

Legal advocacy for domestic violence survivors: The power of an informative relationship

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Abstract

This article uses data from Interviews with domestic violence survivors and advocates to show how legal advocacy for survivors can be successful when it responds to women's relational needs by offering emotional support, information, and the physical presence of an advocate. Survivors were usually confused, doubtful and lonely when they tried to cope with the police and the courts. Advocates lent a supportive, empathic presence and possessed valuable information. Advocates relationships with survivors enabled them to take further legal actions against batterers. This study suggests that an active, relational helping model meets essential needs for some survivors of crime.

EXPERTS ARE CALLING FOR MORE LEGAL advocacy to help battered women in their interactions with police and the courts (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1990; Hart, 1993). Frequently, new domestic violence protocols do include advocacy for battered women. However, we have very little information about how it can be provided most effectively (Edleson, 1993). The lack of information is partly because the published literature that includes survivors' views on legal advocacy is very scarce (Edleson, 1993; Hart, 1995). This article uses a relational theory of women's development to show how advocates can meet some of survivors' needs and, thus, effectively assist survivors in taking further legal action against batterers.

This article will use interviews with domestic violence survivors and with their advocates to increase understanding of successful advocacy relationships. The interviews, which focused on services to domestic violence survivors provided under a new domestic violence protocol in DuPage County, Illinois, also provide information on some of the limitations of advocacy.

Previous Research

When we contrast theorists' assertions about the centrality of relationships in women's development to the social situations of many battered women, it is easy to see an important deficit that advocates can fill. Recent research on women's development has stressed the importance of caring and connectedness for women (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, 1997; Jordan, et al., 1991). Surrey (1991) asserts that "for women, the primary experience of self is relational, that is, the self is organized and developed in the context of important relationships" (p. 52). Surrey stresses that her "definition of relationship involves an experience of mutual empathy" (1991, p. 53), which Jordan (1997) defines as "the dynamic cognitive-affective process of joining with and understanding another's subjective experience" (p. 15). This joining and understanding causes each person to "resonate emotionally and physically with the other's experience" (Jordan, 1997, p. 16). Jordan also writes that, "in relationships, one comes to experience: clarity about one's

own experience and the other's; the capacity for creating meaningful action; [and] an increased sense of vitality" (p. 21).

In contrast to relational theorists' descriptions of relationships that provide empathy, vitality, and clarity, women with battering partners very often find themselves isolated from supportive relationships (Andersen, Boulette, & Schwartz, 1991; Gondolf, 1998; Tolman, 1992). They end up with their partner as their sole adult relationship.

Battering relationships are frequently characterized by psychological abuse (Gondolf, 1998; Tolman, 1992) that can lead to confusion and self-doubt for survivors (Barnett, Martinez, & Keyson, 1996). Abusers frequently tell their victims that they are stupid and unlovable (NiCarthy, 1986; Walker, 1979). In addition, as Tolman (1992) stressed, both support and psychological abuse can be present in the same relationship, adding to the confusion of the victim. Psychological abuse combined with social isolation decreases survivors' confidence and clarity in decision making.

A substantial number of survivors of battering also experience symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Dutton, 1992; Kemp, et al., 1995). These symptoms can include disengagement, numbness, and difficulties in concentration, which can further decrease survivors' confidence in their abilities to make decisions and increase their sense of isolation. Survivors who are not diagnosed with PTSD often experience confusion, anxiety, and sleeping problems (Dutton, 1992). Rosewater (1988) interviewed sixty battered women and found that almost all of them were afraid that they were "crazy."

