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Women's Experience of Police Intervention for Domestic Violence

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Abstract

This report details a qualitative research study conducted by students in the Master of Social Work (MSW) program at the University of British Columbia. The study conducted was in partnership with the Ann Davis Transition Society (ADTS) and the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) with the intent of learning more about women's experiences with police intervention in calls of domestic violence. MSW student researchers were interested in the following questions. From the survivor's perspective, (1) What was helpful during women's experiences with police intervention in situations of domestic violence? (2) What were hindrances or concerns, during women's experiences with police intervention in situations of domestic violence? (3) What do women wish for during police intervention in situations of domestic violence? **Background:** MSW student researchers choose to adapt a systems perspective to examine the intersection of domestic violence and police intervention through two theoretical frameworks, a feminist social justice theory and trauma-informed theory. Three concepts were operationally defined to guide the research study including the terms domestic violence, police intervention, and women. Domestic violence was defined as the physical, verbal, or emotional harm perpetrated towards a victim or victims, either by a current or former intimate partner or by another member within a family or household. Additionally, police intervention was defined as the attendance, interaction, and action of law enforcement with the parties involved in an incident or altercation. Finally, the term woman was broadly defined as anyone who identifies as a woman; this extends to transgendered women. To further inform the basis of this research, a literature review was conducted highlighting three major themes in the literature; (1) "getting lucky" (2) police policies and procedures (3) verbal violence. **Methods:** The MSW student researchers applied the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT), a qualitative research method in which survivors of domestic violence were interviewed using a combination of semi-structured and open-ended questions (Butterfield et al., 2009). In this technique, data analysis involves the development of a clear frame of reference as well as the creation of sub categories that arise from the data. **Results:** Four participants engaged in direct interviews, which were subsequently transcribed and coded according to the ECIT principles. The results highlighted helpful critical incidents, hindering critical incidents and wish list item themes, which participants identified from their interventions with police. The MSW student researcher found the following patterns of significance from the data, (1) the occurrence of more hindering themes compared to helpful or wish list items, (2) the experience of three hindering critical incidents in all four research participants, which were (a) a lack of information provided (b) reported inaction and (c) dismissive & disrespectful response, and finally (3) the similarity of the helpful critical incidents themes to the wish list items. **Recommendations:** This research study indicates there are valuable opportunities to learn from survivors of domestic violence by considering their voices and stories in the development of policy, services and programs. Findings from this study, can be built upon by extending research to include a longer time frame for study, wider recruitment strategy, and diverse sample frame in order to promote a robust understanding of the victim's experience of police intervention in calls of domestic violence.

Keywords: Ann Davis Transition Society (ADTS), Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), domestic violence, police intervention, survivor's perspective, Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT)



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Introduction

A qualitative research study was conducted by students in the Master of Social Work (MSW) program at the University of British Columbia in partnership with the Ann Davis Transition Society (ADTS) and the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) with the intent of learning more about women's experiences with police intervention in calls of domestic violence. The MSW student researchers were interested in the following questions. From the survivor's perspective,

1. What was helpful during women's experiences with police intervention in situations of domestic violence?
2. What were hindrances or concerns, during women's experiences with police intervention in situations of domestic violence?
3. What do women wish for during police intervention in situations of domestic violence's?

The goal of this research study was to capture and emphasize the voice of survivors and to accurately communicate their narrative to service providers, policy makers, and law enforcement. The Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) was utilized and the findings were intended to inform the relationship that is developed between the service providers and users of the ADTS and the Chilliwack RCMP. More broadly, the MSW student researchers were hopeful that this work would be informative across the province where police and family serving agencies work together.

The prevalence of domestic violence is staggering with 30% of women worldwide, reporting victimization (Provincial Office of Domestic Violence, 2016). Within British Columbia, one in four violent crimes reported are categorized as spousal or dating violence (Provincial Office of Domestic Violence, 2016). Moreover, it is estimated that "nearly two-thirds of women (64%), who are victims of a spousal assault do not report the violence to police" (Ministry of Public Safety & Solicitor General, Ministry of the Attorney General & The Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2010). These statistics highlight the need to promote effective police intervention and responses in order to reduce barriers and improve supports for victims.

The participants of this research study were women who have accessed services at the ADTS in Chilliwack, BC. This agency provides education, prevention and support services to those affected by abuse and violence (Ann Davis Transitions Society, 2018). Furthermore, Chilliwack is situated outside of the urban core of Vancouver, surrounded by farmlands and valleys; the population density per square kilometer is 320.2 persons (City of Chilliwack, 2018). The City of Chilliwack recognizes two local First Nations Bands; the Stó:lo First Nation and Ts'elxweyeqw Nation Band (City of Chilliwack, 2018). Based on the comparisons of population density per square kilometer in BC, Chilliwack falls into a category somewhere between rural and urban. When it comes to the number of domestic violence files received by the RCMP Chilliwack there were 189 cases in 2016, meaning a domestic violence file case is opened every second day (Cohen et. Al, 2018).

