who successfully terminated the abusive relationship are more educated with better job skills or abilities, indicates Horton (1993). Horton shows that "...more than 2/3 of the survivors were working and few (10%) were on AFDC. However, Herbert (1991) indicates that resources did not help a woman to stay or leave. 52.6% stated that they would not leave if they had the resources, while 39.5% stated they would leave the relationship..." (page 314). It was argued by a staff respondent, that abused women are trapped by their economic situations. But another staff respondent argued that women who are sufficiently motivated to leave, will find a way to do so regardless of their economic situation.

According to Johnson (1992) it was shown that "...inability to control a portion of the income through employment paired with her subjection to severe abusive acts influenced her decision to stay in the relationship..." (page 171). It appears that employment and lack of financial resources play a role in the decision making process to leave or stay, but studies do not agree to what degree this influences the decision. Consistent with the research, respondents fell on both sides of this debate. While there was a greater response to the opinion that having a lack of financial resources definitely hindered options for the victims, several felt that this did not stop them from leaving.

"Finances are the number one reason they go back", asserted a male counselor. Another counselor agreed by saying, "Welfare doesn't meet all their needs." "We can't stand on our own two feet because of finance", reported a shelter resident. "They are afraid to leave due to financial situations. If they are going to lose all their income, they are going to stay in the relationship", stated a therapist. She went on to state "With welfare cuts and reforms, it's very unstable. It makes it scary for women."

"What helps is to get a job and be around other types of people. You get a better, stronger, healthier support system", stated a peer group counselor. "Having a job is the #1 way to raise self-esteem and create a support system and

independence and they can meet others not in a domestic violence situation", another respondent stated. "It was easier for me to leave because I had job skills and a job", reasoned a former resident.

Those with views opposing the reason that lack of finances kept them trapped in the relationship stated, "I left everything I owned and all my kids' toys when I got out. It wasn't worth it to stay. When I got here I had less than \$5.00 to my name". "I tried to save money so I could leave him, but I couldn't wait that long", another woman reported.

While some respondents felt having money or a job was not a motivating factor to help them get out of the abuse, most respondents felt that it is much easier to make that decision with these resources and they felt that with job skills and a job, the desire to return to the abuser was not as strong.

Theme of Independent Living Skills

The subject of independent living skills encompasses learning how to live independently. The evaluators have separated this theme from that of employment/financial because it became apparent that living independently does not necessarily mean having the financial means to do so. The battered woman exhibits low self-esteem. Because of her low self-esteem, she may perceive herself as incapable of securing a job. One staff respondent stated that women may lack the confidence or motivation to establish an independent

life-style. Another staff respondent noted that providing the victim of abuse with necessary skills was needed to help the victim assume a degree of independence.

In the literature, Noelle (1988) states that a battered women's shelters' main challenge was providing women in crisis with the emotional strength and "social skills that make continued independence possible..." (page 242). Self-help and self-reliance is encouraged at the shelter. Residents of the shelter in the study were responsible for all child care, meal planning, cooking, washing, laundry, etc... Skills they were not previously able to fully participate in while living with the batterer. One staff respondent felt that directing women in shelters to think about their own needs and developing the confidence to acquire these needed skills is a positive feature of the shelter in this study.

Respondents in this study all commented on the fear women have of being on their own. "The obstacles that hinder a battered woman is their lack of knowledge of available resources", viewed a staff member. "I am afraid of being on my own and taking responsibility for myself", reported a resident.

To develop independent living skills a therapist respondent stated, "You can't be judgmental. You need to understand that many of these women have no goals or plans, they just live life day to day. "They've never had to take

care of themselves. We teach them how to cook, write resumes and look for other resources. We teach them skills to deal with life to help them feel more comfortable when they're on their own" a staff member explained. "They need to be shown and taught to be self-sufficient. Most women depend on the abuser for everything. A lot of women don't even have basic living skills as in banking, grocery shopping, or budgeting", expressed a peer counselor.

All staff agreed that lots of encouragement is shown to the women. "We show them they can do it because they don't believe that they can". One resident who was in her late 20's had never written a check and felt she was not smart enough to open her own checking account. "I was given a grocery list and was told what to buy and what to cook by my boyfriend" remarked a former resident. "Now I plan my meals and budget the money to make it last the month".