When isolation, PTSD symptomatology, or self-doubt occur, battered women who come into contact with the legal system may be very uncertain. They often have very little information about how to make use of the police and the courts. (Fischer & Rose, 1995; Muscat and Iwamoto, 1993; Yegidis and Renzy, 1994). Programs that fail to meet women's needs for information leave them disconnected or at a loss, thus continuing the same feelings that the battering relationship engendered. Gondolf and Fisher (1988) suggested that domestic violence programs suffer from "learned helplessness" because they have been ineffective in coordinating services and informing survivors about their services. They found that women were resourceful in contacting a variety of potential resources but often received inadequate responses. When Jaffe, Hastings, Reitzel, and Austin (1993) asked ninety victims of wife assault how they felt about police responses, "the most common suggestion made for improvements was a general request for more information on court process and community service" (p. 81). Davis and Srinivasan's (1995) study of what helped women get out of violent relationships also emphasized the importance of giving survivors information about available resources.

Ferraro and Pope (1993) applied their knowledge of relational theory to their observations of police and their interviews with battered women. They concluded that differences between the "cultures" of battered women and of the police could also reinforce women's sense of disconnection from the legal system. Most battered women come from "a culture of relationships," in which the importance of maintaining family relationships leads to situations in which women make decisions based on compromises, not on calculation of what is best for them. To be effective, those who attempt to help survivors of battering should work within the

context of the culture of relationships rather than within the culture of autonomy, power, rationality, and “facts” that generally pervades the legal system now.

While many programs across the country provide advocacy services, there is a lack of agreement on what advocacy is (Edleson, 1993). The scarce research on advocacy suggests that advocates can fill an important need when they provide information within supportive relationships with survivors (Cahn, 1992; Lyon & Mace, 1991; The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 1990). Outreach by advocates “often facilitates victim participation in and commitment to the criminal justice process” (Hart, 1993, p. 630). Advocates can help women learn about their legal options “within a context that is supportive” (Hart, 1993, p. 630). Finn’s (1991) study of the protective orders described how “advocates may have a better understanding of battering issues and battered women, greater ability to communicate with victims, a greater tendency to take the violence seriously, and more knowledge of the law than attorneys who handle only one or two cases a year” (p. 178). Research in DuPage County, Illinois, indicated that when battered women received advocacy services and protective orders, it was more likely that prosecuted abusers would be found guilty (Weisz, Dolman, & Bennett, in press). Women who received advocacy were more likely to call the police, and these calls were more likely to result in arrest.

A study of women who received broad, intensive advocacy services when they were leaving a shelter showed that the women who received advocacy services were more effective in achieving their goals than those who did not receive advocacy services (Sullivan, Tan, Basta, Rumpitz, & Davidson II, 1992). Fischer’s research (1992) on women getting protective orders indicated that most of the women were satisfied with the help they received from advocates in getting the orders. The women rated information and support as important contributors to their satisfaction with the orders.

To summarize, there is a stark contrast between relational theorists’ descriptions of how relationships can empower women and the relational situations of many women who are in violent relationships. This contrast indicates that advocates who help survivors of battering within a context of relationship and connection can fulfill a vital need. Having someone with them physically or emotionally can help survivors accept and act on information that is provided. Because of this support, some women follow through with legal actions, such as getting protective orders and testifying in the prosecution of batterers. While the scarce literature is beginning to show that legal advocacy relationships can be empowering when they meet the need for connectedness and information, this literature has rarely been informed by the voices of survivors or of advocates.

Also, while the literature often refers to battered women as “victims,” the women who were interviewed for this article are clearly “survivors” who made it through experiences of abuse and were able to share their perspectives. Therefore, this article shares parts of survivors’ stories. It also allows us to hear from advocates who have had the experience of hearing and participating in numerous survivor stories. Through these stories, I use the lens of relational development to examine whether survivors’ relationships with advocates become important relationships within which women experience strength and clarity with respect to taking legal action against abusers.

