

They Did Not Listen to Our Whole Story

Women's Experiences in the Domestic Violence Courts of Nova Scotia



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Researchers: Dr. Nancy Ross, Leslie Bagg, MSW, and Cary Ryan, MSW

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About the Authors

Dr. Nancy Ross

Nancy Ross is an Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at Dalhousie University, which is located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. Nancy entered academia following twenty years of work as a Clinical Therapist and Women Services Coordinator for Addiction and Mental Health Services. These roles ignited a passion to work upstream and proactively to improve responses to all forms of interpersonal violence while working towards the prevention of violence. This has led to research that explores culturally responsive healthcare and social services, investigating trauma and violence-informed and family-centered responses to intimate partner violence, and better responding to and preventing childhood adversity and abuse.

Leslie Bagg (MSW) (she/her)

Leslie Bagg is a social worker, researcher, and educator based in Punamu'kwati'jk (Dartmouth), unceded Mi'kmaw territory. Leslie has a background as a community organizer working on housing and migrant justice issues. More recently, Leslie has been investigating trauma and violence-informed and family-centered responses to intimate partner violence. Leslie works as a counsellor at a non-profit agency that offers supportive, trauma-informed counselling to people who have used violence in their relationships.

Cary Ryan (MSW)

Cary Ryan is a Masters-level Social Worker currently working in direct service delivery with clients in Nova Scotia. She values the time spent working in collaboration with the Elizabeth Fry

Society for this research and has brought the skills and knowledge gained through this research into her front-line work. Cary hopes to return to the research field in the future.

Introduction

This report shares the findings of research that explored the experiences of women who participated in the Domestic Violence Court Program in Halifax and Sydney, Nova Scotia. This research, funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Partnership Engage Grant, reflects a community partnership between The Elizabeth Fry Society and researchers at Dalhousie University.

The impetus for this community research partnership came from Darlene MacEachern, the Executive Director of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. As they support women, girls, non-binary, and gender diverse individuals involved in the Criminal Justice System, Ms. MacEachern and colleagues at Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia were curious about the experiences of their clients when they were charged with domestic violence-related offences. Both chapters of the Elizabeth Fry Society are partner organizations with the Domestic Violence Court Program. This specialized program was created as a pilot in Sydney in 2012 and expanded to Halifax in 2018. The aim of the program is to "...[take] a trauma-informed, collaborative approach that supports healthier relationships and will help protect survivors and their families from future abuse" (The Courts of Nova Scotia, n.d).

The Elizabeth Fry Society staff had concerns that women were being "hyper-responsibilized" in the Domestic Violence Court Program by accepting more than their share of responsibility for actions in order to smooth over legal problems for their families. They also heard from clients that their experience in the Criminal Justice System, even when diverted

through the specialized court, had negative impacts on clients' employment, housing, immigration status, and ability to maintain custody of their children.

Researchers at Dalhousie's School of Social Work joined with the two organizations to investigate the experiences of women charged with domestic violence-related offences in Sydney and Halifax. As researchers and community partners, we were interested in learning about each aspect of the women's journeys through the Criminal Justice System, including the moment of their arrest, their appearances in the specialized court, the supportive programming they received, and sentencing.

Literature Review

In the 1980's and 1990's pro-arrest, pro-charge, and pro-prosecution policies were implemented in jurisdictions across Canada with the intention of improving the Criminal Justice System's response to domestic violence (Ryan et al., 2022). In the province of Nova Scotia, these policies were implemented in 1996, largely as a response to feminists who argued a carceral response would signal societal intolerance and a shift in legal requirements for the arrest and prosecution of domestic violence (Russell & Ginn, 2001). In contrast to police and prosecutions practices of the past that relied on the willingness and capacity of survivors to pursue charges, these policies were implemented in an effort to remove these responsibilities from survivors, and to allow for criminal action against the perpetrator without the need for survivor influence over the charging decision (Ryan et al, 2022). From the beginning, reactions to the pro-arrest, pro-charge, and pro-charge policies as a response to domestic violence have been mixed and nuanced. Initially, many feminists and survivor advocates welcomed the change, as it indicated the state was taking domestic violence seriously and removing it from the private realm (Chesney-Lind, 2002). However, there were also concerns that a one-size-fits-all approach