Relevance to social work

This research study pertains to social work in terms of promoting social justice for women and survivors of violence. The MSW student researchers took a systems lens to understand the issues for women experiencing domestic violence; therefore, the MSW student researchers look to understand the person as part of their environment. Using this lens, interventions were explored on a micro level to help the individual in crisis, as well as from a macro level to advocate for societal and policy change. For women who have experienced violence in the home, an ecological-systems approach explains the attitudes and culture existing around violence against women and explains the maintenance of patriarchal attitudes towards woman (Cohen et al., 2018). The MSW student researchers gathered information intended to help increase the understanding of the victim's experience with law enforcement when attending to incidents of domestic violence. The results of this research study be provided to the ADTS to be distributed to service users as well as service providers.

Theoretical Framework

Grounded in the person-in-environment approach, there are two theoretical frameworks guiding this

research. First the feminist social justice theory of domestic violence provides an explanation of the societal outlook on domestic violence. Second, the trauma-informed theory offers guidance in supporting a survivor at the time of crisis as well as addressing the systemic impact of domestic violence in individual's interactions.

Feminist social justice theory. A feminist social justice lens provides context to the history of domestic violence in North America and the development of laws and interventions by governments and agencies. It acknowledges "domestic violence as a patriarchal force" (Houston, 2014, p. 2). This lens suggests experiences and interventions of domestic violence should be viewed in terms of the distribution of power by the perpetrator and then again by the interventionists (i.e. law enforcement). Therefore the relationship between male domination and domestic violence is seen as both particular and general. On the particular level, battering is about individual men controlling their female partners, and on the general level, the actions of individual perpetrators were connected to the larger system of male control.

Trauma informed approach. Wilson et al. (2015) state "[Trauma-informed care is] an approach to working with participants that assumes the possibility of a trauma history in anyone who walks through the door" (p. 586). It incorporates an understanding of the role of past trauma on present day challenges, response takes into account the persons lived experience and vulnerabilities. A trauma-informed approach is well utilized in work with victims of domestic violence as it acknowledges the influence of past events on present interactions between victims and service providers, as well simultaneously calls attention to issues of social justice and inequality. This approach implies that in the context of domestic violence reporting to police, officers should be cognizant that trauma has occurred, thus requiring sensitivity in responses and interventions (Wilson, Fauci & Goodman, 2015).

Conceptual Framework

The MSW student researchers operationally defined three concepts to guide the research study including the terms domestic violence, police

intervention, and women.

Domestic violence. A description of domestic violence is necessary to establish an understanding of the concept of the violence that is occurring. The MCFD defines domestic violence as: "Physical or sexual assault or the threat of physical or sexual assault against a current or former Intimate partner whether or not they are legally married or living together at the time of the assault or threat" (*Provincial Office of Domestic Violence, 2016, p.4*).

MCFD's description of domestic violence fails to include the diversity of violence occurring in the home between people other than those with an intimate relationship. There are existing jurisdictions (particularly in the United States) that include "family violence" as a part of domestic violence. While the description of family violence and domestic varies between jurisdictions, the common link is the violence is occurring between any members of a household, i.e. sibling violence (Barocas et al., 2016). It is also important to note that domestic violence is the term used throughout this research study and it is inclusive of other language used such as "violence against women in relationships", "intimate partner violence", and "family violence".

Police intervention. The MSW student researchers describe police intervention as the attendance, interaction, and action of law enforcement with the parties involved in an incident or altercation. In this research study the term law enforcement and police describe both the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) officers, a federal policing program, and to municipal police officers. In Canada depending on the region there may be a municipal force or the RCMP. This research takes place in Chilliwack, which is in the jurisdiction of the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2019).

Women. Finally, the MSW student researchers humbly acknowledge that domestic violence can occur for any gender. This research study however focuses on women. "Woman" and "female" are applied to any person who identifies as such. This is inclusive of women who are trans.

Literature Review

This review of the literature focuses on the experience of victims who report domestic violence to police. Three significant concerns are identified in this research study; first, the varied level of police response and intervention based on current policies and procedures; secondly, the experience of women following reports of verbal abuse; and finally, the inconsistency in police response experienced by women who report domestic violence, which has been described as “getting lucky”. This review also includes reference to a trauma-informed approach to intervention and training for support workers and law enforcement services involved in domestic violence cases (Wilson, Fauci & Goodman, 2015).

Police Policies and Protocols

Police are often the first point of contact when victims decide to come forward and report harm (Saxton et al., 2018). Cororan et al. (2000) suggest in their article, that this initial interaction will “play a crucial role in how a domestic disturbance is resolved” (p. 393). Various factors impact the interaction between an officer and a reporting victim including, but not limited to, current policies and protocols, the knowledge and attitude of the officer, and the identity of the victim (Corcoran, Stephenson, Perryman, & Allen, 2001).