Methods

This study used open-ended interviews and focus groups to understand advocates' and survivors' views of advocacy and of women's needs within legal situations. The article is based on a study of services for battered women in DuPage County, Illinois. The county, located just west of Chicago, is the second most prosperous county in the state (Bryan et al., 1992). The DuPage County Domestic Violence Protocol, instituted in 1989, provides for mandatory arrest of batterers with probable cause, no-drop prosecution, and frequent use of courtordered treatment for batterers. The protocol also calls for active outreach and support of victims. Advocates contact victims following a police intervention at their house, whether or not there was an arrest. The advocates offer support, give women information about the legal system, and inform them about counseling and advocacy services. Advocates assist women in obtaining protective orders and give support during prosecution of batterers. Under the protocol, the staff of Family Shelter Service (FSS), a nonprofit agency that has been serving battered women in the county since 1976, provides advocacy services. This study defines advocacy as the services that are provided by FSS staff who are labeled as "advocates" and by FSS counselors who provide physical and emotional support for clients during legal proceedings.

I conducted all of the interviews and focus groups with the exception of two survivors' interviews that were conducted by a student assistant under my close supervision. I brought twelve years' of post-masters' experience as a social worker to the interviewing task, so I had skills in building rapport with individuals and in leading groups. I also had substantial clinical experience working individually with domestic violence survivors. Survivors seemed to respond very well to the interviews. I was also successful in eliciting lively discussion with the FSS staff in the focus groups.

Sample

For this study, I recruited potential interviewees at an annual event in 1994 where FSS distributed free toys for Christmas. About one hundred women agreed to be contacted for more information about the study. I randomly selected and contacted twenty-three women and set up appointments with the first seventeen who were willing to participate. Six women who made appointments for interviews canceled them or did not come for the interview. I obtained informed consent and completed eleven interviews (including the two done by a student assistant). Six were done in person, and five were done by phone according to the interviewees' preferences. When we did the interviews in person, the women read and signed the consent form, which was approved by the University's Human Subjects review board. For phone interviews, we read the complete consent form to interviewees, and they agreed to participate.

Interview Sample

The interviewees were between twenty-seven and forty-five years old. Two of them were African American, one was Puerto Rican, and the others were nonHispanic or white. Eight were married to their abusers during most of the abusive incidents they described, and three were in an intimate nonmarried relationship. At the time of the interviews, two of the women were married and planned to remain married to the men who abused them. Two women were in the process of

getting divorced from their abusers; four were already divorced. All of the women had children, and the number of children ranged from one to four. Four of the women worked full-time outside the home, and two worked part-time. The two women who worked part-time had professional training. The others worked in blue-collar or office jobs. Five women were not working outside the home.

Survivor Interview Format

The interviews were based on a flexible interview guide. A relatively free style of interviewing was used to allow the women to tell their own stories and to emphasize aspects that they viewed as important. The open-ended questions asked them to describe their experiences with the police, with seeking protective orders, and with the prosecution of batterers. The interviews also asked about their experiences in seeking and receiving help from FSS. The women were also asked to give advice to police, judges, attorneys, and advocates about how to improve services for survivors of battering.

Finally, the survivors were asked how they felt about the interview. They were consistently positive in their responses. Almost all of the interviewees noted that they wanted to tell their stories if the stories could be used to help other women avoid the pain of abuse.

I gave the women ten dollars as a thank-you for their time, and I gave them my phone number in case they had further concerns or comments. The interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to two hours and were audio taped and transcribed. Focus Group Format

I also conducted three focus groups with FSS staff. The first group consisted of three advocates, and the second group consisted of seven shelter workers and the program director. The group of advocates was recruited by setting an appointment with the coordinator of advocacy for the program and asking her to invite any advocates who were available. The coordinator and two advocates were able to attend. I held another focus group with shelter staff because they were involved with the daily life of the battered women and with taking police reports and accompanying their clients to court. I held this focus group after shelter staff meetings so most of the shelter staff were present. At each of these focus groups, I asked open-ended questions about the staff's views on the goals of advocacy, their experiences in court, and about coordination of their services with police, attorneys, and judges. The questions related to the staff's direct observations and to stories they had heard from survivors.

About four months after the interviews with survivors, I held another focus group with six FSS staff members. This group included the agency director, the program director, counselors, and advocates. The attendees were invited by the program director to attend, and all of the advocates who were present in the office at the time did attend. During this meeting, we discussed possible interpretations and implications of data I had already gathered. I asked the staff for their views on quantitative and qualitative data I had gathered, especially focusing on whether FSS services encouraged survivors to seek protective orders and follow through with prosecution.

