

Children as Weapons: Child Protection Responses to the Parenting of Men who Batter

by

Colleen MacPherson
B.A., Malaspina University-College, 2002

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Supervisory Committee

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Sibylle Artz, School of Child and Youth Care
Supervisor

Dr. Jennifer White, School of Child and Youth Care
Departmental Member

Abstract

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Dr. Sibylle Artz, School of Child and Youth Care
Supervisor

Dr. Jennifer White, School of Child and Youth Care
Departmental Member

Although there is extensive research on children's exposure to intimate partner violence and its impacts, there is very little information available with respect to how child protection workers assess the risks posed to children by the negative parenting associated with battering and how these workers intervene to protect children. This case study therefore sought to understand how child protection workers accounted for the parenting of men who batter in their assessments of child safety and in their service plans. It explores in detail how mothers and child protection workers conceptualize and describe the parenting attitudes and behaviours of the men who came to the attention of MCFD due to battering, how protection workers assessed children's safety in light of the parenting behaviours and examines the types of child welfare responses or interventions that were utilized in order to deal with these challenges. Results show that despite the level of understanding on the part of the child protection workers' with regard to the links between the perpetration of intimate partner violence and negative parenting approaches, these fathers' parenting was largely overlooked in the child safety assessment and service delivery plans. Thus, it is recommended that child welfare policies draw robust links between the perpetration of intimate partner violence and negative parenting approaches and provide child protection workers with the safety assessment tools and clear direction to assess the parenting behaviours of fathers who batter their children's mothers.

Keywords: *child protection, child welfare, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, battering, parenting of men who batter, interventions, child safety assessments.*

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my children Dieter, Brenna, and Tyler, who always inspire me to do better.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“The role of fathers has been described as the ‘missing piece’ in family violence literature” (Sternberg, 1997).

Research has now widely acknowledged that children are harmed by exposure to battering (also termed domestic violence or intimate partner violence) against their mothers (Saunders, 1994; Hendry, 1998; Bancroft, 2002; Prinz & Feerick, 2003; Silverman, Mesh, Cuthbert, Slote, & Bancroft, 2004; Artz et al., 2014). Bancroft and Silverman (2002) and Silverman et al. (2004) described and defined battering as a pattern of coercive control of an intimate partner, punctuated by one or more acts of intimidating physical violence, sexual assault, or credible threat of physical violence. This pattern of control and intimidation may be predominantly psychological, economic, or sexual in nature or may rely, primarily, on the use of physical violence (Bancroft, 2002, 2010; Bancroft, Silverman, & Ritchie, 2011). I prefer the term “battering” over phrases such as “domestic violence”, “intimate partner violence”, or “violence against women” as it more accurately captures the repetitive pattern of violence and coercive control which is the context of violence against women in relationships rather than discrete incidents of violence. Gender neutral phrases such as such as “domestic violence” and “intimate partner violence” fail to identify that the overwhelming majority of victims of violence within relationships are female and the abusers male (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2016; Zerehi, 2016). Although I prefer the term “battering” I use it along with the phrases “domestic violence”, “intimate partner violence” (IPV), and “violence against women” throughout this thesis to reflect the language used in the literature. In this study I took male violence against women as my starting point and investigated how fathers who have battered the mothers of their

children function in their parental role from the perspective of mothers and child protection workers. When referencing fathers, I include any male taking a parental role, whether biological father, stepfather, or boyfriend who is or has been in an intimate partner relationship with the mother.

Females also sometimes engage in violent acts against their partners, whether male or female, but not at the significantly higher rates on record for males (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2016; Zerehi, 2016). Women's use of violence in heterosexual relationships usually occurs as a defensive or retaliatory response to actual or threatened violence by their male partners. Furthermore, women's use of violence in relationships often puts them at greater risk of more violence from their male partners (Flood, 1999; Swan, Gambone, Caldwell, Sullivan, & Snow, 2008). While a man's use of violence in an intimate partner relationship often results in power and control over the female partner, Pence and Dasguta (2006) suggested that it is uncommon for a woman to achieve dominance over a male partner by using violence. In 80% of domestic assaults, the victims are female and the offenders are male; women in heterosexual relationships have a 4.8 times greater risk of homicide at the hands of their partners than men do (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2016). Canada's General Social Survey (2014) found the severity of assaults on women to be much greater than those on men, with twice as many women reporting having been sexually assaulted, beaten, choked, or threatened with a gun or knife. The 1999 General Social Survey (Freda, 1999) found that women constituted 98% of spousal violence victims of sexual assault, kidnapping, or hostage taking. It is clear that women are victimized in greater numbers than men and experience more severe violence (Ministry of Children and Family Development [MCFD], 2014).