Canadian federal policy endorses mandatory charges and sentencing in situations of domestic violence; research suggests that this policy has had a contributing impact on the increase in domestic violence charges, garnering the approval of victims (Saxton, et. al, 2018). Research also reveals that many victims of domestic violence welcome this practice of “proactive” response, consequently reporting a sense of safety and empowerment (Russel & Light, 2006). In BC, further steps have been taken to enhance collaboration between agencies working in this field including the creation of the Inter-agency Case Assessment Teams (ICAT) in 2010.

"An ICAT is a partnership of local agencies including police, child welfare, health, social service, victim support, and other anti-violence agencies. This group responds to referrals of suspected highest risk cases of domestic violence with a goal of increasing

safety" (Ending Violence Association of BC, 2015, p. 9).

ICATs across the province respond to high-risk cases by identifying risk, sharing information and developing comprehensive monitoring and support plans (Ending Violence Association of BC, 2015). ICATs also offer service providers meaningful opportunities for education on the topic of domestic violence intervention as well as tools such as the best-practice manual, which is used as a template to guide interventions (Ending Violence Association of BC, 2015).

An integrated approach is supported by research completed by Russel & Light (2006), which found that victims reported a sense of empowerment when working with police on integrated teams. Unfortunately, even with some of these safeguards and specialized supports in place, victims continue to report inconsistent experiences following police interventions, as well as incidences of re-victimization and inaction (Russel & Light, 2006; Stewart, Langan & Hannem, 2013).

Verbal Violence

Verbal violence is part of the “fabric of abuse” it includes language that is intended to cause fear and emotional harm to the victim (Stewart et al., 2013, p. 274). The definition of domestic violence reported by MCFD includes threats of physical and sexual assault and is expanded to include “Harassment, threatening or mischief, where there is reasonable basis to conclude that the act was done to cause, or did in fact cause, fear, trauma, suffering or loss to the intimate partner” (Provincial Office of Domestic Violence, 2016, p. 4). Despite this definition, verbal violence can be even more challenging to address and prove therefore it generally falls under separate criminal code categories, such as harassment (Stewart et al., 2013). Consequently, there may be additional complexity in assessing harm and determining whether incidences of verbal violence warrant criminal charges (Stewart et al., 2013).

For example, Stewart et al. (2013) report some victims are subject to chronic and ongoing “putdowns”, “humiliation” and “accusations of infidelity” (Stewart et al., 2013, p.274-275). This may have significant impacts on emotional wellbeing

and cause suffering, as outlined in the MCFD's definition of domestic violence; however, a lack of concrete protocol for police leaves much left open for individual interpretation. The same study suggests that police would benefit from greater support in the assessment of incidences of verbal violence (Stewart et al., 2013). Furthermore, research by Russel and Light (2006), as well as Stewart et al. (2013), give light to themes of deserving versus undeserving victims, in policing and expose problematic issues in cases of dual culpability. It is explained that charges and arrests are obvious to officers when the offense is judged as being serious but as the severity lessens, officer's perceptions of victims tend to become increasingly negative (Russel & Light, 2006; Stewart et al., 2013).

"Getting Lucky"

A review of the research on victim's experiences in reporting domestic violence reveals a persistent inconsistency characterizing interactions with police. Many victims expressed, that when they interacted with a supportive officer they felt "lucky" (Saxton et al., 2018); the findings imply low expectations of police with the baseline expectation being that the officers will lack understanding of the victim's experience. Russel and Light (2006) address the varied experiences of victims based on a scale of "helpfulness" noted by their participants indicating a range from some officers who provide no sense of safety to victims, while others offer minimal support through phone numbers for services, and still others who demonstrate empathy, caring and sensitivity.

Research suggests that practices such as dual charging can evoke fear in victims when making the decision to report domestic violence (Stewart et al., 2013). Dual charging involves laying charges on both parties involved in the domestic violence incident and then allowing the criminal justice system or the courts to determine who is the perpetrator (Stewart et al., 2013). This practice may occur in situations when victim and perpetrator are not easily distinguishable by the police (Stewart et al., 2013). There is evidence to suggest that the practice of dual charging influences victims connections with police, particularly in the case of ethnic minority groups and Aboriginal women who have had challenging experiences with

the criminal justice system in the past which may elicit ongoing fear regarding police interaction (Anderson et al., 2010; Tam, Tutty, Zhuang & Paz, 2016).

A Trauma Informed Lens

To address the fear and low expectations that some women may have towards law enforcement and to offset the tragic and lasting effects of domestic violence, it is crucial to recognize the potential impact of trauma on the victims and the benefit of a trauma informed approach. Research indicates that an understanding of trauma is present but not consistent among law enforcement (Saxton et al., 2018), which may contribute to the "getting lucky" theme apparent in the previously reported experiences of victims.

