
Reporting bad results: The ethical responsibility of presenting abused women's parenting practices in a negative light

Eli Buchbinder* and Zvi Eisikovits†

*Lecturer and †Professor of Social Work, School of Social Work and Minerva Center for Youth Studies, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel

Correspondence:

Eli Buchbinder,
School of Social Work and Minerva
Center for Youth Studies,
University of Haifa,
Mount Carmel,
Haifa 31905,
Israel
E-mail: ebuchbin@research.haifa.ac.il

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present and analyse the ethical dilemmas involved in presenting research findings that describe abused women's parenting practices in a negative light. The study was based on data collected by in-depth interviews for the purpose of examining the turning point among 20 Israeli abused women who refused to live with violence and took active steps to stop it while staying with the perpetrator. Overall the analysis indicated successful survival stories but the women's parenting practices became questionable. This raised dilemmas as to how to present such findings and what are the ethical implications related to interventions with abused women.

INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to identify and illustrate some of the clinical, social and ethical issues related to researching abused women's parental functioning as mothers in the context of their decision to change their attitude towards violence. More specifically we are interested in two interrelated questions: How can we preserve the complexity inherent in presenting women's discourse about mothering; and what are the ethical dilemmas arising from results that call into question their functioning as mothers? The rest of the paper addresses some of the complexities inherent in these two questions.

TWO CONTRASTING VIEWS ON ABUSED WOMEN'S MOTHERING

The victim status of abused women complicates the moral and legal debate surrounding the socio-legal expectations from this population as parents and what should be the appropriate societal reaction when these expectations are not met (Beeman & Edleson 2000; Jones *et al.* 2002). A recent approach presents abused women as 'choosers' rather than just 'reactors' to men's abusive behaviour (Peled *et al.* 2000). However,

such changes in perspective are necessarily associated with increased expectations concerning responsibility in general and childrearing responsibilities in particular. Critical questions and ethical dilemmas include the legal and social consequences of women's decisions to stay with or leave the violence, as well as the liability of a battered woman who herself becomes a violent mother (Peled 1993; Featherstone 1996; Berliner 1998; Wilson 1998; Humphreys 1999; Radford & Hester 2001). In the final analysis, the key dilemma posited by social institutions intervening and influencing women's lives is whose best interests should be given priority: the woman's or the child's? That is, who is the client? Research on abused women's motherhood inevitably raises such questions on competing values and loyalties.

The discourse around this dilemma has created two opposite camps with contrasting intervention philosophies, goals and target clients (Beeman *et al.* 1999; Jones *et al.* 2002). Abused women's advocates maintain that understanding women's attitudes and actions towards their children cannot be separated from the socio-psychological context in which abused women are entrapped and struggle to survive the violence (Peled 1997; Holt 2003). Among the many obstacles encountered in this context are lack of financial

support, fear of the abuser, failure of the legal system to provide sufficient protection, and failure of the helping system to give assistance in sorting out children's needs and loyalties towards their father (McKay 1994). In the light of such limitations, we need to reframe the classical question of self-victimization from 'why does she stay?' to 'why can't she leave?' Ignorance of the context enables social systems to accuse battered women of failure to protect their children who are exposed to violence (Magen 1999). Labelled as poor, disturbed and deviant, women often find themselves being either blamed or victimized (Radford & Hester 2001).

Abused women's advocates also criticize the prevalent failure of the public welfare system to integrate child welfare and abused women's services rather than presenting them as dichotomous entities (McKay 1994; Pearce 1999). Such failure leads to a notorious distrust among women's advocacy groups and child welfare workers, who are often accused of lacking a basic understanding or sensitivity to the plight of abused women and therefore confusing the effects of violence (e.g. depression) with pre-violence personality traits. In her interviews with abused women, McGee (2000) found that the mere knowledge of the occurrence of violence stigmatized abused women as mothers: 'Over and over again women referred to how they had been frightened that if social services came to know about domestic violence, they would remove the children' (p. 115). Mullender (1996) also describes social workers as part of the problem rather than the solution in that they ignore abused women as people in their own right and tend to focus on the children's welfare rather than on the women's needs.

The opposite camp, usually headed by the institutionalized welfare system, especially child protection services, is child-focused and perceives the child as the primary victim. Therefore, the focus is turned away from male violence to concentrate on holding abused women responsible for their children's situation. This camp points to research showing that abused women tend to deny the effects of witnessing violence on their children, which in turn hinders their ability to see the children's needs for protection. Child advocacy groups also claim that abused women may perceive the children as victimizers and as similar to batterers through the projection of their motives (Pearce 1999; Stephens 1999).

