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Correlates for Legal Help-Seeking: Contextual Factors for Battered Women in Shelter

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Abstract

Legal redress can play a critical role in interrupting the pattern of domination and control inherent in intimate partner violence (IPV), yet it remains an infrequent strategy among battered women. The current study employed a contextual framework for investigating the correlates for engagement in the criminal justice system for a sample of 227 sheltered battered women. Results indicated that individual, relational, and system-level factors were all associated with two legal help-seeking behaviors: having a civil protection order and criminal prosecution. In particular, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptomatology, social support, and prior experience with police officers were significant correlates for legal help-seeking. Results highlight the need for a coordinated community response to IPV, addressing both legal needs and psychological needs simultaneously.

Keywords

intimate partner violence; criminal justice system; PTSD

Battered women often engage the criminal justice system as one strategy to help them control the abuse and protect themselves and their children. Legal help-seeking strategies are varied and can include calling the police, filing a petition for a civil protection order (CPO), filing criminal charges, seeking assistance from legal aid, testifying against the abuser in court, and being deposed. Although battered women report that legal help-seeking strategies in general are more helpful than various individual attempts to manage abuse such as placating and resisting the abuser (Goodman, Dutton, Weinfurt, & Cook, 2003), it remains an infrequent strategy, with estimates suggesting only 62% of all intimate partner violence (IPV) incidents were reported to police between 2004–2005 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007). Moreover, low arrest rates of batterers have been well documented in the extant literature (Erez, 2002), and it has been suggested that less than 10% of IPV cases are ever prosecuted (Jordan, 2004).

Criminal justice interventions can have both therapeutic and antitherapeutic effects for battered women. In addition to providing temporary safety, legal intervention validates a victim's right to be free from personal violence, sends the message that domestic violence is criminal, informs victims of other services (e.g., mental health and social services), and enhances feelings of empowerment and liberation (Erez, 1999; Erez & Belknap, 1998a; Simon, 1996). Antitherapeutic effects to criminal justice interventions, unfortunately, also exist and can include victim blaming and disparaging attitudes from service providers, which in turn

reinforce low self-esteem and feelings of isolation and helplessness for battered women (Hart, 1993; Simon, 1996). As a result, some researchers have advocated for a more restorative or communitarian form of justice in cases of IPV that ideally is less adversarial than traditional justice responses (Koss, 2000). Yet, regardless of which type of intervention is employed, the same goal remains—to increase therapeutic jurisprudence and reduce violence against women.

To date, research examining battered women's engagement in the criminal justice system has often solely focused on either situational aspects of the abuse (i.e., factors related to the abuse itself) or certain individual characteristics of abused women (e.g., race and education level) in predicting whether women seek legal help. These situational and individual difference factors, although important, may not tell the whole story. Decisions to engage the criminal justice system are also likely to be influenced by the larger sociocultural context within which IPV occurs (Bennett Cattaneo, Stuewig, Goodman, Kaltman, & Dutton, 2007; Fleury-Steiner, Bybee, Sullivan, Belknap, & Melton, 2006; Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra, & Weintraub, 2005). For example, Fleury-Steiner et al. (2006) found that several contextual factors (i.e., relational, community, and system-level) influenced battered women's intentions to reuse the criminal justice system.

Therefore it is likely that to best understand battered women's engagement in the criminal justice system, research must examine situational, individual, relational, and system-level factors together. The current study aims to address this gap in the literature by identifying the correlates of two legal help-seeking behaviors (i.e., having a civil protection order and participating in criminal prosecution) in a sample of battered women in shelter, using the theoretical framework proposed previously suggesting help-seeking decisions are made within a multidimensional sociocultural context encompassing situational, individual, relational, and system-level factors.

SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS AND LEGAL HELP-SEEKING

In general, the justice system response to IPV, which includes a unique combination of both civil and criminal remedies (Jordan, 2004), has received less attention in the literature than the role of police officers (Erez, 2002). Not surprisingly, the IPV cases that typically get reported to the police are also those most likely to be adjudicated by the courts; namely, cases that involve battered women who have experienced more severe abuse, have suffered physical injuries, include sexual coercion, and involve situations where a weapon and/or children were present (Duterte et al., 2008; Erez, 2002). Although these situational factors, which typically coincide with acute instances of violence, prompt battered women to call the police in response to abuse, civil remedies and criminal prosecution generally involve a more arduous, adversarial, and demanding process. For example, obtaining a CPO often requires attending two hearings—an *ex parte* hearing held the same day the petition is filed and a full hearing where both the battered woman and the abuser can testify. It is thus likely that seeking help from the courts is influenced by additional factors.

Previous research investigating the influence of individual difference factors has generally focused on demographic variables, such as age, race, marital status, and education level, with mixed support (Coulter, Kuehnle, Byers, & Alfonso, 1999; Jordan, 2004). The influence of mental health symptomatology, however, may also play a critical role. Dutton and Goodman (1994) theorized that posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), particularly avoidance and re-experiencing symptoms, resulting from IPV may provide some explanation for why women engage in certain legal strategies. Avoidance symptoms, which can include minimization and emotional numbing, may cause a battered woman to deny the reality of her situation and therefore not seek formal or informal help by calling the police, telling others, or going to a shelter when she is being battered. High levels of distress, however, may actually influence

victims to seek initial assistance from legal sources (Wright & Fitzgerald, 2009); yet if this distress remains high, it will likely interfere with a battered woman's ability to effectively utilize these resources over time (Johnson, Palmieri, Jackson, & Hobfoll, 2007; Johnson, Zlotnick, & Perez, 2008), even compromising future safety (Krause, Kaltman, Goodman, & Dutton, 2006; Perez & Johnson, 2008). For example, intrusive symptoms may be triggered by police interrogation or criminal prosecution (e.g., raised male voices, intimidation tactics, or aggressive gestures), leading a battered woman to respond in a similar fashion as she did to the abuser, such as by acquiescing to suggestions that she was to blame, or by completely withdrawing and not voicing her experiences (Dutton & Goodman, 1994). To date, however, PTSD severity has not been examined empirically in legal help-seeking decisions for battered women.

Relational factors, that is factors related to interpersonal relationships, may also influence legal help-seeking. Goodman, Bennett, and Dutton (1999) found that lack of social support from family and friends was a significant obstacle to cooperating with criminal prosecution of IPV incidents. This support often involved providing tangible forms of aid such as child care, temporary housing, transportation, and emergency money (Goodman et al., 1999), without which following through with prosecution would be difficult if not impossible. Other researchers have also argued for the importance of social support in enabling battered women to effectively cope with the demands of engaging the justice system in response to their abuse (Hart, 1993; Hoyle & Sanders, 2000). For example, Bell and Goodman (2001) found that battered women who received support from a legal advocate (i.e., a law school student) while they were obtaining a protection order against their abuser reported lower levels of psychological and physical reabuse and higher levels of emotional support compared to women who received standard court services.

Finally, system-level factors, namely previous experience with the legal system, are likely to influence help-seeking behaviors. Police officers play a critical role in situations of IPV because they serve as gatekeepers to the criminal justice system (Erez & Belknap, 1998a). Jordan (2004) argues that police response directly affects the next step battered women take within the criminal justice process. For example, women who reported having positive experiences with police, such as believing they were listened to, being encouraged to press charges, and being given information about the criminal justice process, were more likely to say they would reuse the system again in the future (Fleury-Steiner et al., 2006). Although the deterrent effects of arrest are still uncertain, recent research suggests batterers are less likely to reoffend following arrest (Erez, 2002). Police response, therefore, becomes critical to "channel(ing) deserving cases for prosecution and adjudication" (Erez, 2002, ¶ 37).

Understanding the decision-making process that battered women undergo when considering whether to seek help from the justice system, as well as the outcomes of this involvement, has important implications for both legal and psychological interventions. By taking a multifactor contextual approach to understanding legal help-seeking behaviors, it places IPV appropriately within a sociocultural framework, reinforcing the contention that this abuse is not solely a private matter but an issue that needs to be addressed at a societal level (Raphael, 2004).