prevented the Criminal Justice System, including police and the Crown, from meeting the complex needs of survivors of domestic violence (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1990; Heidensohn, 1992; Martin, 1980). Since the implementation of these policies, research has revealed a number of unintended consequences, such as dual arrests (Atrooshi, 2010; Barata & Senn, 2003; Chewter, 2003; Comack & Balfour, 2004; Dutton, 2010; Koshan & Wieggers, 2007; Light, 2009; Poon et al., 2014) and the criminalization of women survivors (Comack et al., 2000; DeLeon-Granados et al., 2006; Girard-Brown, 2012; Hirschel & Buzawa, 2002; Martin, 1997; Poon et al., 2014; Ursel, 2000; Ursel and Hagyard, 2008). Dual arrest, also known as dual charging or cross-charging, occurs when survivors of domestic violence are arrested and prosecuted alongside their partners, often for acts of self-defence and resistance to the violence they have experienced (Chewter, 2003; Snider 1994). Girard-Brown (2012) and Ryan et. al., (2019) note that survivors who are criminalized under these mandatory arrest policies are more likely to be socially, racially, and economically marginalized.

It is also important to acknowledge that both perpetrators and survivors of domestic violence are frequently survivors of prior experiences of childhood adversity and trauma including exposure to domestic violence in childhood (Cotter, 2018). Hughes et. al. (2017) conducted a global systemic review of the effects of early trauma and multiple adverse childhood experiences and found that individuals who had experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences were about eight times more likely to be a victim and/or perpetrator of intimate partner violence in adulthood. The growth in research that recognizes these impacts of early exposure to childhood adversity and trauma supports the need for Domestic Violence Court Programs to implement trauma and violence-informed principles. These principles usually include safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality;

empowerment, voice and choice; and acknowledgment of cultural, historical, and gender issues (SAMHSA, 2014). Levenson (2017) points out that trauma-informed care includes an understanding that the frequency and effects of early adversity have an impact across the lifespan and can influence the psychosocial functioning of adults. She explains that the incorporation of a trauma-informed approach implies understanding current presenting challenges as maladaptive coping and the recognition that trauma is not experienced as a distinct event but as a framework that can define and deeply affect the core of a person's identity (Levenson, 2017). This approach incorporates a cultural and gendered lens and seeks to understand and respond to the intersectional influences of gender, relationships, environment, access and quality of services, socioeconomic status, and community on how trauma is manifested and experienced (McKenna & Holtfreter, 2021). As Clark (2016) points out, choosing to use the term trauma and violence-informed care locates the source of distress within structural, cultural, and systemic inequity, including experiences of racism and colonization. As specialized courts attempt the implementation of trauma and violence-informed principles they must include an intersectional lens that can help acknowledge histories of colonization, racism, poverty, and sexism.

When survivors in violent relationships are criminalized, they are less likely to seek help from police when subject to future violence from their partners (Pollack et al. 2005). Criminalization often affects women differently than men. Pleading guilty or being found guilty of a domestic violence-related charge can have a ripple effect on a woman's life, affecting custody of her children, immigration status, housing, and employment (Cross 2012; Pollack et al. 2005; Poon et al. 2014). McMahon and Pence (2003) indicate that looking at domestic violence through a gender-blind lens makes it hard to understand women's use of violence in abusive relationships. In many cases, women charged with domestic violence-related offences had used

violence against their partners in self-defence (Chewter, 2003; Sisic, 2012) or to protect their children (Community Coordination for Women's Safety, 2007). Fraehlich and Ursel (2014) point out that women's motivations for using violence are complex, and can include expressing frustration, achieving power and control, and demonstrating seriousness. The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) and Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) (2008) define hyper-responsibility as the Criminal Justice System expecting some people to take more responsibility for their actions than others. Women who are racialized, poor, have a disability or mental illness, or who are part of the LGBTQ community are most affected by this expectation. Riggs (2011) notes that women may be motivated to rush to take responsibility for offences by pleading guilty in order to return to their children or avoid the scrutiny of child protection authorities.

Methodology

In collaboration with our community partners, we developed the following research questions:

1. Has the number of women participating in the Domestic Violence Court Programs increased over the life of the court?
2. Have research participants had prior exposure to adverse childhood experiences?
3. How do women make sense of their use of violence?
4. Does the Domestic Violence Court Program incorporate trauma and violence-informed principles?
5. What is the impact of participation in domestic violence courts on women and their families?

To answer these questions, this study included four main methods of data collection: interpreting quantitative data collected by the Nova Scotia Department of Justice, qualitative semi-structured group interviews with 14 women who had participated in the Domestic Violence Court Program as offenders, an anonymous online survey administered to those same participants, and analysis of the participants' court transcripts. As this was a community partnership, representatives of our partner organizations, the Elizabeth Fry Societies of Mainland Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, were involved in every stage of the project, from formulation of research questions to research design, conducting the group interviews, and data analysis. This project was approved by the Dalhousie Research Ethics Board File #: 2020-5080.