These groups often accuse abused women's advocates of blocking investigations concerning children who witness violence, based on the belief that given the situation of abused women, they are 'at their best'

even when they act out (Peled 1997). This line of thought is part of the socially accepted formula whereby women are the sole victims and men are the sole abusers. From this perspective, almost any behaviour of abused women towards their children may be understandable and forgivable or at least explainable. As such, abused women's motherhood is glorified and their wrongdoing as mothers is excluded from the public consciousness (McKay 1994).

In fact, as child advocates argue, there is significant research evidence showing that mothers who are battered are inconsistent in their parenting and that they use extensive physical punishment as an 'educational' tool (Holden & Ritchie 1991; Holden *et al.* 1998; Jones *et al.* 2002). Therefore, the position of child advocacy groups is that children's welfare needs must be examined outside of the preconceived notion that portrays abused women as well-functioning mothers just because they are victims (Kerig & Fedorowicz 1999).

THE CONTEXT OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The literature describing abused women's attempts to fight violence from within while remaining in the intimate relationship is relatively sparse. Staying is typically described as entrapment and leaving as a sign of empowerment. Only recently has this trend been questioned conceptually (Peled *et al.* 2000) and staying redefined as a choice and a sign of strength. There has been little, if any, research conducted on the experiences that lead those women who remain in violent relationships to the 'turning point'. This term describes (i) the inner process by which abused women totally reject violence and are no longer willing to continue living with it, (ii) public acknowledgement of the violence and willingness to seek help in curbing it, and (iii) open confrontation of the partner concerning the woman's unwillingness to tolerate the violence and her initiation of involvement with formal organizations specializing in curbing domestic abuse. All of these aspects are undertaken without leaving the abusive partner (Eisikovits *et al.* 1998).

The population of the present study consisted of a purposive sample (Patton 2002) of 20 women who sought help from the Emergency Hotline for Survivors of Violence or the Domestic Abuse Intervention and Research Unit, which are the only agencies working in the field of domestic violence in a large municipal area in northern Israel. Participants were selected based on whether they were living with their partners on a continuous basis and whether they were taking

active steps in order to reiterate their demands to stop the violence. All of the women in the sample had been married for periods of time ranging from 6 to 25 years. They ranged in age from 25 to 45 years old. They were Jewish and had from one to four children. The respondents had at least a high-school education, and 50% had jobs outside the home.

Data were collected through semistructured interviews. The interview guide covered five topical areas: (i) understanding the turning point and its causes as viewed by the women; (ii) changes in the women's situation before and after the turning point; (iii) behavioural and emotional reactions of the partners to the turning point; (iv) impact on the children; and (v) relationships with formal and informal support systems.

Content analysis of both the surface (i.e. the text) and the deep structure (i.e. the subtext) of the interviews (Bandler & Grinder 1975) was performed. Surface structure refers to the descriptions of the sum of words as they were spoken, whereas deep structure refers to the interpretive constructs, meanings, and emotional and attitudinal implications of what has been explicitly stated but not written in the text. In the analysis, we used what Gilligan *et al.* (1990) termed as the need to identify the different voices in the text and attempt to combine them. That is, we analysed both the loud and explicit as well as the underlying and unstated voices in the surface and deep structure of the text.

THE RESULTS LEADING TO THE ETHICAL DILEMMA

Our analysis revealed that women who reach a turning point need to generate a total break in their personal meaning system in order to solidify the conclusion that change is inevitable. This arises from a long period of suffering from and coping with violence without attempting to change the basic structures in which they live or the conception of the overall relationship with their partners. The process of change is a narrative of survival, empowerment, and victory against all odds. It was our expectation that these images would be preserved throughout the various existential spheres in which battered women moved, including childrearing. While most of our findings pointed in this same direction (e.g. a coherent survival story of abused women), the way in which these women functioned as mothers seemed somewhat more complex and inconsistent with the success narrative described above. Upon further investigation, we

were faced with criticism from some claiming that a fuss was being made about nothing, while others maintained that the issues being raised were real, and still others suggested that the researchers involved were hiding behind typical claims of qualitative research to persuade readers about their *a priori* ideas. In spite of such messages and perhaps because of them, we decided to confront the dilemmas head on.