A trauma-informed lens can provide a useful framework for domestic violence by acknowledging influences from oppressive societal structures and through its focus on promoting emotional safety and healthy coping (Wilson et al., 2015). In the context of Aboriginal peoples, Anderson et al. (2010) express the unfortunate normalcy of domestic violence in First Nations communities which stems from a history of colonization and denial of traditional practices. For victims in racial minorities and/or immigrants, there are multiple factors deterring some from seeking help such as cultural beliefs, the fear of repercussions on their citizenship status and a lack of knowledge regarding services and the criminal justice system (Tam et al., 2016; Violence Against Women in Relationships, 2010). Awareness of the context in which abuse occurs can lead to improved connection between responders and victims (Wilson et al., 2015).

Domestic Violence Intervention in Rural Settings

This study is focused on the experiences of victims in Chilliwack, BC. Therefore, it is valuable to understand what it means for survivors to access services in an area that is not clearly defined as rural or urban. MCFD recognizes that there are limited services available in the area. In their research, Varcoe and Deck (2008) identify the "inward-looking" nature of rural communities and the unique challenges their residents face. Noting that, "Abusers often live in the same places, meaning that women who seek assistance are often threatened or exposed to further violence by the abuser's family, friends or the abuser themselves" (p. 47).

Gaps in knowledge

A review of the current literature suggests the need for research framed within a BC context, and more specifically a community context. This research study intended to fill part of this gap by increase the understandings of the experiences of domestic violence victims in the city of Chilliwack, BC, to inform the development of supportive and effective interventions.

Methodology

This study drew from ECIT, a qualitative research method in which participants are interviewed using a combination of semi-structured and open-ended questions (Butterfield et al., 2009). As the research study involved direct interviews with women survivors of domestic violence, ethics approval was required from both the University of British Columbia Behavioral Ethics Board (UBC BREB) and the MCFD Research Ethics, Privacy, and Security Department. An ethics application was first submitted for review to the UBC BREB on November 30, 2018 and following two stages of requested provisos, approval for the study was granted by the board on January 14, 2019 (ethicsID H18-03557). MSW student researchers then proceeded to submit an ethics application for this study to the MCFD on January 14, 2019 and after addressing requested revisions, the study received ethics approval from the MCFD on January 21, 2019.

Sampling and Recruitment

A non-probability, purposive sampling method was used in this study. Purposive sampling as a method, attempts to seek out “key informants” (Grinnel & Unrau, 2018, p. 345), persons with specific knowledge about an issue who are willing to discuss their experiences and who represent a diverse range of perspectives (Grinnel & Unrau, 2018). Interviews in this approach generally occur until a saturation point is reached, where there are no longer new themes or relevant information arising from interviews (Grinnel & Unrau, 2018). The sample frame for our study, was adult women who experienced domestic violence and police intervention, who were community service users of either the ADTS or another partner agency within their network, in Chilliwack, BC.

Recruitment for the study began immediately

following ethics approval from the UBC BREB and MCFD. Recruitment posters were sent to the ADTS for distribution and placement at the various sites of the society, as well, the request was made for the society to share the recruitment posters with other community agencies within their network in Chilliwack. Posters briefly described the aim of the study and eligibility criteria, as well as noted the provision of a small cash honorarium. Interested participants were prompted to contact MSW student researchers directly for more information. MSW student researchers responded to potential participants by phone using a preconstructed telephone script, to provide more information about the study and to confirm eligibility. Eligible participants were adult women who had experienced police intervention as related to incidents of domestic violence and who were available to attend one of the locations of the ADTS for an interview of up to 90 minutes in-person on select dates in mid-February 2019. During the initial telephone call, potential participants were encouraged to ask questions about the study, as well were provided with the option of additional time to make their decision about participation. Researchers also created a detailed information and consent form for the research study, these forms were sent to all potential participants following the initial phone call and they were provided with an opportunity to raise concerns with the MSW student researchers prior to the interview.

In order to meet course deadlines, interviews were initially planned for the week of Feb 4, 2019; however by this date, only one participant had confirmed her involvement. As such, MSW student researchers made the decision to delay interview dates by one week to allow more time for recruitment. During this additional week, staff at the partner agency, ADTS, were able to identify and refer several more potential participants. In total, seven women expressed interest in the study; one woman decided not to participate following the initial telephone call, one woman was unable to attend the interview due to illness, and one woman did not show up for her scheduled interview. By the conclusion of the study, four participants in total were engaged and completed direct interviews with MSW student researchers.

Data Collection and Analysis

In the ECIT the “focus is on critical events, incidents or factors that help promote or detract from the effective performance of some activity or the experience of a specific situation or event.” (Butterfield et al., 2009, p. 268). This qualitative research technique is adapted from Flannigan’s Critical Incident Technique research method, the origins of which are in the disciplines of organizational and industrial psychology (Butterfield et al., 2009). The ECIT represents a version which has been further “enhanced” for use in counselling psychology research; it is also noted to be well utilized in disciplines such as education, nursing and social work as an exploratory tool for capturing the characteristics, shifts and transitions within experiences (Butterfield et al., 2009).