Data analysis

The interviews and focus groups were audiotaped. The tapes were transcribed and typed into a Hypercard file. This file enabled me to sort statements by topic and also to apply multiple codes to the same statement. I then categorized statements according to topics such as: definitions of abuse, calling police, police and advocate helpfulness, protective orders, prosecution, advice to criminal justice professionals and advocates, etc. Later, I applied a second set of coding categories to the data, this coded responses according to whether they addressed relational or informational themes.

Since the interviewees were recruited with help from FSS, the sample is biased in favor of survivors who chose to maintain a connection with FSS. The interviewees may have viewed me as being connected to FSS even though I told them that I was not employed there. In addition, all of the interviewees apparently needed free toys for their children for Christmas. This biased the interview sample toward parents of lower socioeconomic status. All of the respondents had telephones, and all described themselves as currently free of abuse.

Findings

I sorted the data by paragraphs according to whether the content was primarily about survivors' interactions with police or the courts. Analysis of the data revealed that most of the interactions between battered women and FSS staff involved the staff's provision of information within the context of an emotionally supportive relationship. First, I will present data that shows how the advocates provided information and emotional support in interwoven ways in relation to survivors interactions with the police. Next, I will show how these elements continued to be intertwined in advocacy regarding the courts. This approach represents one of many organizational schemes that could have been applied to the data. I chose it because it focuses on a major theme in the interviews, addresses the literature calling for services that provide information and emotional support, and shows how services to women can operate within a relational culture.

Advocates and Survivors: Interactions with Police Advocates provided survivors with information regarding definitions of illegal behavior and appropriate times to call the police. They also provided emotional support when survivors were hesitant about calling the police. Before their contacts with FSS, only two of the interviewees recognized that they were being abused and that it was wrong:

I didn't think of it as abuse, because I always thought abuse was really where you had broken bones and beat up . . . and [I thought that] if I did say something wrong he had a right to hit me.... He had the right, because I pushed the wrong button. Now I know differently. FSS staff noted that many women do not know that pushing, shoving, and slapping are illegal. Therefore, a major thrust of outreach by advocates consisted of telling victims that these behaviors are illegal and that they have the right to seek help from police when they occur

In relating the history of the abuse they experienced, several women described fears that initially prevented them from calling the police. Said one woman: I was afraid. What would the

neighbors say, and what would they think? I guess I was afraid of the outcome. It would be out of my control, and it would happen too fast. Another response:

[In] a few of my sessions [at FSS] they would say that the police are there to help you; by law they're supposed to help you. So it felt more secure knowing that they are there to help, and it was very helpful. A third woman:

They told me I should (call the police), because, even if they didn't do anything, at least it would be documented that this was not all in your mind, that this was here.

Women were also afraid that the abuser would seek revenge if they sought legal help.

Several interviewees described situations when they did not know what to expect from the police. FSS advocates responded to this lack of information by telling battered women of their legal rights and how the police are supposed to respond. Advocates believe that their services help clients so that they "know how to handle the system" better and "can present themselves better to the police officer." They talk with women about how to be assertive with police officers. Five of the survivors noted that their discussion with FSS staff had affected their behavior with the police:

. . . Then I talked to one of the counselors here [at FSS], and she said. . . "call the police, have him arrested, get him on file, and show the police what [injuries] you have and let them take pictures of you." . . . So I started thinking about what this agency told me, and that's what even gave me more incentive to this. Before I was kind of like scared about doing these things. Another respondent added:

In one of the counseling groups, they said "Well, if things escalate, you should call the police." So I called the police. Yet another:

They told me, "just call." I call them [FSS]. They say "call. If you feel you are threatened in any way, you have that [protective] order. You just call."