NS DOJ statistics

The research team submitted a request for data from the Nova Scotia Department of Justice. We submitted our research questions to a senior policy analyst with the department who worked with a project research assistant to provide relevant, deidentified data. This process took several months.

Semi-structured group interviews

Recruitment

Participant recruitment was initiated by our community research partners, the Elizabeth Fry Societies of Mainland Nova Scotia and Cape Breton. The Domestic Violence Court provided support at each site to reach out to past and current participants of their programming who they thought might be interested in sharing their experiences in the context of this research project. After initial contact with the worker, interested potential participants were asked to reach out to a research assistant to learn more about the project and sign up if desired. Care was taken at every stage of the recruitment process to assure potential participants that their decision about

participation would have no influence on their relationship with the Elizabeth Fry Societies or any services current or future services they might receive there.

Interviews

The purpose of the interviews was to learn about how the participants had experienced their involvement in the Criminal Justice System. We were interested in their entire journey, from the moment of their arrest, their decision to plead guilty and enter the Domestic Violence Court Program, their court appearances, and the programming they were required to complete by the court.

The COVID-19 pandemic required a shift from in-person group interviews to online. Three virtual group interviews were held using the Collaborate platform (REF). Two included participants of the Sydney court (n=3 and n=5), and one included participants of the Halifax court (n=6). An Elizabeth Fry Society Domestic Violence Court support worker was present for each group interview. Prior to the group interview participants were provided with informed consent information. They were also sent packages in the mail containing headphones and art supplies. The headphones were provided to help ensure confidentiality as participants joined the online call from their homes. The art supplies were used in an art-based reflection exercise that was a key element of the interview. The three interviews followed the same format: introduction to the study, verifying informed consent, and an art-based reflection exercise followed by a group discussion. We used a reflexive thematic qualitative analysis to identify themes in the interviews.

Please see Appendix A for the semi-structured interview guide used to structure the interviews.

Adverse Childhood Experiences Survey

All research participants were invited to complete an anonymous online survey regarding prior experiences of childhood adversity up to the age of 18 before participation in the group interview. Nine of the 14 participants chose to complete the survey. The survey questions can be found in Appendix B.

Court Transcript Analysis

We obtained audio recordings of all court appearances of the research participants (with their permission). We then had these recordings transcribed. We used a reflexive thematic qualitative analysis to identify themes in the transcripts.

Results

Nova Scotia Department of Justice Statistics

The Nova Scotia Department of Justice shared data they had collected on the Domestic Violence Court Programs in Sydney and Halifax. Data provided for the Sydney court reflects the period from 2012 to 2020. Halifax court data was collected between 2018 and 2020. The following are some highlights from the data provided that relate to our research questions.

Women in the Domestic Violence Courts

Three hundred and eight-two women were referred to the Sydney Domestic Violence Court Program over a period of eight years (2012-2020). During the same time, 1335 men were referred to the court. For the Halifax court, the number of participants over the two years (2018-2020) was 84 women and 300 men. The data revealed that the number of women participating in Domestic Violence Court Programs in Nova Scotia has remained consistent over time.

Type of Offense by Gender

In Sydney, the cases referred to the Domestic Violence Court Program where the accused was a man included 26 offence types, but cases referred to the Domestic Violence Court Program where the accused was a woman included 18 of these 26 offence types. This means there were eight offence types that men were referred to Domestic Violence Court Program for that women were not (robbery, other crimes against the person, sexual assault, fraud, other property crimes, possession of stolen property, and impaired driving). The Domestic Violence Court Program typically does not accept these charges into the program; however, some clients may address their DV-related charges in Domestic Violence Court Program while their other charges continue through the 'regular' court process. Generally, the Domestic Violence Court Program will only address assaults, mischief, and criminal harassment charges. Women were more frequently referred to the Domestic Violence Court Program than men for offences of major assault (8.3% vs 4.2%), common assault (37.6% vs 20.5%), mischief (12.4% vs 9.7%), and failure to comply with order (18.5% vs. 13.4%). Men were more frequently referred to the Domestic Violence Court Program than women for offences of robbery (some vs. none), other crimes against the person (some vs. none), sexual assault (some vs. none), fraud (some vs. none), other property crimes (some vs. none), possession of stolen property (some vs. none), CC impaired driving (some vs. none), and uttering threats (15.0% vs 11.9%).