In this study, MSW student researchers conducted three direct interviews in person and one remote interview by phone (see Appendix A for Interview Guide), with the participant utilizing a secure, private office and phone at the facilities of the ADTS. Participants were provided detailed information and consent forms prior to the interview and had several days to bring forward any questions and concerns. On the day of the interview, the MSW student researcher again verbally reviewed information and consent forms with participants to support a fully informed consent process. Participants were given the option to pass on questions and to end the interview at any time without any penalty or explanation. Interviews ranged from 40 to 105 minutes and were recorded and transcribed with permission from the participants. All participants were offered counselling services before, after, and up to two months following the interviews, by partner agencies, the ADTS and the Chilliwack Youth Health Centre. At every step of data collection and analysis, all efforts were made to maintain anonymity and to keep secure the identities of the participants. All data was securely stored as per ethics agreements with the UBC BREB and MCFD.

Drawing from the thematic analysis approach of the ECIT model, MSW student researchers discussed and developed a frame of reference for data analysis, which was determined by how the data might be used (Butterfield et al., 2009).

In this study, the frame of reference was to explore themes useful for informing program development including training, interventions, and inter-agency collaboration for victims of domestic violence. This frame of reference was applied in the individual and independent initial analysis of all interview transcripts by both MSW student researchers. The purpose of the initial analysis was to categorize relevant statements into both helpful and hindering Critical Incidents (CIs) and Wish List (WL) items using the frame of reference. In a second step of data analysis, MSW student researchers jointly cross-referenced the coding in the initial analysis; this involved vigorous discussion and confirmation of individually identified CIs and WL items and was intended to strengthen the validity of categories. Next, MSW student researchers discussed and identified patterns within each CI and WL category and with consideration to the frame of reference, formed general sub-categories to capture and name significant themes within each group.

Following the initial interview, each participant had expressed interest in a short follow-up interview of up to 15 minutes by phone. Once MSW student researchers completed data coding and thematic categorization, research study participants were again engaged in follow-up interviews by phone, as a final step of data analysis. After reaching out to all participants, three out of four persons were agreeable and available to complete a follow-up interview by phone with an MSW student researcher. This follow-up interview was mainly intended as a credibility check to discuss the categorization of statements and themes drawn from each interview, and to ensure that the data accurately captured the experience of each participant. Follow-up interviews work to further strengthen the validity of the categories and thematic sub-categories and offered participants an opportunity to make clarifications and ask questions. Follow up interviews were not transcribed however relevant field notes were kept as needed. Of the participants who engaged in a follow-up interview, none noted any significant discrepancies and all participants confirmed the accuracy of the categories and themes identified in the data analysis. During the follow-up interview participants were also informed of the small sample size of the study, and each willingly provided consent

for MSW student researchers to use specific quotations of their verbal statements in the final reporting of findings.

Results

Data was organized into three main categories: helpful CIs, hindering CIs and WL items. Table 1 shows noteworthy themes under each main category, as well as the number of participants who confirmed their experience of the noted theme.

Table 1: Frequency of themes by number of participants

Helpful Critical Incidents	#	Hindering Critical Incidents	#	Wishlist items	#
Presence (attending the incident)	2	Lack of information provided	4	Timely action	3
Consequences (or taking action)	2	Reported inaction (despite available evidence)	4	Validation	3
Practical support	2	Dismissive & disrespectful response	4	Empathy	2
Dispatch (phone support)	1	Reported stigma (related to substance use, mental illness, disability) and related discrimination	3	Clear information, guidelines	1
Support for family (Trauma informed)	1	Reported unequal treatment	3		
Looked for evidence	1	Rigidity in policy & practice	2		
		Increased vulnerability to harm	1		
		Attendance used as a form of harassment by the perpetrator of domestic violence	1		

indicates the number of participants who shared an experience consistent with the noted theme

Helpful CIs were actions taken by police which participants felt supported their overall sense of safety, following an incident of domestic violence. Helpful CIs included actions such as prompt attendance at the location where the incident took place, immediate consequences for perpetrators, practical support such as car rides, victim services referral, and others such actions. The following are statements from participants identifying helpful CIs, these statements reflect themes of action, consequences for perpetrators, and support for family: "I charged him, and they made their report and they came out and arrested him..."; "They made sure that before they took me in the ambulance, that my son and daughter had left and gone with a friend, so they didn't have to see any more trauma..."; "They were very kind and I mean, they didn't pressure me, they

said at any time... we will stop and you can come in and give your statement later on..."

Hindering CIs are actions (or inaction) which participants report worked as a barrier to their sense of safety and wellbeing, in incidents of domestic violence. Of significance is the finding of three hindering CIs which were shared by all four research participants. The first CI noted by all participants, was a lack of information provided; in this case, our participants reported there was little explanation provided for inaction, or inadequate communication regarding subsequent actions that might be taken. Furthermore, participants felt there was a lack of information provided, regarding supportive services and referrals to community groups.