CURRENT STUDY

The current study employed a multifactor contextual framework, based on work by Fleury-Steiner and colleagues, for investigating the correlates for engagement in the justice system for battered women. Specifically, we examined the relation between situational, individual, relational, and system-level factors and two legal help-seeking behaviors in response to IPV: (a) obtaining civil protection orders, and (b) engaging in criminal prosecution. Moreover, the

study focuses on the role of PTSD symptomatology which, to date, has not been studied in relation to engagement in the criminal justice system.

METHODS

Participants

We examined a sample of shelter residents ($N = 227$) recruited from two shelters within the same shelter system over a 4-year period. On average, the shelter residents were 34.56 years old ($SD = 9.03$; $range = 18-64$). The majority of the sample self-identified as either African American (48.9%; $n = 111$) or White (41.0%; $n = 93$). Nearly half reported that they have never been married (46.3%; $n = 105$), and the majority had at least one child (87.7%; $n = 199$). Most residents had obtained at least a high school education/GED (75.3%; $n = 171$), and nearly the same proportion was unemployed (74.0%; $n = 168$). Finally, 72.1% of participants experienced at least one prior relationship that was physically and/or sexually abusive ($M = 1.48$; $SD = 2.00$; $range = 0-12$), and the average length of the most recent abusive relationship was 68.4 months ($SD = 84.08$).

Procedures

Data for this study were taken from a larger ongoing research study (Johnson & Zlotnik, 2006) investigating IPV and psychological treatment. Participants were approached by shelter staff who provided them with a brochure that included contact information for the research project. Then, interested participants were scheduled for an interview with trained graduate students in psychology or counseling. The interviews consisted of both structured and semistructured interviews as well as the administration of self-report forms. Interviews were conducted at the shelter and lasted approximately 2–3 hours, with every attempt being made to assure the participant's privacy and safety. Each interviewer received extensive training from the second author, including formal training in psychopathology and assessment with an emphasis on multicultural sensitivity and gender victimization, and detailed instruction and practice of the interview protocol. Finally, interviewers received weekly formal supervision, as well as as-needed informal supervision by a licensed psychologist.

MEASURES

Legal Help-Seeking Behaviors

As part of the structured interview, respondents were asked two single-item questions regarding their use of legal help-seeking behaviors: (1) Do you currently have a restraining order/protective order or any other type of civil legal document to minimize contact with your abusive partner (i.e., *yes* or *no*)? (2) Are you currently involved with the courts/legal system as a result of the abuse perpetrated by your most recent partner (i.e., *yes* or *no*)?

Situational Factors

IPV Severity—The Revised Conflict Tactic Scales (CTS-2; Straus, Hamby, McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) is a 32-item self-report measure assessing the severity of abuse participants experienced within the past month. Responses were provided on a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*once in the past month*) through 6 (*more than 20 times in the past month*). The CTS-2 was scored by summing the number of different types of violent acts the participant had experienced the month prior to entering shelter, a scoring method found to provide valid measure of severity of violence (Regan, Bartholomew, Kwong, Trinkle, & Henderson, 2006).¹ Straus et al. (1996) reported internal consistency estimates for the CTS-2 ranging between .79–.95, and have established adequate construct and discriminate validity. In the current study, the measure demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$). Means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients for all scales are presented in Table 1.

Trauma History—The Trauma History Questionnaire (THQ; Green, 1996) consists of 24 items that assess trauma experience in crime-related events (e.g., mugging or robbery), general disasters (e.g., serious accident or natural disaster), and unwanted physical and sexual experiences prior to current abusive relationship. Responses were provided on a dichotomous scale (i.e., *no* and *yes*) and summed to reflect the number of types of potentially traumatic events participants experienced in addition to IPV. Green (1996) reported adequate test–retest coefficients for the THQ for a 2–3 month period with a sample of female college students.