For the Halifax court, from 2018-2020, men had cases referred to the Domestic Violence Court Program with 21 offence types, but women had cases referred to the Domestic Violence Court Program with only 15 of these 21 offence types. This means there were seven offence types that resulted in men's referral to the Domestic Violence Court Program that women were not referred for (sexual assault, theft, other property crime, drug possession, and provincial

statute offence). Women were referred to the Halifax Domestic Violence Court Program more frequently than men with common assault (36.8% vs 29.8%) and failure to comply with orders (24.1% vs. 19.9%). Men were referred to the Halifax Domestic Violence Court Program more frequently than women with sexual assault (some vs. none), theft (some vs. none), other property crime (some vs. none), residual CC (some vs. none), drug possession (some vs. none), provincial statute offence (some vs. none), other crimes against the person (6.4% vs. 0.75%), uttering threats (11.3% vs. 8.3%), and breach of probation (5.8% vs. 3.0%).

Limitations

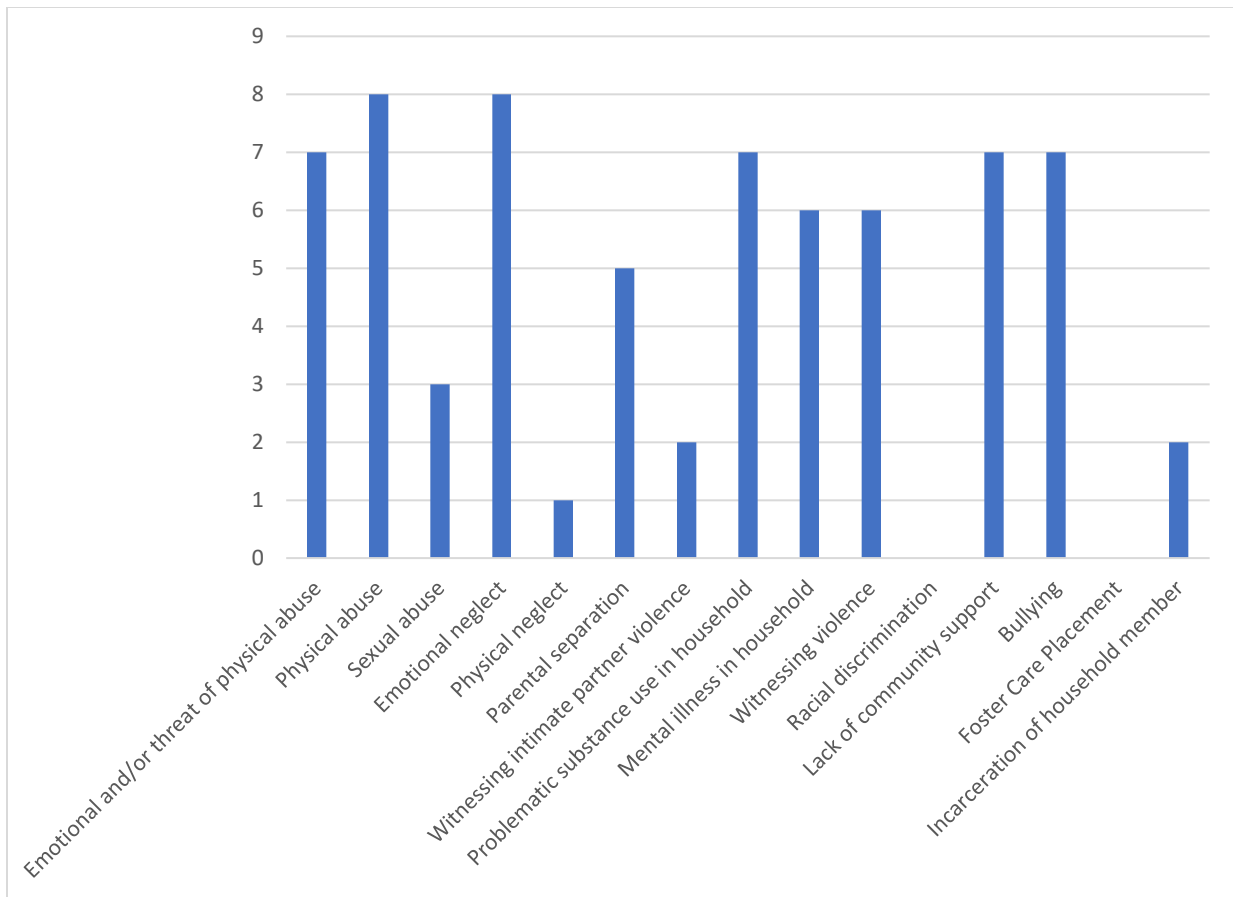
The Department of Justice records the gender of Domestic Violence Court Program participants based on the gender indicated on their government-issued identification, not based on self-identification. As of July 2019, Nova Scotians have had the option to choose “X” as an option for gender identity or have no gender displayed on birth certificates, driver’s licenses, and photo ID cards but this option was not available for the entire data collection time period. Trans and non-binary individuals may not have identification that accurately reflects their gender identity for various reasons, including cost (Hébert et al., 2022).