As previously stated, there is general recognition that children's exposure to violence, whether from directly witnessing it or being exposed to the aftermath, has negative impacts on them and their development. However, the harm done by the negative parenting of those who batter is less well understood within the child welfare field. The underlying dynamics of power, control, and entitlement, which are inherent in the battering of women, are the same dynamics that underlie the negative and harmful parenting attitudes and behaviours associated with battering parents (Saunders, 1994; Bancroft, 2002, 2010; Bancroft, Silverman, & Ritchie, 2011; Jaffe, 2014). Bancroft (2002) noted that the bulk of the literature on the effects of children's exposure to domestic violence speaks to the effects of children witnessing their mothers being assaulted and abused, but overlooks the parenting characteristics frequently found in men who batter and the detrimental impacts those characteristics have on children's well-being, their relationships with their mothers and siblings, and their social and moral development. Bancroft (2002) also stated that the effects on children of being exposed to both the violence of a batterer and to negative parenting can be long-lasting and may include the development of destructive attitudes and values that support or condone the use of violence in relationships as well as behavioural, academic, or employment problems. Artz and colleagues (2014) found such exposure can lead to mental health issues, problems with emotional and stress regulation, substance use and addiction issues, internalizing and externalizing behaviours, conduct disorders, crime and delinquency, and increased physical health problems and hospitalizations.

Bancroft (2002) showed that batterers misuse their parental role by undermining their partners' parenting and authority, reversing the caretaking role with the children (resulting in the batterers' emotional needs becoming paramount), and sowing seeds of division between family members (particularly between children and their mothers) to increase power and control and

escape accountability. He also noted that batterers use children as spies to report on the actions and whereabouts of the children's mothers and enlist the children in pressuring their mothers to remain in relationships with the batterers or refrain from reporting the assaults to the police (Saunders, 1994; Bancroft, 2002, 2010). Batterers may also pressure, coerce, or incite their children, especially adolescents, to use violence against their mothers, thus causing them even more injury, or to threaten the children themselves with violence and other harm (Bancroft, 2002, 2010; Bancroft, Silverman, & Ritchie, 2011). These tactics are clearly a means of further abusing and controlling their partners/ex-partners.

Jaffe (2002), Bancroft (2002, 2010), and Bancroft et al. (2011) have stated that speaking about "children exposed to batterers", rather than "children exposed to violence", more accurately reflects the complex ways in which a batterer's abusive and controlling behaviours permeate the fabric of daily life and family dynamics; it also underscores the batterer's accountability and responsibility.

Further to this, Jaffe (2002) stated that Bancroft and Silverman (2002) have shed light on the common misconception that trauma to children from domestic violence ends when the parents separate. In fact, the trauma often increases when batterers have less opportunity for direct contact with the victims/mothers, for example, during unsupervised access visits and custody and access disputes. This increased risk for exposure to trauma underlines the need for more, not fewer, child welfare interventions to ensure long-term safety of children.

Many in the literature have noted the absence of fathers in the child welfare process and in child welfare research has resulted in an over-focus on mothers (Sternberg, 1997; Scott, 2004; Strega, 2006; Strega et al., 2008). Scott (2004) pointed out that, "Intervention has the potential to

increase paternal accountability and responsibility” (p. 97). She also emphasized that current practices in this regard fall short:

Focusing protective service efforts and interventions on the mother-child relationship has indirectly allowed maltreating fathers to avoid dealing with the consequences of their abusive behaviour and its effects on children. It has also placed a greater burden on children’s mothers (p. 97).

In summary, the research cited in the foregoing indicates that IPV and the negative parenting behaviours of men who batter result in harm to children who experience them. Batterers’ undermining of children’s relationships with their mothers is particularly concerning for child protection workers as it is the quality of the relationship that children have with the non-offending parent that may, over time, mitigate any harmful effects from their exposure to violence (Bancroft, 2002, 2010; Stover, 2013). Although there is extensive research on children’s exposure to IPV and its impacts, there is very little information available with respect to how child protection workers assess the risks to children from the negative parenting associated with battering and the steps that must be taken to protect children from such risks. This study therefore sought to understand how child protection workers in one office in British Columbia (BC) account for the parenting of batterers during the workers’ child safety assessments and the resulting service plans. I examined in detail how mothers and child protection workers conceptualized and described the parenting attitudes and behaviours of the men who came to the attention of child protection workers due to battering, and how these protection workers assessed children’s safety in light of these parenting behaviours.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

“In domestic violence cases, this means that battering fathers are less likely to be assessed as undermining his partner’s basic care of the children and the stability of the household, interfering with children’s medical or mental health care, and attacking the relationship between the mother and the children. Therefore, when these behaviours manifest as a child’s disrespect for their mother or behavior and emotional issues, they will often lead to a case plan that is focused on the survivor’s parenting versus the batterer’s abuse” (Mandel, 2010).