Individual Factors

PTSD Symptomatology—The Clinician Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS; Blake et al., 1995) is a semistructured interview that assesses frequency and severity of PTSD symptoms. The CAPS parallels the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fourth edition (*DSM-IV*; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) diagnostic criteria, and participants were asked about any PTSD symptoms related specifically to the IPV that led to their shelter admission. The current study uses 1-week symptom status CAPS scores, and responses were provided on a 5-point scale. Blake et al. (1995) reported internal consistency estimates for the CAPS ranging between .73 and .85, good concurrent validity with other PTSD measures (*r*'s between .42–.84), and excellent interrater reliability estimates (*r*'s between .92–.99).

Based on previous research demonstrating the multidimensionality of PTSD (see e.g., Johnson et al., 2007; King, Leskin, King, & Weathers, 1998), the current study employed a well-supported four-factor model of PTSD symptoms. The four-factor model divides PTSD symptoms into re-experiencing, experiential avoidance, emotional numbing, and hyperarousal clusters. In the current study, the CAPS demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .93$) as well as good interrater reliability ($kappa = .82$), which was assessed for 17 randomly selected interviews for CAP-derived PTSD diagnoses. The four subscales also demonstrated good reliability, with coefficient alphas ranging from .75 (experiential avoidance) to .87 (re-experiencing).

Demographics—Information was collected regarding several demographic variables including: age, marital status (recoded dichotomously: 0 = never married, 1 = married/cohabitating), race/ethnicity (recoded dichotomously: 0 = *minority*, 1 = *nonminority*), highest education level attained, employment status (recoded dichotomously: 0 = *unemployed*, 1 = *employed*), and children (recoded dichotomously: 0 = no children, 1 = one or more children).

Relational Factors

Social Support—The Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors (ISSB; Barrera, Sandler, & Ramsay, 1981) is a 40-item self-report measure that assesses the amount of social support an individual has received over the past month. The measure taps six categories of social support: material aid, behavioral assistance, intimate interaction, guidance, feedback, and positive social interaction. Responses were provided on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*about every day*) and were summed to create a total scale score. Barrera et al. (1981) reported internal consistency estimates ranging from .93–.94 and established construct validity for the ISSB with other measures of social support (*r*'s between .32 and .42 with the Arizona Social Support Interview Schedule). In the current study, the ISSB also demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = .95$).

¹Different scoring methods for the Revised Conflict Tactic Scales (CTS-2) were used in the current study, with each yielding identical results.

System-Level Factors

Police Contact (Recent)—Respondents were asked how many times they contacted the police only in response to abuse perpetrated by their most recent partner.

Justice System Contact (Lifetime)—Respondents were asked about the number of times they met with a prosecutor and the number of court appearances related to IPV in their lifetime; these included both criminal and civil contacts. Responses were combined to create a composite score of previous engagement with the justice system.

Analysis

Bivariate analyses were conducted with each variable to identify potentially significant variables. Then, to predict group membership (e.g., protection order vs. no protection order), logistic regressions were conducted using only these potentially significant variables. Logistic regression can be used to predict an individual's group membership on the basis of a set of measurements by estimating the probability of a certain event occurring by calculating changes in the log odds of the dependent variables (Peng, Lee, & Ingersoll, 2002). Logistic regression was used as opposed to predictive discriminant analysis because it does not require the assumptions of multivariate normality of data and homogeneity of covariance matrices of the groups (Garson, 2006), and it is hypothesized to be theoretically superior when handling disproportionate group sample sizes (Fan & Wang, 1999).

RESULTS

Descriptives

Seventy-four percent of shelter residents ($n = 168$) had contacted the police one or more times related to IPV in their most recent relationship, with 26% having contacted the police four or more times ($n = 60$). Despite the high degree of police involvement, only 32% of shelter residents ($n = 74$) reported that they had a civil protection order and the same percentage reported being involved in the criminal court system ($n = 73$). There was a significant amount of overlap between the two groups: 20 women reported having only a civil protection order, 19 women reported only being involved in the criminal court system, and 54 women reported both having a CPO and criminal court involvement.