Adverse Childhood Experiences Survey Results

The 9 study participants who chose to complete the survey reported a range of childhood adverse experiences (see Figure 1.).

Figure 1.

Childhood Adverse Experiences Reported



Among the nine participants who completed the survey, experiences of childhood adversity were extensive. Notably, experiences of physical abuse and emotional neglect were the most commonly experienced followed by emotional abuse, problematic substance use in the household, lack of community support, and experiences of bullying.

Court Proceedings

The most striking finding to come from the analysis of the transcriptions of court proceedings was that participants barely spoke during their hearings. On average, the participants spoke 4.13% of the words in the transcripts, with the rest of the words being spoken by judges, crown prosecutors, and defence attorneys. Personal details relating to six of the participants' mental health, including addictions, were discussed openly in court. The reviewers also noted

instances of judges and prosecutors using a patronizing and, in some cases, infantilizing tone. Examples include a prosecutor referring to a participant as a “young lady” and a judge telling a participant she was “lucky” to be in court so she could receive services. In one instance a judge summoned a participant as one might a child saying “O.k. Ms. [last name] come forward, come up to that blue chair please ma’am. Don’t be scared. Don’t be scared”.

There are many factors which may limit the voice of participants in the court proceedings that include a recognition that what they say will be open to the public and included in the court record. For that reason, participants are connected with a service provider who can share updates and insight into the participants’ wellness and progress throughout the program. If a participant wishes to address the court, it is allowed and emphasized at sentencing. However, many of our participants did not feel this was a viable option.

Interview Themes

Five themes emerged from our reflexive qualitative thematic analysis of workshop transcripts and court transcripts: *silencing women’s voices*, *taking responsibility*, *negative impacts on women’s lives*, *court as system-centred*, and *punishment versus support*. We have used pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants.

Silencing Women’s Voices

Participants reported that they were not able to tell the full story of the circumstances leading up to their arrests, except in the programming outside of court. Briana told us:

I tried to explain to my lawyer even what had happened, you know, like nobody had asked what happened. Nobody asked my side of the story. So, I tried to tell it. And then I almost lost my chance to go through DV court. Which I didn’t wanna do.

Thirteen of the 14 participants shared that although they had been violent towards their partner they had also been subjected to violence in the same relationship. Several participants voiced frustration at being labelled as solely an offender in the eyes of the Criminal Justice System, including the Domestic Violence Court Program. This points to a need to strengthen a gender-based analysis that is trauma and violence informed. It also indicated a need to revisit the pro-arrest, pro-charge and pro-prosecution policies and their impact on women, particularly in these circumstances. In one extreme case, Isabelle recounted the severe prior physical sexual and psychological abuse she had suffered at the hands of her partner:

For two years, he would beat me. He actually chained to a bed [*sic*]. He wouldn't let me leave the house. He wouldn't let me talk to people. Sexually assaulted me. I had to go to the hospital for damage. If sometimes he would joke and like, well you're not pregnant are you? Just gonna make sure you've got me. Punch me in the gut. He just took all of his anger... He was an absolute psychopath. He would choke me out and make me pass out just to show me that if I wanted to say anything I couldn't. There would be trouble.

Isabelle found it especially painful to be forced to refer to her abuser as the “victim” during court proceedings.

Taking Responsibility

Reviewers found many examples of women taking responsibility for their violent actions in both interview and court transcripts. Participants also explained their rationale for choosing to plead guilty and go through the Domestic Violence Court Program rather than the regular court system. Reasons cited included the desire to receive services that would be otherwise unavailable and avoiding the trauma and uncertain outcomes of the regular system. This is unfortunate

because the Domestic Violence Court Program should not be the only option for people to access services. Cynthia explained:

I pled guilty so that I could have access to services because I was presented the options of...you can go to court with him and we, we can't predict how he'll want things to go. He actually wanted to drop the charges, but they wouldn't allow him to. Because that is the way the law works in Nova Scotia. And my lawyer really recommended you should do the DV court programme. And she said, you know you'll get to a counselling programme. And I was like, a counselling programme? I need therapy. Awesome! I can't afford therapy. This is the only option for me so I will plead guilty so that I have access to services.