Literature Search

In order to conduct a review of the literature regarding child welfare responses to the parenting of men who batter, I utilized several methods for retrieving the extant research on this topic. At the onset, with the help of a research librarian through Info Line Services at the University of Victoria, the following key words were chosen for the literature search: treatment* (or prevent* or counsel* or intervention* or program*) and father* and parenting (or childrearing) and “intimate partner violence” (or “partner abuse” or “spouse abuse” or batter*). Using these key words, in 2010 Info Line carried out a search in PsychInfo, Academic Search Complete, Social Work Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, ERIC, Cinahl, Health Source: Nursing, Medline, WorldCat, Dissertations and Theses (PQDT), and Google Scholar. I repeated the search in 2013/2014 using the terms and data bases listed above as well as a search using the University of Victoria’s search tool Summons 2.0. In addition, I conducted a search of articles and resources I have accumulated through my practice as a child and youth care worker practising child protection in the province of BC.

I reviewed the abstracts of the articles, books, and government publications that the literature searches returned and selected the most relevant for inclusion in the review. In many cases, I was able to identify additional articles to be included by reviewing the reference lists of

the relevant articles. Once these steps were completed I categorized the articles, books, and government publications by topic, removed the least relevant, and began reviewing the chosen literature in greater detail. Through a process of constant comparison, while reading the literature, I noted similarities among and differences between particular topics and from these formulated the categories for this chapter. These categories are: conceptualizations of the parenting of men who batter; the overlap between child abuse and IPV; fathers' groups relating to rights, responsibility, or involvement; recommendations for assessing, responding, and intervening, including parenting-after-violence groups and supervised access; policy recommendations; and finally, suggestions for further research.

In many families where domestic violence occurs, children witness the degradation and violation of one parent by another and subsequently become an instrument through which the aggressor seeks to maintain power over the victim (Edleson & Williams, 2007; Bancroft, 2010; Olofsson, Lindqvist, Gådin, Bråbäck, & Danielsson, 2011; Jaffe, 2014). Although there is a compelling body of research concerning the effects of exposure to domestic violence on children and a smaller body of research on how the negative parenting of batterers has damaging effects on children's wellbeing and development, including their relationships with their mothers (Bancroft, 2002, 2010; Jaffe, 2014), comparatively little attention has been given to how negative parenting by batterers can be effectively changed (Kulkarni, 2005). While the resulting issues related to battering or IPV are far reaching and complex, this study and literature review focuses specifically on battering fathers' destructive parenting and child protection workers' responses. Throughout this review of the literature, violence against women in intimate partner relationships is referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV), domestic violence, and battering to reflect the terminology used by particular authors.

Context for Child Welfare Responses

Eighty percent of domestic violence cases involve female victims of male perpetrators (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2016). Although men can also be victims of IPV, women are victimized in far greater numbers than men and experience more severe violence. Four times as many women as men reported to police being threatened or harmed; almost twice as many reported having a gun or knife used against them; and 5 times as many reported being choked (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2016; MCFD, 2014).

In British Columbia, violence against women in intimate partner relationships has long been recognized, by both policy and legislation, as posing a risk to children's safety and wellbeing (*Child, Family and Community Service Act*, RSBC, 1996). Additionally, *The Child, Family and Community Service Act* (CFCSA) was amended June 1, 2014 to include specific references to children being in need of protection if living in situations of domestic violence. Although the previous versions of the CFCSA afforded child protection workers in BC the latitude to intervene in families where domestic violence was present if there was evidence that a child was being or was at risk of being harmed, the amendment identified domestic violence as a specific form of child maltreatment much like physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect.