The second theme of significance is reported inaction, this refers to police attending to a call, but participants still feeling that a lack of appropriate action was taken. Inaction is related to police declining to take statements, make arrests, or provide other practical support, although participants often felt there may have been evidence to support more action

Finally, all participants reported that at one time during police intervention, they felt their concerns were either dismissed or that they were treated disrespectfully by the attending law enforcement officer. More specifically, in these situations, participants suggested their credibility was questioned or that they were "talked down" too. One participant was upset when officers made light of the situation at hand, joking with the participant while responding to a call related to ongoing verbal violence and intimidation. These next statements reflect interventions which participants found to be hindering in their interactions with police. They reflect experiences of being stigmatized, dismissed and disrespected: "It's like I'm being followed and hunted, and the police were obviously, very obviously, condescending, didn't believe a word I said, wrote me off as crazy, mentally ill..."; "I was calling them quite, quite a few times and um, eventually they just stopped coming..."; "Yeah I think when you're doing drugs and think they are more so likely to treat you kinda differently... yeah you know they are just judgmental about that kinda thing right?"

WL items are actions or approaches, which participants wished for in situations of police intervention and domestic violence. WL items include timely action such as arrests and removal, as well as approaches involving validation of the victim's experience, sensitivity, and a clear communication of information.

In these following wish list statements, the participants make clear their wishes for empathy and action: "Yeah for them to recognize just the basics of it if this is the situation of extreme not physical violence really, but you know extreme family violence, really bad breakdown of a marriage... maybe she's traumatized?... Maybe she just seems scattered and you know crazy, because you know, she just doesn't know what to do..."; "If I'm calling for help, I want them to help..."; "I want to be treated like a normal law-abiding person, who is in need of help..."

Discussion

There are several noteworthy observations which arise from the data, including the identification of more hindering CIs than helping CIs in the experiences of the participants. Of additional note is that the WL item themes appear to share a number of similarities to the helpful CI themes, such as the WL theme of timely action, which can be related to the helpful CI theme of police presence or attending. MSW student researchers felt that the relationship between WL items and helpful CIs, might be in part due to the unique experience of one participant outlier who had a significantly distinct experience as compared to the other three participants. This single participant had a largely positive interaction with police while the other three participants reported generally negative experiences in their interactions. It was also interesting to us that the same outlier, was also the only participant who did not specifically identify as someone with an existing mental health condition. Other participants noted their struggles with mental health and the resulting stigma perceived during interactions with police, one participant described her own experience with stigma, stating:

"I get that a lot with police because I'm a person

with disabilities and once I'm identified as such, um, I'm mistreated".

Major themes identified in the literature appear to be consistent with the experiences of the research participants in Chilliwack, BC. Particularly, the theme of victims feeling as if they "got lucky" after experiencing a positive police intervention and generally expressing low preceding expectations regarding the quality and helpfulness of police involvement.

Given that only one of the four research study participants felt their experience was positive, the results of this study are consistent with past findings. Furthermore, consistent with the theme of police policies highlighted in the literature review, two participants of this study reported concerns about the rigidity of charging policy and practices. Specifically, this study's participants reported that in their experiences, police appeared sometimes reluctant to take statements or press charges due to a lack of evidence or because the victims were unwilling to take recommended action. For example, one participant stated, "They didn't do anything, cause I wouldn't go to a transition house." "I don't believe when they tell me they have no power. I believe if they wanted to lay charges they could, and they could have helped me to stop the harassment that was damaging." "I was raised constantly seeing contradictions towards the law and the officers who are suppose to support the law..."

All participants also felt that at some point in the interaction with police, they were not provided enough information about what exactly the parameters regarding charging practices are, thus contributing to an overall sense of frustration. One participant explained, "And [the police are] like there's nothing we can do until he pulls into the driveway... I said, I have a peace bond... I live 20 minutes from town ... by the time you get there, I said, he could have beaten me up or killed me by this time..."

The last theme noted in the literature review of verbal violence was highlighted in the experience of one participant in our study who shared her own

challenges with surviving verbal and psychological abuse. This participant shares her story in the following statement: “I said, nobody, the police don’t believe me, nobody seems to understand... if he was punching me in the face, I guess it would be easier cause I guess, cause at least they could see what was happening...”

When looking at the data from a feminist social justice perspective it is interesting to consider the role of power, patriarchy and gender in the experiences of our participants; particularly as half of the participants in our study at some point, perceived unequal treatment from police at towards themselves and their male perpetrators. Though there was no specific discourse regarding such systems of oppression within the interviews conducted, some participants alluded to frustration regarding perceived gender-based subjugation in their experience as victims.