Sophia told us:

So when the time came, you know it's go to court with your partner or ex-partner and this police officer who obviously is the one they're going to listen to. And you know that's traumatic. That's not something that I was equipped to do at that point. I was alone. I didn't have anybody to go with me. So I plead guilty. And it felt so wrong because I wasn't guilty.

Participants were keenly aware of the negative impacts that a criminal record would have on their lives and employment prospects. They saw the Domestic Violence Court Program option as presenting a lesser risk of emerging with a criminal record.

Negative Impacts on Women's Lives

Participants told us that their experience of being charged and tried for domestic violence-related offences had negative impacts that rippled through their lives in the areas of family relationships, employment, finances, housing, and mental health. These negative impacts

were felt most keenly during interactions with police and the child welfare system. Some participants felt that the police response was disproportionate to the situation. For example, Mackenzie described four police cars and six officers converging on her home and arresting and handcuffing her in front of her children.

Nova Scotia's Children and Family Services Act requires Child Protection Services be notified when police or other professionals become aware that a child has witnessed or is aware of intimate partner violence. Participants with children spoke of the intense fear they had that their children would be removed from their care. Isabelle shared:

They come, it's your kids right? There's nothing more triggering than the fear that you're not gonna have your kids. Like as a parent you're one number one instinct is to protect, have your kids near you. And not only do you have trauma from this other ... instance but you also have people randomly showing up on your back. Like I'm also gonna take away the one thing that gives you purpose, the one thing that makes you happy, we're gonna take that away from you if you don't process things or [be] the way we expect you to.

Court as 'System-Centered'

Participants remarked on their experience with the Criminal Justice System as being system-centered rather than human-centered. Lindsay told us: "It felt very much still like I was a number. Like I was just being processed like it was a formality. Like they didn't care about my personal experiences or story." Participants also expressed frustration that different parts of the system had different and sometimes conflicting expectations for them to live up to. For example, a woman might have an order from Domestic Violence Court that they stay away from their partner or ex-partner at the same time that a family court judge or child protection authority expected her to facilitate that person's access to their shared children. This difficulty needs to be

addressed by ensuring orders coming from the Domestic Violence Court are not in conflict with family or other orders.

Importantly, some participants noted that their partners were able to use Criminal Justice and Child Protection Systems to continue their patterns of abuse. For example, Alison told us that her partner admitted to calling the police as a form of revenge, not due to concern for his safety. In some cases, abusive partners exploited the contradictory demands of the systems noted above to continue their abuse. For example, Mackenzie told us that she believed her partner and co-parent had been trying to get her to break conditions imposed by the court so that she would be re-arrested.

Support Versus Punishment

The bright side of the experiences, as they were related to us by participants, was their experience of the supportive services they were able to receive due to their involvement in the Domestic Violence Court Program. For many of the participants, this took the form of group-based healthy relationship programming provided by the Elizabeth Fry Societies of Mainland NS and Cape Breton. For example, Cynthia told us:

I was taught so much about myself. It made me a stronger person and a better person. I didn't change who I was. I just changed how I thought and how I was gonna allow people to treat me. And I put my foot down. I have boundaries now.

Melissa specified that she appreciated the flexible, trauma-informed orientation of this programming. When she was feeling unable to participate in group sessions due to her diagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder, she was offered the option of individual treatment.

Discussion

Our research findings affirm the value of providing therapeutic and supportive services to women charged with domestic violence while also providing a critique of their experience within the Criminal Justice System. Figure 1 points to the need for further research that explores the prevalence of prior experiences of adversity in childhood. This knowledge can play an important role in informing the content of therapeutic and supportive services that aim to assist people in healing from past adversity and trauma. The attempt to provide trauma and violence-informed approaches within the Domestic Violence Court Program is laudable. However, the implementation of the pro-arrest, pro-charge, and pro-prosecution policies that inform this program limits more nuanced and flexible responses. These policies inform system delivery but cannot be human-centered in their current one-size fits all approach. Therefore, attempts at providing more space and opportunity for women to use their 'voice' to tell their story and have more choice in court proceedings. The court process is not trauma and violence-informed without providing a sense of choice, personal agency, and opportunities to share their history.