CIVIL PROTECTION ORDER

Variable Reduction

Independent samples t-tests and Pearson chi-square tests for independence were conducted to examine differences between the two groups: (1) women with a civil protection order as a result of abuse perpetrated by their most recent partner ($n = 74$), and (2) those without a protection order ($n = 153$). The purpose of this preliminary analysis was primarily data simplification and variable reduction. None of the chi-square tests for coded data (i.e., race, marital status, employed, and children) were significant; t-test results appear in Table 2. We found significant differences between the two groups on 5 of the 15 variables: PTSD – Re-experiencing, PTSD – Experiential avoidance, PTSD – Hyperarousal, current police contact, and lifetime justice system contact. Binomial logistic regressions were then conducted with these variables using SPSS.

Logistic Regression

To assess whether a shelter resident was likely to have a civil protection order against their abuser, a five-predictor logistic model was fitted to the data using the likelihood ratio forward stepwise method. An evaluation of the log-likelihood test of the overall model was significant

($\chi^2 = 35.96$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$). The Hosmer-Lemeshow (H-L) goodness-of-fit statistic was nonsignificant ($p > .05$), suggesting that the model fit adequately. The final model is presented in Table 3. According to the model, the log of the odds of a shelter resident having a civil protection order was related to the frequency of police contact in response to abuse perpetrated by her most recent partner² (OR = 1.66, [95% CI = 1.36, 2.02]) and her level of trauma re-experiencing symptoms (OR = 1.05, [95% CI = 1.01, 1.08]). Nagelkerke's R^2 (.204) and Cox and Snell's R^2 (.147) (also shown in Table 3) measure strength of association and indicate that the model performs well (Garson, 2006). Finally, the overall percentage correctly predicted by the model is 69.6%, which is a significant improvement over chance.

CRIMINAL COURT SYSTEM

Variable Reduction

Independent samples *t*-tests and chi-squares were again conducted to examine differences between the two groups: criminal court involvement ($n = 73$) and noninvolvement ($n = 152$) as a result of the abuse perpetrated by their most recent partner. As before, the purpose of this preliminary analysis was variable reduction (see Table 4 for *t*-tests); all chi-square tests were nonsignificant. We found significant differences between the two groups on 6 of the 15 variables: PTSD – Re-experiencing, PTSD – Experiential avoidance, PTSD – Hyperarousal, age, social support, and current police contact. Binomial logistic regressions were then conducted with these variables using SPSS.

Logistic Regression

A six-predictor logistic model was fitted to the data using the likelihood ratio forward stepwise method to assess criminal court involvement for battered women in shelter. An evaluation of the log-likelihood test of the overall model was significant ($\chi^2 = 35.50$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$), with a nonsignificant ($p > .05$) Hosmer-Lemeshow (H-L) goodness-of-fit statistic. According to the model (see Table 5), the log of the odds of a shelter resident engaging the criminal court system was related to the frequency of police contact in response to current/most recent abuse (OR = 1.43, [95% CI = 1.17, 1.74]), her degree of social support (OR = 1.01; [95% CI = 1.00, 1.02]), her age (OR = .954, [95% CI = .92, .99]), and her level of trauma hyperarousal symptoms (OR = 1.05, [95% CI = 1.02, 1.09]). Nagelkerke's R^2 (.204) and Cox and Snell's R^2 (.146) indicate that the model performs well and correctly predicted 72.3% of participants.

DISCUSSION

Legal redress may play a critical role in interrupting the pattern of domination and control inherent in IPV situations (Fischer & Rose, 1995). Past research examining the reasons why battered women engage in certain legal help-seeking behavior, such as calling the police or filing for a CPO, has generally focused on either situational aspects of the abuse or certain individual characteristics of the women themselves in explaining justice system engagement. Based on the conceptual framework of Fleury-Steiner et al. (2006), we examined legal help-seeking behavior within a multifactor sociocultural context. Specifically, we investigated the influence of situational, individual, relational, and system-level factors on sheltered women's use of two legal help-seeking behaviors: having a civil protection order against their batterer and involvement in the criminal courts.