The literature review highlighted a trauma informed approach as a response in work with victims of domestic violence; one that may be effective in addressing past experiences of trauma in direct front line interventions with victims. A trauma informed approach focuses on the promotion of physical and emotional safety for victims by assuming that a history of trauma in some form exists for everyone and consequently these past experiences work to influence present interactions (Wilson et al., 2015). Consistent with this approach, participants in this study appeared to identify helpful CIs and WL items as those which cultivated a sense of safety and sensitivity, as expressed in the following statements: “They made sure that before they took me in the ambulance that my son and daughter had left and gone with my friend, so they didn’t have to see any more trauma.” “Asked if was okay if they talked to my son... they said what a great job he did answering questions... I mean I was very impressed... sorta taking measures to make sure he was comfortable.”

Limitations

The ECIT as a qualitative approach is effective in the initial stages of research to gain an increased understanding of a relatively lesser known issue (Butterfield et al., 2009).

Though there is significant literature regarding women’s experiences with police intervention; this study was particularly interested in the experiences of women living in the unique community of Chilliwack, BC. In this regard, the initial findings are helpful for understanding directions for future research however there are also significant limitations to the findings of this study, in particular the small sample size of the study limits the extent to which findings can be used to directly inform any changes to program development. Furthermore, the small sample size of the study, though providing a highly valuable window into the experience of victims, is limited in its generalizability to the larger population of women who experience domestic violence (Grinnel & Unrau, 2018).

A limited three-week recruitment period and convenient, purposive sampling approach, targeted participants who were already accessing supportive community services during or after an experience of domestic violence and police intervention. Consequently, this research study did not include past or present victims of domestic violence who have not accessed supportive services in the Chilliwack area. Furthermore, recruitment was further narrowed to those within the network of our partner agencies in Chilliwack. Additionally, MSW student researchers did not complete an extensive review of other social support agencies or victims’ service agencies in the area and did not directly include other agencies in the study’s recruitment strategy. Moreover, based on demographic statistics on the City of Chilliwack, MSW student researchers noted that the sample group did not fully reflect the diverse cultures and backgrounds of women who experience domestic violence in Chilliwack. Though, MSW student researchers did make attempts to strengthen the validity of results through strategies such as credibility checks with participants and a triangulated approach to data analysis. According to the ECIT, as well as other qualitative research methods, interviews with participants should ideally continue to a point of exhaustiveness where no new themes are raised (Butterfield et al., 2009). In this study, MSW student

researchers felt that a saturation point was not met, and there was likely potential for further formation of new thematic categories.

As the experiences of the participants took place in the past during situations of extreme duress there is some risk of recall bias (Grinnel & Unrau, 2018). Some of the participants acknowledged details are not as clear as they once were. Though MSW student researchers had the utmost confidence in the word and intentions of the study's participants, memory recall from events that took place weeks, months, years ago inevitably holds a possibility of error in recollection.

This study did not include the experiences of victims following their initial interaction with law enforcement, however research and current media accounts indicate that moving through the criminal justice is also a significant challenge for victims (Russel & Light, 2006; Saxton et al., 2018; Tam et al., 2016). Furthermore, our review does not address the experiences of children as witnesses and victims of family violence. However, we recognize the need for future research based on a report by the Ministry of Children and Family Development which indicated domestic violence is frequently witnessed by children (MCFD, 2016).

We would also like to note that the focus of our study does not address the experiences of victims from the lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer (LGBTQ) community, nor does it encompass the experiences of male, heterosexual victims of violence. Given that domestic violence is experienced by persons of diverse genders and sexuality, MSW student researchers acknowledge that this study represents a limited analysis based on the experiences of cis-gendered, heterosexual women survivors of domestic violence perpetrated by men. This research study also focuses solely on the victim's perspective and does not include the perspectives of community service providers, clinicians, family members, police or others involved in calls of domestic violence. Lastly, due to the limitations of time and constraints of the research study, neither the literature review or study itself included information about local services, policy and procedure, and only very limited information

regarding the RCMP or other community services in Chilliwack were noted.

Implications and Future Directions

This study was exploratory in nature with the aim of capturing the experiences of a small sample of women as related to incidents of domestic violence and police intervention in the community of Chilliwack, BC. The intent of the data collected is to inform the development and changes to supportive services and programs. Though the small sample size and limited scope of the study, constrain its utility for guiding direct recommendations in program development, findings from the data indicate that there are many opportunities to further study the experiences of victims of domestic violence. The voices and stories of survivors offers a highly critical, nuanced perspective of the experience of domestic violence and has potential to reveal ways in which first responders such as police, may work more effectively to further promote a sense safety and wellbeing for victims.

The recruitment strategy and sample size were heavily influenced by the parameters of this course and the limited time frame in which the research was conducted. MSW student researchers recommend a more extensive study of the experience of victims of domestic violence in police intervention, however with a longer time frame, wider recruitment strategy, and larger sample frame. Future research would ideally involve more agencies including law enforcement and community service providers as well as family members of those who experience domestic violence, thus promoting a more robust understanding of the experience of domestic violence and the implications on participation within present systems.