The statistics provided by the Department of Justice add to the literature that describes differences in men and women's use of violence in intimate partnerships. This points to a need for systems responses, such as the Domestic Violence Court Program, to adopt a gendered lens. As the Domestic Violence Court Program continues and is expanded in Nova Scotia, further analysis of this data would be crucial in understanding how men and women's experiences may differ in terms of what brings them to the Criminal Justice System and the impact that it has on their lives. An important area for future research would be to compare the experiences of women who participate in the Domestic Violence Court Program with those who go through the regular provincial court process.

Our thematic analysis revealed that the participants of our research found the experience of involvement in the Criminal Justice System added further harm to their life and that of their families. Working within the constraints of the pro-arrest policies, the question arises as to what extent can Domestic Violence Courts implement trauma and violence-informed principles. As indicated by our brief discussion of trauma and violence-informed principles in our literature review, an intersectional lens is required in their implementation.

The finding that the research participants appreciated the supportive programming that they accessed through the Domestic Violence Court Program deserves attention. Participants reported implementing skills they learned through this programming in their current relationships. This lends credence to calls by advocates for increased investment in community-based supportive and preventative services as a response to intimate partner violence.

Conclusion

Pro-arrest, pro-charge, and pro-prosecution policies limit the ability of the Criminal Justice System, including Domestic Violence Court Programs, to implement trauma and violence-informed principles. To better understand and respond to women's use of violence, an intersectional lens is required that accounts for cultural and gendered factors that influence their lives and experiences of trauma. Systemic change to permit more flexibility in responding to domestic violence and substantial education and training for those who work in these programs are both necessary to implement more just and trauma and violence-informed approaches. As it may be difficult or impossible to achieve a truly trauma and violence-informed approach within the constraints of the current Criminal Justice System, community-based and restorative responses to the prevention and treatment of intimate partner violence should be explored and supported.

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Appendix A

Semi-structured Interview Guide

We will use the artwork as a jumping off point for participants to discuss their experiences with the domestic violence court program. Participants can share their artwork if they wish and talk about what they were thinking about when they made it and what it means to them. They may choose to read any text they have written. We will then have a large group discussion using the following questions as prompts:

- What has happened in your life as a result of participating in the domestic violence court program?
- Could you describe the impact this has had on you? Your family?
- Could/can you describe anything that happened to you in the CJS that wasn't fair? If you feel that this unfairness may have been linked to any aspect of your identity (such as sexuality, gender, race) could you please share that part of your identity with us? For example, if it would be helpful for us to know that you are an Indigenous person to understand your experience, we would appreciate it if you would share that with us.
- Did you feel you got to tell your side of the story in DV court? If not, what would you want people to know about what led up to the incident where you were charged?
- You might remember the survey we asked you to fill out online about your childhood experiences (including adverse childhood experiences) and sources of support, now, as an adult (i.e. resilience). Sometimes filling out that survey helps people make connections between childhood trauma and their current challenges. Do you have any ideas about that that you would like to share? The domestic violence court program describes itself as

“trauma-informed”. Thinking about what you may have learned about yourself from filling out the survey, would you say that was the case for you? Why or why not? Do you have recommendations that would help the domestic violence court become more trauma-informed?

Optional additional questions

- Tell us about any parts of your experience that may be worth retaining.
- What role if any do you think substance use played in the events leading up to your participation in DV court?
- What made you interested in participating in this research?
- Could/can you describe the impact this has had on you? Your family?
- Could/can you describe anything that happened to you in the CJS that you didn't understand?
- Could/can you describe anything that happened to you in the CJS that harmed you? Or your family? Can you talk about the harm that was caused?
- Were there certain aspects that were more harmful than others?
- What should the priorities of the CJS be?
- Could/can you describe any positive experiences you had?
- What advice would you give to those working in the criminal justice system?
- What advice would you give to policy-makers?
- If you could go back 6 months/1 year/2 years/5 years/10 years, what advice would you give yourself?
- What advice would you give another woman in a situation similar to yours?

- We are interested in people's experiences with Child Protection in relation to DV court, is there anything about that you would like to share?
- End with: If you woke up tomorrow and there was a perfect response to intimate partner violence in the criminal justice system, what would it be?

Appendix B

Life Experiences and Resilience Survey

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS:

1. What is your present employment status? Are you...

- a) Employed full-time (30 or more hours/week)
- b) Employed part-time (less than 30 hours/week)
- c) Unemployed, LOOKING for work
- d) Not in labour force, NOT looking for work
- e) Student employed part-time or full-time
- f) Student not employed
- g) Retired
- h) Homemaker
- i) Maternity leave
- j) On disability
- k) Other (please specify) _____

2. Including yourself, how many ADULTS live in your household (related to you or a. not)? # Adults (18+)

b) How many CHILDREN under the age of 18 (live in your household)?