Overall, our findings were consistent with the recent literature incorporating a multifactor contextual framework for conceptualizing justice system engagement. Results indicated that

²Analyses were also conducted that included length of relationship as an independent variable. As length of relationship was found to be nonsignificant in all analyses, this variable was omitted from the current study for the sake of clarity and brevity.

individual, relational, and system-level factors were all associated with legal help-seeking behaviors. In particular, PTSD symptomatology, which has not previously been examined in relation to legal help-seeking, was associated with both civil and criminal justice engagement in this study. Re-experiencing/intrusive symptoms was associated with having a civil protection order as a result of abuse, and hyperarousal symptoms were more common for abused women who reported being involved in criminal prosecution. This provides further evidence for examining the role of PTSD by symptom cluster in that these clusters likely differentially influence the types of legal help-seeking behaviors battered women employ. These findings are also consistent with recent research demonstrating that PTSD severity may act as a catalyst for women to seek legal help as a means of managing their distress (Wright & Fitzgerald, 2009). Yet, we also know that if this distress remains high it will likely interfere with a battered woman's ability to effectively utilize these resources over time (Johnson et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2008) and can lead to revictimization (Krause et al., 2006; Perez & Johnson, 2008). This has important legal and psychological implications, as these findings suggest this may be a prime time to intervene with these women. Recently, researchers have argued for the need for a coordinated community response to IPV, addressing both legal needs and psychological needs simultaneously (Jordan, 2004). Reducing PTSD symptoms of avoidance, re-experiencing, and hyperarousal in battered women can enhance psychological stability, thereby leading to better cooperation with the criminal justice system such as by providing impact statements, giving depositions, and testifying in court.

Social support, a relational factor, was also a significant correlate of legal help-seeking. Abused women involved in criminal prosecution as a result of their abuse reported receiving more social support from family and friends over the past month. This support included both tangible forms, (e.g., material aid and behavioral assistance), as well as more intangible forms of support, such as providing positive guidance and feedback. Unfortunately, controlling behaviors in abusive relationships "dissolve sources of support" (Hoyle & Sanders, 2000, p. 27), often through the social isolation of battered women. This isolation then may lead to more violence in relationships. Moreover, battered women may use up their support networks by overtaxing the resources of others. Therefore, victim assistance programs should aim to educate and engage those individuals in an abused woman's social support network to facilitate criminal prosecution of batterers (Hart, 1993).

Logistic regression results also indicated that recent police contact, a system-level factor, was a significant correlate of engaging in civil and criminal remedies for IPV. Abused women who reported having more police contact in response to current or most recent abuse were 1.7 times more likely to have a civil protection order and 1.4 times more likely to be involved in criminal prosecution. This finding underscores the critical role police officers play in influencing whether cases are adjudicated.

When factors beyond situational aspects of the abuse and individual characteristics (i.e., demographic variables) of the abused are included in examinations of legal help-seeking behavior among battered women, they allow IPV to be conceptualized within a contextual framework. In the current study, situational aspects of the abuse, namely abuse that was more severe or frequent, included sexual coercion, or resulted in physical injury, were not predictive. This finding is consistent with other research studies that included a multifactor approach to examining legal engagement for IPV. For example, Fleury-Steiner et al. (2006) also failed to find that severity of abuse predicted reuse of the criminal justice system. Further, individual demographic factors were also not predictive, such as race/ethnicity, education level, and employment status. This finding again lends support for the contention that IPV is a societal problem, requiring intervention strategies aimed at the relationship rather than the individual. Moreover, by recognizing that factors other than frequency/severity of abuse are important, such as social support and mental health symptomatology, it provides researchers, clinicians,

and service providers with more varied and accessible points of intervention with battered women.