Advocates also encouraged the women to press charges against abusers if the officers do not press charges themselves. Several women mentioned the importance of being able to call FSS at any time for support when they were fearful or experiencing doubts about actions they had taken against abusers. Advocates and Survivors: Interactions with Courts FSS advocates give women information on protective orders and prosecution and provide emotional support during stressful court appearances. The agency has a goal of informing all clients about the availability of protective orders. In describing the type of emotional support the agency tries to provide for women going to court, the FSS program director said that "we want to give them the message that they don't have to go it alone."

Protective Orders

Many women do not know that protective orders exist, and they do not know how to get them. Some interviewees described how the police were inconsistent in giving them information about

protective orders. Two women noted that they were too upset during the police visit to absorb the information the police gave them about protective orders. However, they were later able to absorb information from advocates.

FSS staff explained that most of the women who come into the shelter get protective orders because the staff gives them information about how to use the orders to counter batterers' threats.

If they've made a decision to leave, usually that's when it gets the worst for them, or if they have children, that gives them temporary custody. . . So he can't threaten the kidnapping and the abduction, which is usually what keeps the women at home until they call us up and say, "He told me I can't leave because I'll be charged with kidnapping." And we say "That's not true . . . but if you want temporary custody you need that order."

This example shows that advocates' provision of information can substantially affect women's decisions, such as by helping them feel that they can leave their abusers and retain custody of their children.

Once women decide to get protective orders, advocates accompany them through all the steps of getting the orders. Survivors reported that they were often feeling very vulnerable when they went to the court for orders. While seeking a permanent protective order, a woman usually must face the abuser. In addition to the frightening memories of previous abuse that she may have, her abuser may be overtly threatening in court. She is dealing with unknown procedures, and she may have already received unsatisfactory treatment from other authority figures, such as the police. She must tell parts of the story of the abuse in public, and she risks being disbelieved by the judge. Women's comments about these obstacles illustrated their fears.

I was so nervous when he walked into that courtroom, I felt like I was going to throw up, and he [the abuser] knew he could make me feel that way. Another comment:

It was kind of scary, because this was the first time. I didn't know what I was doing. It was all Greek to me – what I was getting into and wanting to make sure I'm doing the right thing. Yet at the same time, I didn't want to push any buttons, because you know how they always threaten you. They always go "Oh we're going to do this if you do this to us." So I always had that in my mind that he was gonna come jumping out of bushes or do something to me. Some survivors talked about how helpful it was to have an advocate with them.

From the first moment she [the advocate] talked to me, I knew I had a friend, someone who was in my corner. . . That makes all the difference in the world when you're going in that courtroom to face the person who has beat you like a dog, abused you, cursed you, tried to strip your sanity away from you.

A shelter staff member shared her experiences of going to court with women to extend their orders of protection.

It's humiliating to watch a woman who tries to be so strong, and he walks in most of the time with an attorney. And she's there by herself, and she has to stand in front of a judge. And his

attorney is going to look down on her first of all and then ask her these questions, and she's like [quiet voice] "Well, I need some money for the kids." It's really humiliating. . . It can be unsafe. I mean you're like running . . . you have to get out of the building before he's let out of court, and you have to get out of the court parking lot before he comes and gets in his car. Or they have to restrain him . . . to me it's a circus. Clearly, accompanying survivors to court created a great deal of empathy in this FSS staff member and caused her to fear for her own safety, as well as for the survivor's safety.

When women get protective orders, they do not always understand what all the remedies mean. Two interviewees mentioned being confused about the remedies. FSS staff tell women which behaviors are illegal and encourage them to call police for violations of orders. They also tell women that the legal system seems to respond better to women who have orders.

Prosecution

Several of the women whose partners were prosecuted noted that they received very little information about the trial from the police or the state's attorneys. Sometimes they were not given much notice about trial dates and were not informed about case continuances. While two women said that the state's attorneys were very supportive, several others complained that they were distant and seemed uninterested in hearing what had happened to the survivor.