One of the dominant themes that emerged from the interviews was that of the accounts constructed by women concerning the role of children in a life immersed in violence. It wasn't always clear whether these dilemmas were those of the researchers or the informants, as their respective voices often intertwined in both the text provided by the informants and the interpretations of the text and subtext by the researchers. Upon combining these voices, an ethical concern emerged from the realization that although some of the women's actions were accounted for by the 'best interests of the children', both before and after the turning point, a more detailed examination of the subtext called into question this assertion. In fact, the interviews revealed that the children's interests became secondary to those of the mothers, who apparently did not see the use of child-related justifications and the need to protect their children from harm as being mutually exclusive.

During the turning point, the women need to first come to terms with their own situation as victims. Only then are they capable of including their children and realizing the full impact of violence on them. Once this becomes possible, the introspective process of assessing the damage done to the children and the beginning of a search for solutions are set in motion. However, the children's and the women's interests are not easily discernible, and women tend to see the best interests of the children in retrospect but not necessarily at the time of the occurrences. The following quotes are illustrative:

'He abused the kid, cracked his skull when he was two years old. The child was hospitalized. I said he would kill him. I slept with him [the abuser] and did everything I could to have this kid. I am not going to let him finish him off. But at that time, I still didn't decide to end our relationship; I still had feelings towards him.'

'He got a lot, a lot of blows from him; he even hit him over his head. I realize now that this had many side-effects on him. I didn't connect between what was happening to the kids and to me. I said the kids are one thing and I am another thing.'

Through the multitude of voices emerging from these quotes, we shall focus on the clinical and the ethical ones. The clinical voice turns our attention to the

physical and emotional damage inflicted on children by violent fathers, as well as the action or failure to act on the part of the mothers in their attempts to understand and survive the violence. The first woman identifies the damage inflicted on her child and describes a combination of emotional and physical means to protect him. However, from the subtext we learn that her emotional ties with the perpetrator stopped her from providing full protection to the child. We the researchers believe that from a clinical perspective, we can infer that the woman's attitudes towards herself in violence and her children are intertwined and reflect the dynamics rendering abused women unable to protect themselves and their children. We perceive this as self-defeating for the women, as they are motivated by contradictory forces which necessarily come at the expense of each other; the subsequent behaviours are confusing for all involved parties – the children, the woman and the abuser. The second interviewee creates a purposive split between herself and her children so as to enable her to at least hope that violence towards her will not affect the children. In addition, such a split allows a story line whereby she can persuade herself and others that she was present physically but not emotionally when the violence towards her children took place. We believe that such a split is functional for many abused women who do not feel capable of coping with the violence and/or dismantling the family, not even for the purpose of providing protection to their children. On the other hand it creates a false dichotomy between things under her control and others which are beyond her control. Through these contradictory and complex voices, it becomes increasingly clear that abused women cannot act on their children's needs when their own needs are made acute by the violence and by the emotions involved in the relationship. Before the turning point occurs, the considerations related to children are not part of the process of weighing whether or not to leave the relationship. The separation between their children's and their own experiences of violence enables the women to keep the dyadic framework intact and to have some level of release from the guilt associated with neglecting their children.

Moreover, the women in the above quotes reported knowing the high level of risk to their children. They understood that based on past experiences, the future was likely to be even more violent. Despite such clear and imminent danger to their children, this knowledge was still placed in the background rather than the foreground. Thus, it appears that ethical reasoning

related to the women's behaviour towards their children became a secondary concern to their own emotional safety.

There are many reasons explaining why women remain in violent relationships, ranging from social to economic and psychological entrapment to having no alternative place to live. The issue of staying or leaving is often framed in the context of the children's best interests, as reflected in the following quote:

'During my marriage, I thought a number of times of running away to the women's shelter and taking the kids with me, but I didn't want to do it because I wanted to avoid a traumatic situation for the children arising from living in this institution. They will be ashamed if everyone will find out what is the situation in our home.'

The woman quoted above perceives only the extreme option of running away to the shelter as a solution for the violence, but refuses to choose it 'for the sake of the children'. By acting on her own assumptions, she presents the situation as one in which choice is lacking if she is to avoid traumatizing her children. While children's voices are not heard, she seems to act based on her own assumptions and we believe that her decision is not taken solely based on her children's needs but rather due to being overtaken by her own shame and fear. The consequence is that her good intentions become suspect or get lost when the boundaries between herself and her children are blurred: what is advantageous for herself is presented as being suitable for the children, and vice versa. Our analysis revealed that the battered woman who acts according to the above mode becomes entrapped in a paradoxical situation whereby she hurts her children by attempting to protect them and she denies herself and her children the choice by the choices she makes for them.