Finally, though some researchers have suggested that victims seek protection orders for the same reasons they pursue prosecution (Erez, 2000), this assertion has yet to be empirically tested. Results from the current study suggest there may be unique correlates for utilization of different legal help-seeking behaviors. This finding needs to be replicated in additional studies; however, it lends support to the argument that a “one size fits all” solution to IPV is not likely to alleviate problems (Erez & Belknap, 1998b). Instead, a coordinated community response is critical given the likelihood of several distinctive contextual factors impacting different legal help-seeking behaviors.

Limitations and Future Directions

Probably the greatest limitation on our results lies in the limited ability to draw conclusions due to the cross-sectional and correlational design of the current research. For example, it is impossible to determine if more social support leads battered women to engage in legal help-seeking behaviors or if the engagement in help-seeking behaviors influences victims to seek out more social support. The same is true of the relationship between having a CPO and more frequent police contact; that is, did more police contact influence women to get a CPO against their abuser, or did violations of the CPO by the abuser lead to more frequent police contact? Unfortunately, the cross-sectional design prevents the researcher from determining directionality of relationships. As such, longitudinal designs are a necessary future direction to enable researchers to determine causality. Further, single-item measures were employed to assess battered women’s legal help-seeking behaviors and the two system-level factors, which increases the likelihood of measurement error and limits generalizability. Additionally, battered women in shelter represent a small proportion of those who participate in the justice system (Bell & Goodman, 2001), similarly limiting the generalizability of our results to battered women who do not seek shelter.

As previously mentioned, there was a great deal of overlap between legal help-seeking groups, and we were not able to compare these legal groups due to the small sample size within each group. Finally, there is, unfortunately, no way to rule out the influence of constructs not included in the study, particularly the role of quality or helpfulness of legal responses and fear or lack of knowledge about the justice system. Strengths of this research, however, include its use of a relatively large sample of battered women in shelters, quantitative research design utilizing standardized clinical interviews and empirically supported measures, and inclusion of different types of legal help-seeking behaviors within the same sample.

Given these limitations, however, future research should include conducting more longitudinal studies at community and battered women shelters to capture variables representing the quality of these prior experiences, as well as examining certain affective (e.g., fear of retaliation) and cognitive (e.g., negative schemas) factors that may predict legal help-seeking behaviors. Further, it is critical that future studies incorporate measures of PTSD severity in samples of battered women and assess how it influences legal help-seeking as well as battered women’s ability to access other resources overtime. Moreover, a next logical step would be to examine the interrelationships among these constructs, as it is likely that these factors (i.e., individual, relational, and system-level) relate in significant ways. Future research should be aimed at developing a conceptual model of the decision-making process battered women undergo when engaging the criminal justice system. The subsequent theoretical model then needs to be empirically tested to assess specific relations among latent constructs to identify factors that inhibit or encourage decisions to seek help from the legal system and the potential variables that mediate or moderate the process.

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TABLE 1

Correlation Coefficients Amongst Independent Variables

Scale	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 IPV severity	14.27	7.44	–										
2 Trauma history	7.19	4.35	-.01	–									
3 PTSD – Re-experiencing	15.89	9.51	.20**	.17**	–								
4 PTSD – Exp. avoidance	7.65	4.57	.28**	-.01	.47**	–							
5 PTSD – Emo. numbing	12.66	9.51	.10	.27**	.54**	.41**	–						
6 PTSD – Hyperarousal	16.82	9.83	.14*	.15*	.65**	.46**	.63**	–					
7 Age	34.56	9.03	-.22**	.24**	.00	-.11	.04	-.09	–				
8 Education level	4.20	1.11	-.10	.12	.06	-.02	.08	.04	.13	–			
9 Social support	90.36	29.45	.01	-.01	.04	-.13	-.11	.02	-.01	.02	–		
10 Recent police contact	1.88	1.55	.02	-.08	.09	.22**	.02	.09	-.06	-.06	-.02	–	
11 Lifetime justice system contact	3.15	6.46	-.06	.05	.10	.08	.02	.06	.03	-.02	-.04	.38**	–

* $p < .05$ level, two-tailed.** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