Fear of not knowing how to live independently and the confidence to overcome this fear was felt by all respondents to have a major impact on women leaving the abusive situation.

Community Education

Members of the community each have a different view on the battered woman and their responsibility towards domestic violence. Educating the community on domestic violence may help address the problem more adequately. Hart (1993) found that "...many women become discouraged with the criminal

process because of the delays..." (page 626). Because of this many women fail to follow through with seeking to prosecute the abuser.

Law enforcement becomes frustrated by their perception that the woman refuses to follow through. Many police officers refrain from arresting the abuser because of the woman's perceived lack of cooperation. Hamlin (1991) suggests there is an ongoing need for improved response from local law enforcement officers.

Law enforcement officers have been perceived as either hostile or non-caring towards victims. Law enforcement officers are a primary point of contact for victims of spouse abuse. Helping law enforcement understand the victims reluctance may cut down on the perceived hostility towards the victim. Having law enforcement aware of appropriate services for referrals may increase awareness of services to the victim. It was noted by many staff respondents that they felt increasing community education regarding the causes, symptoms, and treatment of spouse abuse was needed. The literature was in agreement with this statement.

According to Horton (1993) therapists also need education on domestic violence. It was found by Horton (1993) that counselors who were not trained in abuse, were criticized by the victims, and this was particularly true of the clergy. Horton also indicated that Doctors, hospitals and family members were also cited as being insensitive to

the victim.

"The community needs more education on domestic violence. They need to know it's a disease, just like alcoholism. They're accepting alcoholism, so society needs to understand domestic violence", felt a staff member. "The community sees domestic violence as a private matter and it's not. It's a social illness that needs to be dealt with by society", one former resident observed, "people just don't understand what domestic violence is. They say how come you let him do this to you. This blames the victim".

"Law enforcement doesn't confront the abuser appropriately. They remove the victim and let it go at that", stated a respondent. She went on to say that better education and a greater awareness about what's really going on is needed. "We need to get law enforcement out of the mode of negotiating and get them to enforce the law".

"After my husband's fourth arrest for battery, he was sentenced to only three months in county jail. He did less than 30 days"! recounted a resident. "We need education in the community order to prevent further generations from being victims/abusers".

One resident felt that the community needs to have "more compassion for the victim. People always focus on the negative by saying, 'How could you stay in a relationship like that and put your child through that; instead of, 'I'm proud of you for getting out. It always make me feel bad

about myself when they said negative comments".

Lenore Walker (1995) stated recently that she feels the murder of Nicole Brown has finally put the phrase battered women's syndrome into the homes of every American.

"Something I've been wanting for the last 15 years", states Walker (1995). She went on to state that the public still does not have the understanding or knowledge about domestic violence.

It was felt by both residents of the shelter and staff in this study that three areas in the community need more education in the area of domestic violence. Those areas are the general public, law enforcement, and the legal system.

Aftercare

Literature suggests that research needs to elicit more information on the subject of aftercare for the victim of domestic violence. Respondents in this study also talked about aftercare.

One therapist suggested that domestic violence is not being treated thoroughly enough. Besides her feeling that the women need to be treated initially in isolation for the first 60 days, she suggested that transitional housing for these women are a must if changes are to occur and remain.

Another staff member suggested that follow-up is missing when the women leave. "More programs are needed to help these women in the transition back into the community".

One former resident who is now working for the shelter

observed that "60 days is good to get them moving, but they need an opportunity to stay longer if they are working the program and not just being dependent on the shelter".

It was interesting to note that the resident respondents did not discuss the subject of aftercare on their own. When the evaluators brought the topic to discussion, most of the residents felt they would be ready to leave the program, but aftercare would be helpful to others.

OUTCOMES: FINDINGS

Finding 1: The Experiences Encompassing the Battered Woman

The Decision-Making Process of Choosing a Shelter

While each respondent felt that choosing to come to a shelter was a difficult decision, all felt that the choice was out of desperation and lack of other options. All respondents discussed how dangerous the situation had become right before the decision to come to the shelter was made. A woman's sense to protect her children from either further harm or future damage was also an important factor in leaving the relationship. Because this shelter accepts all age children there was no need to consider what options they had for offering their older children safety.