The research that I reviewed shows that children may be harmed by their exposure to violence against their mothers, or by being directly abused. As statistics indicate that over half (51%) of victims with children in the home self-reported that they believed the children had seen the spousal violence take place, it is easy to recognize the significant cost of such exposure to Canadian society (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2016). The domestic violence child welfare policy for BC, entitled *Best Practice Approaches: Child Protection and Violence Against Women* (MCFD, 2010), states:

There are common emotional and behavioural impacts that children and youth may develop in response to this exposure. Emotional and behavioural problems such as depression, worry, problems in school, withdrawal from social interactions, and aggression against peers, teachers and mother are seen at elevated rates (between 10 and 17 times greater) than in children and youth from non-violent homes (p. 22).

This policy also notes that about 30% to 40% of children and youth who witness abuse of their mothers are, themselves, directly physically abused (MCFD, 2010, 2014). The overlap between mother assault and child abuse is a significant concern for child welfare (Margolin, 2003; Jaffe & Crooks, 2007; White Starr, 2010; MacDonell, 2012). In addition, children and youth may be harmed by their exposure to their father's parenting (Bancroft, 2002, 2010; MCFD, 2010; Bancroft, Silverman, & Ritchie, 2011; Jaffe, 2014; MCFD, 2014).

As the legal system focuses primarily on interventions with IPV offenders, and the anti-violence sector on interventions with women, and to a lesser degree their children, child protection workers, according to their legal mandate, are in a unique position to offer interventions to the whole family (Alaggia, Jenney, Mazzuca, & Redmond, 2007). Alaggia et al. noted that child welfare workers have more opportunity than the legal system to intervene with violent fathers (2007). If child welfare interventions respond only to women's and children's immediate physical safety and the possibility of the children's future exposure to violence against their mothers without considering the risks attending the parenting of battering fathers, this may result in missed opportunities to engage fathers in the child welfare process and enhance children's safety and wellbeing (Brown, Callahan, Strega, Walmsley, & Dominelli, 2009; D'Cruz, 2002; Maxwell, Scourfield, Featherstone, Holland, & Tolman, 2012; Walmsley & Federation of Child and Family Services of BC, 2009).

Conceptualizations of Parenting

“The pattern of abusive and controlling behaviors that define the experience of domestic violence are antithetical to the tenets of efficacious parenting” (Cronholm et al., 2011).

As previously noted, research has widely acknowledged that children are harmed by exposure to violence against their mothers (Saunders, 1994; Hendry, 1998; Bancroft, 2002, 2010; Prinz & Feerick, 2003; Silverman, Mesh, Cuthbert, Slote, & Bancroft, 2004; Postmus & Merritt, 2010; Artz et al., 2014). A growing body of evidence indicates that children’s witnessing abuse and violence by their fathers toward their mothers is a form of emotional harm that constitutes child abuse (Saunders, 1994; Bancroft, 2002; Alaggia et al., 2007; MCFD, 2010, *CFCSA*, 2014). In addition to the harm that occurs from being exposed to domestic violence, there is a growing recognition within the literature that children are also harmed by the deficient parenting behaviours of men who batter their children’s mothers (Bancroft, 2002, 2010; Baker, Cunningham & Jaffe, 2004; Edleson & Williams, 2006; Groves, Van Horn, & Lieberman, 2007; Cunningham & Baker, 2007). These authors argued that the impact to children from being exposed to the batterer’s violence and parenting can be long-lasting. To increase his power and escape accountability, many in the literature have noted the batterer typically undermines the mother’s parenting and authority, reverses the caretaking role with children (resulting in his emotional needs being paramount), and sows seeds of division between family members (particularly between the children and their mother) (Baker, Cunningham & Jaffe, 2004; Bancroft & Silverman, 2004; Bancroft, 2012; Cunningham & Baker, 2007; Edleson & Williams, 2006; Groves, Van Horn, & Lieberman, 2007).

Groves, Van Horn, and Lieberman (2007) highlighted that what is most troubling about the literature confirming that violent fathers employ more negative parenting practices than non-violent fathers is the negative outcomes for children. They noted that these impacts do not cease

when parents separate. Many studies have shown that these negative parenting practices, including undermining the mother's parenting authority, actually increase after separation, particularly if the abuser is restrained from having direct contact with the mother; they can be seen as indirect attempts to further control the mother (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Baker, Cunningham & Jaffe, 2004; Cunningham & Baker, 2007; Groves, Van Horn, & Lieberman, 2007; Campbell, Gordon, Foster, 2008). Campbell, Gordon, and Foster (2008) also revealed that upon separation, many of these men use the children as go-betweens, asking them for information about their mothers or passing messages to the mothers through them (2008). Further, Bancroft and Silverman (2002) and Baker, Cunningham and Jaffe (2004) noted that many violent fathers directly interfere with mothers' attempts to provide structure and rules for the children; these fathers may also prevent mothers from comforting a distressed child or seeking medical care for an illness or injury, and may even go so far as to intentionally endanger their children. Jaffe, Johnson, Crooks and Bala (2008) pointed out that many children are either rejected and ignored by their violent fathers or alternatively made the favourite at the expense of their siblings; they may be encouraged to engage in morally corrupt or criminal behaviour.