An FSS staff member described how advocates give women an idea of what will happen in court and of what the consequences of a successful prosecution might be. I think preparing them for what's gonna happen in court kind of takes away the fear of the unknown – gives them a good idea of what could happen if he's found guilty – that he's not gonna go to prison for five years or something. I think that makes them much more willing to go through it if they know that the chances are stronger that he's going to get counseling or something rather than go to jail. . . They feel guilty. It's like "I got him arrested" rather than "He got himself arrested."

This comment shows the advocate's awareness of some survivors' guilt and confusion about prosecution. Advocates explain that the state's attorney is pressing charges, not the survivor. They also tell women that batterers who are found guilty usually "get help" by being sent to treatment and that they probably will not go to jail or lose their jobs or their houses.

One interviewee, who later did testify against her abuser, described how he had previously influenced her to avoid testifying by threatening to withhold her only source of income. Another woman spoke poignantly about how it felt to testify in court. That little stretch of hallway [to the courtroom] is like a long two- or three-mile walk, because the closer you get to the courtroom that you're going to, you have shortness of breath. . . You're going to have to relive that incident, that abuse. . . You're going to have to tell it. You're going to have to see the abuser. It's a big mental and physical setback to go, and you have to have the courage to do it. . . I was very afraid. There were times I went through anger, intense anger, but once again I had [FSS advocate] there. I had her to hold my hand, to acknowledge "I know you're very angry inside." There was times I sat there and I cried. . . All these emotions I went through, they would have been more intense and more worse than they were had I not had someone there talking me through it. Several other

interviewees mentioned the importance of having an advocate there to support them during prosecution of their abuser

The advocates' empathic approach enables them to understand how initial help-seeking attempts can become so frustrating for survivors that they sometimes try to avoid seeking further legal help. One FSS staff member commented that some women feel "tortured" by going to court, especially when trials are repeatedly postponed.

An advocate summarized how she views herself as an ally of the survivor:

You know going through the court system can be terrifying, but it can be very, very empowering if the system is on your side. And once they realize that . . . They're now faced with the abuser, but they've got the system on their side. That's very empowering. It can be a wonderful experience; it can be the first time that you've ever felt that empowerment, because you've got all these people supporting you. But without that, forget it; she's not a match for him. This advocate's empathy is reflected in her comments. She views the experience of entering the courtroom with allies as one that can change a woman's feelings about herself.

When Advocates Disappointed Survivors

Four of the survivors described incidents when the advocates' help seemed to be inadequate. One survivor noted that while some FSS staff were people she would never forget, there were "some who maybe didn't put so much thought into it." Two survivors were frustrated by situations when advocates failed to give them all of the information they needed. For example, one woman was very distressed that her advocate did not tell her that her statement on the petition for a protective order could later be used against her in court. The advocate also failed to help her understand that there was a criminal case pending against the abuser in addition to her civil request for a protective order. Another interviewee described how an advocate forgot to tell her that she needed to bring her police report with her in order to file charges. As a result, she had to go all the way home to get it.

Other Relational Issues Affecting Survivors' Decisions

Of course, survivors' relationships with batterers are essential relational aspects of their situations, but these relationships cannot be discussed adequately in this article. In addition, the interviewees often spontaneously mentioned another important type of relationship – relationships with their children. Survivors reported that concerns about their children either influenced them to stay in violent relationships or take steps to get out of their relationships.

Three survivors described how they stayed in the relationship because they thought it would protect their children. One woman stayed because she feared a divorce would allow her erratic husband unsupervised visitation. Two other women said that they felt guilty for taking their children's fathers away. They noted that when the abusers were forced to leave, their children were upset and missed their fathers. One woman, who was concerned about her daughter missing the abuser, also said that she remained in the marriage because she did not want to upset her elderly parents. Several interviewees described how they took legal action to protect their

children. Five mentioned that they got protective orders at least partly to protect their children. Two women emphasized their concern that their daughters might imitate them by choosing an abusive partner or allowing a man to abuse them. One woman left her partner after her son began to imitate his father by being abusive toward her.