Through such a fusion of needs, women can justify staying because of their concern for the welfare of their children, even as they are actually pursuing their own interests. They can persuade themselves and their audiences that they have to go on suffering for the children's sake. As in the quote above, they may point to the social consequences of leaving or exposing the violence by seeking help, which places an unbearable stigma on the family and the children in particular. By using this kind of child-related justification, the decision is framed as the best response to both clinical and ethical concerns involved in the situation. As a result, the impact of violence on the children who witness it is marginalized, and staying is equated with the least detrimental alternative for the children. In the final analysis, however, the dilemma about

whether to stay or leave has little relevance to the turning point, which usually takes place within the relationship and not as a function of leaving or staying. Thus, the dilemma seems to reflect the woman's own concerns rather than those related to the children.

During the next stage in the development of the turning point, when actual steps are taken to curb the violence, the children continue to be instrumental in enhancing the feelings, decisions, and actions taken by their mother in dealing with the violence. The following quote illustrates how children may be used as a justification for their mother's actions:

'I had to convince myself that calling the police was the right thing to do, that what he did was too much, that sometimes it is impossible to take it any more. As much as you want to, you can't, and the kids are growing up, they start seeing things . . . The children are suddenly involved here; one can't take it any more.'

This woman's decision to call the police represents a shift in her previous mode of coping with the violence, again by using the 'best interests of the children' doctrine. On the surface, the woman describes how her children's enhanced cognitive abilities with age are enabling them to experience the violence. Although this consideration has clearly become a meaningful part of her turning point, it is not clear from the deeper interpretive structure as to whether the shift is really due to the children or to her own understanding that the violence has reached the boundaries of her own tolerance. Although the change is presented as a sudden shift requiring immediate action, the subtext shows us that once the woman is ready to proceed to the turning point, she needs to build an acceptable social script for it. This is achieved by integrating the children's suffering with her own. We believe that while such enmeshment leads to a powerful infrastructure underlying her narrative, it fails to provide a clear differentiation between the woman's interests and those of her child. The statement 'one can't take it anymore' remains elusive as to who is the one who cannot take it. One thing is clear: calling the police is not an easy task and she needs a release from guilt for doing so.

A similar line of justification related to 'the children's sake' is used when women intend to leave the dyadic framework. As one woman explains:

'I wanted a break, a great change in my life; I had enough of all the physical and mental violence. I thought that if I would change my life, it would be better for both me and the kids to live a quiet life, to live apart from my husband.'

When women feel that the timing of a significant change in their lives is appropriate and that there is no point in continuing a joint life, they enlist the children as part of their line of argumentation. In the above quote, the children's need 'to live a quiet life' is enlisted as if this need was previously non-existent. However, at the turning point it parallels the woman's needs and is thus brought to the forefront. The ethical concern for children at this point in time may be real, but it also raises the inevitable question of 'Why now?' In our view, it appears that in spite of the best intentions of women towards their children, the needs of the latter and the meaning system of the woman are becoming increasingly enmeshed, with one being transformed to represent the other. From a clinical perspective, this seems to be in line with the basic dynamics of victimization in domestic violence by which there is a certain level of violence that brings the woman to the turning point, either with or without the children's input. The decision not to tolerate more violence is a personal one and comes from within when the women reach the turning point experientially. Another dimension of the convergence between the meaning systems of the mother and the children relates to the perception of the male partner in the process of arriving at the turning point. This is mostly referred to in a negative manner. As one woman said:

'Let him tell everyone stories about how much he loves the children. He can tell it to someone else who doesn't know him. I can't say he doesn't love the children; in his own way, he does love them. But how is this kind of love good for me? He is no father and he is no husband; he loves only himself. I don't think that he can give me love, and I don't think that the children will miss him a lot.'