TABLE 2

Independent Samples *T*-tests for Having a Civil Protection Order

Independent variable	No CPO Mean (SD)	CPO Mean (SD)	<i>t</i> -value	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
IPV severity	13.72 (7.59)	15.42 (7.03)	-1.62	225	.107	.232
Trauma history	7.03 (4.27)	7.51 (4.53)	-0.78	225	.436	.109
PTSD – Re-experiencing	14.59 (9.73)	18.57 (8.50)	-3.00	225	.003	.436
PTSD – Experiential avoidance	7.03 (4.59)	8.95 (4.26)	-3.02	225	.003	.436
PTSD – Emotional numbing	12.49 (9.64)	13.00 (9.30)	-0.38	225	.706	.054
PTSD – Hyperarousal	15.67 (9.81)	19.22 (9.51)	-2.58	225	.010	.367
Age	35.20 (9.43)	33.27 (8.04)	1.52	225	.130	.109
Education level	4.20 (1.14)	4.20 (1.05)	-0.00	225	1.00	.000
Social support	88.99 (28.43)	93.22 (31.47)	-1.01	224	.314	.070
Recent police contact	1.50 (1.50)	2.66 (1.36)	-5.65	225	.000	.375
Lifetime justice system contact	2.48 (4.53)	4.53 (6.96)	-2.26	225	.025	.172

Note. IPV = intimate partner violence.

TABLE 3

Binomial Logistic Regression for Having a Civil Protection Order

Predictor	β	SE β	Wald's χ^2	df	p	e^{β} (Odds Ratio)	95% CI (Odds)
Recent police contact	.504	.102	24.517	1	.000	1.66	1.36–2.02
PTSD – Re-experiencing	.044	.017	6.780	1	.009	1.05	1.01–1.08
Constant	–2.497	.404	38.217	1	.000	–	–

Note. Nagelkerke $R^2 = .204$. Cox and Snell $R^2 = .147$.

TABLE 4

Independent Samples T-tests for Criminal Court Involvement

Independent Variable	No Court Mean (SD)	Court Mean (SD)	t-value	df	p	Cohen's d
IPV severity	13.70 (7.54)	15.68 (7.07)	-1.89	223	.060	.272
Trauma history	7.15 (4.37)	7.26 (4.33)	-0.18	223	.861	.025
PTSD – Re-experiencing	14.65 (9.53)	18.58 (8.86)	-2.96	223	.003	.209
PTSD – Experiential avoidance	7.22 (4.58)	8.62 (4.38)	-2.18	223	.031	.154
PTSD – Emotional numbing	12.32 (9.54)	13.27 (9.40)	-0.71	223	.479	.050
PTSD – Hyperarousal	15.27 (9.54)	20.21 (9.69)	-3.49	223	.001	.240
Age	35.75 (9.23)	32.32 (8.14)	2.71	223	.007	.394
Education level	4.23 (1.06)	4.16 (1.22)	0.42	223	.678	.058
Social support	87.36 (28.18)	95.82 (31.39)	-2.03	222	.044	.284
Recent police contact	1.62 (1.58)	2.42 (1.37)	-3.74	223	.000	.541
Lifetime justice system contact	2.78 (6.37)	4.00 (6.75)	-1.33	223	.186	.186

Note. IPV = intimate partner violence.

TABLE 5

Binomial Logistic Regression for Criminal Court Involvement

Predictor	β	SE β	Wald's χ^2	df	p	e^{β} (Odds Ratio)	95% CI (Odds)
Recent police contact	.355	.102	12.105	1	.001	1.43	1.17–1.74
Social support	.011	.005	4.717	1	.030	1.01	1.00–1.02
Age	-.047	.018	6.373	1	.012	0.95	.92–.99
PTSD – Hyperarousal	.050	.016	9.239	1	.002	1.05	1.02–1.09
Constant	-1.780	.858	4.299	1	.038	–	–

Note. Nagelkerke $R^2 = .204$, Cox and Snell $R^2 = .146$.