Domestic violence is a complex issue, as is the response to domestic violence. Though our sample was small, the results of our study suggest that the mental health status of victims, may influence the way police respond to calls of domestic violence. Participants of our study reported experiences of stigmatization, as related to a mental health disability in their interactions with police. Further study is needed to better understand the unique experiences

of persons living with mental illness in their interactions with police, particularly in situations of domestic violence. Ideally, future study should examine the risk of predisposed treatment by police towards those with a known or suspected mental health condition. Research should seek a comprehensive understanding of current policies and practices of police and other community agencies, as well as the mechanisms that connect them.

Future research should also attempt to include the voices of participants from diverse genders, socioeconomic groups and cultures using methods of study that are accessible to greater numbers of people. Although interviews were helpful and appropriate this small study, several potential participants were notably hesitant and ultimately declined to participate due to the time commitment and reservations about recorded interviews. Other methods such as surveys and focus groups might be considered in future research, if made safe for victims to access.

Conclusion

MSW student researchers would like to acknowledge the strength and resiliency of the study's participants as well as their courage in sharing their experiences and powerful statements. At this time, domestic violence continues to remain a complex and relevant issue throughout British Columbia, and in communities such as Chilliwack. The response to domestic violence is an important factor impacting the wellbeing and safety of victims. Our research indicates there are valuable opportunities to learn from survivors of domestic violence by considering their voices and stories in the development of policy, services and program development.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Participant: # _____

Date: _____

Interview Start Time: _____

1. Introduce yourself (name, role in research, background and field of study).
2. Read and complete the informed consent form.

“As you are aware we are interested in learning more about your experiences with police in situations of domestic violence. We understand that there may be many elements to your experience but will be focusing the questions today to your experiences specifically with police intervention. As researchers, hearing about your lived experiences is highly valuable for informing services and supports in the community. We recognize that talking about your experiences may be difficult and an emotional process, we urge you to do what is needed to care for yourself including going to the washroom, taking a short water or snack break, asking for clarification, passing on/declining questions, or ending the interview. There will also be counseling services available to you to today and in the days following this interview. We ask that you only share information that you are comfortable with. We will go through the consent form with you now and then you will have an opportunity to ask questions.”

- Read through the consent form together.
- Sign 2x copies and provide 1x copy to the client.

“ Following the interviews we will be reviewing all the recorded data and we will be categorizing your information to better understand the themes that may come out of your interview. If you are agreeable we will follow up with you by phone or email for a very brief 15 minute call to confirm that we have correctly categorized your information and to give you an opportunity to make additions or revisions to previous statements and to ask questions”

3. Provide time for participant to ask questions.
4. Review duty to report and limits of confidentiality.

“Though we’ve already reviewed this, I’d like that to be transparent and note again that If at any point during the study, information is disclosed which gives reason to believe that a child needs protection under section 13 of the Child, Family, and Community Service Act (CFCSA), then we, the researchers, must, by law, report this information to the appropriate authorities.

5. Start interview.

** This interview guide is adapted from Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio & Amundson (2009). Using the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique in Counseling Psychology Research. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*. 43 (4), 279-281

Version 2: Jan 22, 2019
(H18-03557)

Interview Script

1. Contextual Component

So we have up to 1.5 hours together, as a way of getting started, can you tell me a bit about yourself and a situation where you had to interact with police during an incident of domestic violence?

In what ways has domestic violence impacted your life?

2. Critical Incident Component

Thinking back to the incident you described,

- *What was helpful during your experience with police?*

<i>Helpful factor & what it means to the participant</i>	<i>Importance (how did it help? Tell me what it was about That you found helpful)</i>	<i>Example (what led up to it? Incident/ Outcome of incident)</i>

- *There may have been things that you felt that made the interaction with police more difficult. Can you please tell me what kind of things made it more difficult for you or which you found to be a hindrance to your reporting or interaction with police?*

<i>Hindering factor & what it means to participant (what do you mean by...)</i>	<i>Importance (How did it hinder? Tell me what it was about... that you found so unhelpful)</i>	<i>Example (What led up to it? Incident. Outcome of Incident)</i>

- *What would you wish for during interactions with police, in situations of domestic violence?*

<i>Wish List Item and what it means to participant (What do you mean by...?)</i>	<i>Importance (How would it help? Tell me about what it is about ... that you would find so helpful.)</i>	<i>Example (In which circumstances might this be helpful?)</i>

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Version 2: Jan 22, 2019
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Summarize discussion up to this point.

- ***We've discussed some things that have been helpful (name) and some things that you felt were a hindrance (name) to your interaction with police. Are there any other things that you would think would help in future similar interactions with police?***

Have you contacted the police in situations of domestic violence on other occasions?
What prompted you to contact police this time?

“Those are all the questions we have for you today, is there anything else you would like to share with me or any questions you have?”

Just as a reminder, I will contact you by phone within 10 days for a second interview, to confirm some of the themes gathered from this interview and to provide a chance for you to ask some questions that may come up for you. If you are agreeable please provide a phone number that would be appropriate for me to contact you at.

Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today.”

Interview end time: _____

Interviewer's name: _____

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