This woman describes the father's love as meaningless, since his behaviour is inconsistent with his statements. His emotions towards the children and towards her cannot be separated, and therefore he is presented as 'bad' for the entire family. In her experience, his emotional attitude cannot be fragmented so that his love towards the children will stand alone. Rather, his attitudes towards the woman and the children are interdependent, with one reinforcing the other. By appearing to focus on protecting herself and her children, the woman succeeds in creating an ethically acceptable situation for herself, while at the same time creating for the outside listener a temporary identification with her plight. However, a careful examination of the subtext reveals the ethical inconsistencies in her solution. Her disenchantment with her partner is described by using the children, and she

does not distinguish between her own needs and those of her children. As such, the children are used only when the timing is right for the turning point from the woman's perspective, though at times the decision is framed as one that runs contrary to the position of the children:

'I talked to the kids and I told them that I ran out of energy and that we need to end this. My daughter didn't want to hear about it; my son listened, but was mad, as if he understood and didn't at the same time. As if he was saying: a little more, mummy . . . Hang in a little more . . . But he never said what would be afterwards. I have thought already about the kids; they are big already. I won't leave them, I won't ever cut my connection with them, but it is time to think of my own life. I need a safe corner so that I can live without fear, so that he won't harm me.'

While in the previous quotes the women attempted to represent their decisions as child-centred, here the interviewee is describing her decision as one that she made in spite of rather than because of her children. From her perspective, the decision has been made and is non-negotiable, with no opportunity for further dialogue. Such rhetoric seems more integrated from an ethical standpoint, but still does not answer the previous question as to whose interests are in the forefront – the mother's or the child's?

DISCUSSION

This discussion addresses two issues. The first relates to the battered women's functioning as mothers at the turning point at which they decided to refuse living with violence and took active steps to change the situation. The second issue is more covert and complex and relates to the ethical position taken by researchers in cases where unanticipated findings present the informants of the study in a negative light.

Research has shown that homes with domestic violence are less safe than their non-violent counterparts for the children who live in such homes. They were found to suffer more often from physical abuse of parents, failure to be protected, emotional abuse and overall conflicts with the children (Jones *et al.* 2002). Moreover, abused women themselves are aware of the negative impact of violence on their parenting and mothering roles (Levendosky *et al.* 2000). The major explanations for abused women's behaviours as mothers were related to the effects of being subjected to physical and emotional abuse themselves (Bancroft & Silverman 2002; Mullender *et al.* 2002). Mohr *et al.* (2001) argue that we must suspend our preconceived conceptualizations of what works for abused women

and their children, and start viewing their decisions and actions as the best ways of achieving personal effectiveness in their complex situation. Along these lines, Mullender *et al.* (2002) emphasized the self-defeating dynamics underlying the relationship between battered women as mothers and their children. Although the battered women tend to believe that they have done their best to protect their children from violence and from the loss of family by remaining in the violent relationship and by ' . . . leaving the children in happy ignorance' (p. 167), their communication lines with their children are bound to be severed and/or cut off eventually. These dynamics and the added effects of the abuse usually result in distortions in the shared interests of mothers and children, and transform the relationship into a conflictual one in terms of needs, interests and mutual perceptions. The literature on intimate violence tends to focus on the man's violence as the underlying reason for this state of affairs. It is assumed that such a position will empower women and will avoid social stigma that otherwise could be attached to them. While this may be a factually correct position it may also help to marginalize and blur the problematic of the mother-child relationship in the context of family violence. Attempting to empower and to be socially responsible does not necessarily mean presenting a one-sided image (Padgett 1998; Antle & Regehr 2003). All too often, ideological considerations come into play and obscure the complexity of the ethical picture. For instance, while many of us have struggled for years to highlight the difficulties in hearing and theorizing about women's experiences through male-dominated language, we have fallen into a similar pattern from the opposite direction by taking issue with hearing stories that contradict dominant feminist understandings (Featherstone & Trinder 1997; Mauthner & Doucet 1998). Feminist researchers in the field of domestic violence struggle with ethical concerns stemming from conflicting demands of science and ideological-political commitments (Gondolf *et al.* 1997). The prevalent theoretical narrative of gender dynamics in intimate violence emphasizes the fact that women do not have equal power as men to shape their lives and that abuse is always part of this socio-political context (Yllo 1993; Weick 1994). As such, gender is an ethical issue that researchers can neither ignore nor overemphasize (Campbell & Dienemann 2001). Part of such an approach to gender is to become sensitized to the oppressive nature of motherhood in the cultural narrative that forces mothers to exist for the sake of children only (Hutchison & Charlesworth

2001; Nelson 2001). Professionals also need to understand women's emotional distress symptoms as linked directly to domestic violence (Humphreys & Thiara 2003). In parallel, it is becoming increasingly clear that feminist discourse not only portrays women as victims and stresses the evil perpetrated upon them but also leads to attempts to use 'ideological purity' as a major feature in explaining any kind of behaviour by women (Wolf 1993; Mills 2003). Such explanations are as unethical as those that ignore the context of power inequality. A similarly unethical practice identifies abused women exclusively in their victim roles and excludes their additional identities, particularly as mothers (Krane & Davis 2002). Such homogenization denies the complexities of abused women's lives and their need to cope with multiple roles and identities.