Children (Under 18)

c) That is a total of people in the household?

Enter the total number of people: _____

3. What is your age: _____

4. What is your CURRENT marital status?

- a) Never Married (Single)
- b) Married
- c) Common-Law Relationship/Live-In Partner
- d) Divorced
- e) Separated
- f) Widowed

5. What is your highest level of education?

NO SCHOOLING

ELEMENTARY

JUNIOR HIGH

HIGH SCHOOL

COLLEGE/TECHNICAL INSTITUTE (non-University)

UNIVERSITY

Professional Degree

Master's Degree

Doctorate

6. What is your religion?

- a) No Religion (Including agnostic and atheist)
- b) Anglican
- c) Baptist

- d) Lutheran
- e) Catholic
- f) United Church
- g) Protestant (not on list,
- h) Islam (including Sunni Islam, Shia Islam)
- i) Other (specify)

7. Were you born in Canada?

- 1 Yes (GO TO question 7b)
- 2 No (GO TO question 8)

8b. Were you born in Nova Scotia?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

9. People living in Canada come from many different backgrounds. Are you ...?

White (Caucasian)

Aboriginal (e.g., First Nations, Inuit or Métis)

South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)

Arab

Other (please specify)

The following questions are asked to help us understand the relationship between life experiences and health. Your answers are confidential. When survey results are

published, only grouped information will be provided and no individuals will be identified. When answering the following questions we would like you to reflect upon and then tell us about the experiences you had before your 18th birthday.

While you were growing up, before your 18th birthday ...

10. Did a parent or other adult in the household often ...

Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you?

or

Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?

Yes No If yes enter 1 _____

11. Did a parent or other adult in the household often ...

Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you?

or

Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?

Yes No If yes enter 1 _____

12. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever...

Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way?

or

Try to or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal sex with you?

Yes No If yes enter 1 _____

13. Did you often feel that ...

No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special?

or

Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?

Yes No If yes enter 1 _____

14. Did you often feel that ...

You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you?

or

Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?

Yes No If yes enter 1 _____

15. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?

Yes No If yes enter 1 _____

16. Was your mother or stepmother:

Often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her?

or

Sometimes or often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard?

or

Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?

Yes No If yes enter 1 _____

17. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?

Yes No If yes enter 1 _____

18. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill or did a household member attempt suicide?

Yes No If yes enter 1 _____

19. Did a household member go to prison?

Yes No If yes enter 1 _____

Now add up your “Yes” answers: _____ This is your ACE Score

Adult Resilience Measure-Revised (ARM-R)

ARM-R						
To what extent do the following statements apply to you? There are no right or wrong answers.						
		Not at all [1]	A little [2]	Somewhat [3]	Quite a bit [4]	A lot [5]
1	I cooperate with people around me	1	2	3	4	5
2	Getting and improving qualifications or skills is important to me	1	2	3	4	5
3	I know how to behave in different social situations	1	2	3	4	5
4	My family have usually supported me through life	1	2	3	4	5
5	My family knows a lot about me	1	2	3	4	5
6	If I am hungry, I can get food to eat	1	2	3	4	5
7	People like to spend time with me	1	2	3	4	5
8	I talk to my family/partner about how I feel	1	2	3	4	5
9	I feel supported by my friends	1	2	3	4	5
10	I feel that I belong in my community	1	2	3	4	5
11	My family/partner stands by me during difficult times	1	2	3	4	5
12	My friends stand by me during difficult times	1	2	3	4	5
13	I am treated fairly in my community	1	2	3	4	5
14	I have opportunities to show others that I can act responsibly	1	2	3	4	5
15	I feel secure when I am with my family/partner	1	2	3	4	5
16	I have opportunities to apply my abilities in life (like skills, a job, caring for others)	1	2	3	4	5
17	I enjoy my family's/partner's cultural and family traditions	1	2	3	4	5

For administration instructions and scoring, please refer to the accompanying manual.

When using the measure, please cite the following:

Resilience Research Centre. (2018). CYRM and ARM user manual. Halifax, NS: Resilience Research Centre, Dalhousie University. Retrieved from <http://www.resilienceresearch.org/>

Jefferies, P., McGavigle, L., & Ungar, M. (2018). The CYRM-R: a Rasch-validated revision of the Child and Youth Resilience Measure. *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work*, 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761407.2018.1548403>