By asking the survivors how they felt about the interview, I learned about another relational aspect of their feelings. Each woman said that she was happy to do the interview if it would help other women in the same situation. In addition, several women said that they would eventually like to do volunteer advocacy with battered women. These comments suggest that the survivors experienced a connection with other battered women. They might have also wanted to model themselves after the advocates who helped them.

Relational Issues Affecting the Advocates

The other side of the advocate/survivor relationship is the advocate, and the interviews revealed the advocates' empathy for survivors. First, the advocates frequently mentioned their frustrations with the criminal justice system. Their intense expressions of frustration showed their empathy with those survivors who got unsatisfactory results from the criminal justice system. One survivor noticed the advocates' frustration and empathy when she described how they were shocked and upset when a judge would not grant her a protective order.

Advocates described how women often do not want their partners arrested because they know the police will not hold them very long. Advocates have heard stories from survivors whose abusers returned a few hours after an arrest and beat the women even more intensely because of the arrest. The advocates also have heard survivors' stories about abusers who succeeded in using the county's domestic violence protocol against survivors. For example, abusers sometimes get protective orders against survivors for "violence" when the survivor only acted in self-defense. Advocates were also aware of many times when survivors followed through with prosecution only to find that it did not seem to result in any meaningful consequences for the abuser. One advocate summarized her observations of survivors' interactions with the legal system, by saying: "I think a lot of people feel tortured by the system and they don't want to go through it again."

Discussion

These survivors' and advocates' stories illustrate how advocacy is successful when it includes empathic relationships and empowerment through information. The stories also show that advocates can have a powerful influence on survivors that contributes to the survivors' increased participation in the legal system. The women who felt supported followed through with getting protective orders, calling the police, and testifying for the prosecution.

The interviews illustrated how some survivors were confused and full of self-doubt when deciding whether to call the police, get protective orders, or participate in prosecution. They were also influenced by their "relational culture," which manifested itself in concerns about protecting the welfare of their families (Ferraro & Pope, 1993). Their confusion and their concerns for their children helped to keep them in subordinate positions within violent

relationships and made it difficult to take legal actions against batterers. Therefore, the survivors needed a very potent form of help. The survivors' stories indicate their appreciation for advocates who were "there" for them physically or by telephone. Both advocates and survivors described a strong sense of connection between them during some stressful encounters with the legal system. In many of the situations discussed by the interviewees, active outreach from advocates provided information that women did not receive or could not absorb from anyone else. The interviews with survivors suggest that advocates were often persuasive because they were meeting some of the survivors' relational needs. At times, advocates affected how women used police services, their feelings and actions regarding getting personal protective orders, and their participation in prosecution.

The advocates tried to let the women decide what was best for themselves. However, survivors have little power over mandatory arrest, over whether a judge grants a protective order, over the nature of protective order remedies, over the continuation of prosecution, or over the sentences for batterers. When survivors do have choices, they are often hampered by their lack of knowledge about the legal system. A survivor might feel very alone when she faces the legal system without a supportive relationship with a knowledgeable advocate.

Advocates' empathy showed them that the survivors' choices within the legal system are far from ideal. FSS staff members were aware of times when the police and the courts provided excellent services for battered women. However, they were also keenly aware of the legal system's limitations. The staff members were often in the position of encouraging women to make maximum use of the criminal justice system in spite of limitations.

When survivors feel that they are struggling alone to cope with their confusing and powerful attachments to their partners and children, as well as to cope with the confusing and powerful legal system, an advocate can be a very powerful ally. Advocates provide physical presence, empathy, and vital information. This model of active outreach, physical accompaniment, and support goes beyond the empathic presence that many therapists can offer during office-bound sessions.

This research suggests a number of questions for further research. One fruitful area would be to explore which survivors of domestic violence are most responsive to outreach and support from advocates. Another area of research is to examine whether other victims of crime who lack positive social support systems – need this type of outreach and physical presence from helpers so that they can cope better with the legal aftermath of the crime.

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