With a phenomenon as complex as this, it is essential that polarized and dichotomous thinking be avoided. Rather, we advocate a 'both/and' approach (Goldner *et al.* 1990). When explaining the social construction of wife-beating, Loseke (2001) points out that the process involves the creation of 'formula stories', which locate abusive men and abused women in fixed roles such as 'villain versus victim'. These simplified images are in stark contrast with the life experiences of abused women, which are complex, ambiguous in meaning, and fundamentally conflictual in nature. The 'both/and' approach suggested above implies recognizing both strengths and hardships of women rather than assuming that a simplified one-sided image of their situation will better protect their interests. Pseudo-attempts to defend abused women while expecting that they be both martyrs and 'mothers of the year' are both unethical and unrealistic and may do more harm than good to the cause of abused women in the long run.

Thus, researchers, advocates and practitioners are placed in a complicated position as they try to integrate between such polarities. There is a need to achieve some kind of balance between blaming abused women too much or too little for parenting practices. When we blame them too much, we bring shame on them and marginalize the violence directed against them, while giving support to the perpetrators. When we blame victims too little, as Lamb (1996) wrote, '... we make them too small as individuals and reinforce the passivity that was inherent in the experience of victimization' (p. 181). We concur with McGee's (2001) position asserting that '... family support must be taken to mean support for the mother as non-abusing parent to care for her children' (p. 92). But

this cannot be done without abused women's awareness and recognition of their responsibility for the various self-defeating relationship patterns with their children and their partners. Mills (2003), as a feminist, views the feminist explanation of intimate violence as an escape for women to work on themselves:

Rather than viewing self-reflection and responsibility as self-blame, as main stream feminism suggests, I believe that by taking stock of the fluid identities of victim and abuser, women can reassert their agency and overcome the subordination endemic to passivity and acceptance. (p. 98)

As such, refusing to bring such issues to the surface with the mothers is assuming that they are helpless and morally passive human beings. Finally we should reiterate the already existing idea in intimate violence research (Peled & Leichtentritt 2002) that while empowerment is a major ethical principle neglected by many of us in research and practice, empowering alone is not a panacea. When considering the implications of this paper for practice, we suggest taking into account the relative weight and prominence of ethically sensitive information versus the needs and interests of the informants as clients. Practitioners should be able to foster simultaneously women's understanding of the structural oppression resulting from gender violence, as it impacts on the woman's ability to function in her various roles, and the assumption of personal responsibility for the quality and level of her functioning. In balancing the needs and rights of women with those of their children, we may be able to operationalize empowerment for both parties. By highlighting the complexities involved in attempting to understand abused women as mothers, this paper has demonstrated that it is possible to ask questions concerning their mothering failures without disempowering them.

Finally we should ask: Are Israeli battered women different from their Western counterparts? While the complete answer to this complex issue is beyond our scope, two issues are worth mentioning. First, Israel has a strong Western value orientation, which includes the predominance of certain family models, social and political values related to choice, decision making, freedom and limitations of freedom, social, religious and ethnic stratification, and the extent to which the welfare state interferes with family life. Second, research on families with intimate violence in Israel, as well as in the USA and Great Britain, has concluded that couples who live in such conditions have their own traditions, ways of thinking, and emotional climates, as well as styles of talking about their

experiences. Intimate violence, so to speak, creates a culture that crosses national boundaries, so families of diverse cultures living in intimate violence may well be similarly trapped in it. Moreover, Western cultures are under the strong influence of the Judeo-Christian value system, which emphasizes male dominance, female submission, and overall patriarchal social arrangements, all of which have the potential to emphasize the similarities in battered women's behaviour (e.g. Alsdurf & Alsdurf 1989; Heggen 1996). Therefore, the themes arising out of the interviews reported here have been created in primarily Judeo-Christian Western cultures. In different dominant cultures other themes may have evolved.

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