Substance Abuse in Connection with Domestic Violence

Each resident that was involved with substance abuse in

the relationship agreed that they excused the abuse because of the alcohol or drugs involved. And that when the abuse occurred outside of the substance use was when they became aware of their abusive relationships.

The Battered Women's Perception of Violence

The situation the residents found themselves in, determined when they perceived themselves to be in a dangerous enough situation to leave. Only when they determined their children were being harmed, and that the drugs and alcohol were not the cause of the abuse and that their options were limited did they choose to find a shelter.

Finding 2: Treatment Issues Surrounding Domestic Violence

Empowerment

A major component to helping women of domestic violence includes the issue of empowerment. Studies indicate it is not the level of income a victim has that will help her leave an abusive situation, but whether she believes she can "make it" outside of the relationship. Respondents in our study agree with the literature in this area. While finances can be a factor to women staying in an abusive relationship, it does not keep one there when she is ready to leave. Having a job, or job skills leads to a healthier self-esteem, which empowers a woman to believe in herself.

Children of Domestic Violence

It is apparent from this study that children are affected by living in a home where domestic violence occurs. Our respondents agreed and the literature supports this finding. There is an identified need to help these children of domestic violence cope with their behaviors that have developed. Without help in this area respondents and literature both show that the cycle of violence will most probably continue into the next generation.

Generational Cycle

It was evident from this study that domestic violence is handed down through the generations. Batterers and their victims most often come from abusive homes. Without treatment for the entire family, the violent cycle will continue.

Finding 3: Skills Needed to Enhance Independence

Parenting Skills

Battered women who possess appropriate parenting skills, have the confidence to live without their abuser. It was found that many victims of abuse feel incompetent as parents and therefore rely on the abuser for parenting the children.

Independent Living Skills

A woman's inability to function on her own keeps her trapped in the abusive relationship. Skills such as meal

planning, budgeting, securing a job, and learning social skills are significant in helping the battered woman become independent. Being independent gives the battered woman options other than living with abuse.

**Finding 4: The Need for Community Education and
 Aftercare**

Law Enforcement

This study found that law enforcement need to better understand the battered woman. Increasing the awareness of this issue, will help ensure better service to the victim and lower the officers frustration when dealing with families of domestic violence.

Aftercare

Aftercare appears to be a component thought important by those working with the battered woman. Staff felt that to thoroughly help the battered woman, an aftercare program is critical for the desired outcome.

APPENDIX A - Informed Consent and Debriefing Statement

We are graduate students at California State University, San Bernardino from the Department of Social Work. We are studying the experience of battered women in the High Desert. We are interested in how you have been involved with the experience of battered women, and services offered in the High Desert.

We would like you to be a participant in this study by sharing your feelings and experiences of working with these battered women in an interview setting. Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to refuse to answer any question(s), and may terminate the interview at any time.

During the interview, we as researchers will share with you our own perceptions, as well as those views of others in the study. In recording your thoughts and feelings regarding this subject, if at any time you feel we are not accurately recording your information, feel free to correct us.

When we have completed the study we will give you a copy of the written report highlighting both common constructions and areas of disagreement expressed by all involved in the study. Through this data we hope to collect information which will help those involved, fully understand the problems associated with the battered women. Thank you for your time in helping us with this study.

APPENDIX B - Interview Questions

1. Tell us a little about your experience with domestic violence.
2. What do you see as the biggest obstacle that hinders the battered woman.
3. What do you see that is being done to help domestic abuse that is either harmful or helpful.
4. What do you see as being some of the reasons for domestic violence.
5. What are your favorite things about being at the shelter.
6. What is your least favorite thing about the shelter.
7. What is most important for others to know about domestic violence.
8. What would help victims not return, and why do you feel they return.
9. Options instead of going to a shelter.
10. What other services could be offered that would help the battered woman.
11. Does domestic violence affect children.
12. How has being at the shelter helped you and your children.

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