Bancroft and Silverman (2002) also noted that the behavioural and attitudinal characteristics of many men who batter affect their parenting styles. Bancroft and Silverman found that the characteristics exhibited by these men in their relationships with their partners include: an overarching pattern of coercive control, a sense of entitlement, selfishness and self-centredness, a sense of superiority, possessiveness, confusion of love and abuse, engagement in psychological and social manipulation, contradictory statements and behaviours, externalization of responsibility, denial, minimization, and victim-blaming. As well, these researchers identified numerous parenting behaviours and attitudes that reflect the common characteristics of control,

entitlement and self-centeredness that lead to battering of mothers including rigid and controlling authoritarianism, under involvement, neglect, irresponsibility, selfishness, manipulateness, and the ability to perform appropriately as a parent under observation or in public. These characterizations of men who batter are supported by many other researchers (Baker, Cunningham & Jaffe, 2004; Cunningham & Baker, 2007; Edleson & Williams, 2007; Groves, Van Horn, Lieberman, 2007; Jaffe, Johnson, Crooks and Bala (2008); Scott & Lishak, 2012;). Groves, Van Horn and Lieberman (2007) observed that men who batter also display more negative affect toward their children and demonstrate less warmth, nurturance, and support than do non-violent fathers.

Bancroft and Silverman (2002) noted that the self-centredness of many fathers who batter includes an intolerance of children's needs and emotions and an expectation that the children will meet their fathers' needs, thereby reversing the caretaking role. In a longitudinal study of 74 families, Maliken and Fainsilber Katz (2013) confirmed that, because violent men react to their own vulnerable feelings with aggression, punishment, or dismissal, if they become aware of their children's sadness or fear they will be dismissive or punitive toward their children rather than supportive, resulting in poorer social and behavioural adjustment in their children.

Cunningham and Baker (2007) recorded that in some instances a child will become the abuser's ally within the family and may take up the abuser's role when he is absent, including using violence against the mother (Bancroft, 2002, 2010). In addition, some children become the father's scapegoat, and are blamed for "triggering" the abuser or for all the family's problems (Cunningham & Baker, 2007). In the same vein, Peled (2000) noted that although children may empathize with the pain and suffering of their abused mother, siding with the person who has the most power and control in the family can be attractive as well.

The manipulative behaviours of the fathers may create confusion in their children regarding the nature of the abuse in the home, leading children to blame either their mothers or themselves for the abuse (Bancroft, 2010). In a study by Bancroft and Silverman (2002), women expressed concern that batterers' manipulation of their children often increased after separation; manipulation that included the children being used as spies to report on the actions and whereabouts of their mothers. These manipulations often resulted in the children experiencing loyalty conflicts (Bancroft, 2002, 2010; Saunders, 1994; Edleson & Williams, 2007).

Having documented that men who batter display similar behavioural and attitudinal characteristics to both their partners and their children, Bancroft and Silverman (2002) also pointed out that the men's parenting characteristics are not as consistent as the behaviours and attitudes they exhibit to their partners. As an example, they noted that a portion of men who batter are fairly dependable in showing kindness to their children, but no batterer is dependable in showing respect to his partner. Despite the spectrum of parenting behaviours exhibited by men who batter, Bancroft and Silverman (2002) remarked that they cannot say that any batterer is a fully responsible parent as the batterer's abuse of his children's mother has damaging effects on the children and should be seen as reflecting deficiencies in his parenting.

While some researchers have found that the negative parenting of men who batter can be understood as intentional and strategic attempts to maintain power and control over their partners (Bancroft, 2010; Jaffe, 2014), there are others who have suggested that many men may not be aware of or understand the negative impacts of their behaviour upon their children (Maxell et al, 2012; Crooks, Scott, Francis, Kelly, Reid, 2006; Salisbury, 2009). Furthermore, Peled and Peled (2007) stated that the negative characterizations found in the literature of the fathering practices of men who batter are one-dimensional and lacking in the expressions of vulnerability, distress,

and yearning for closer relationships with their children expressed by many of the men who participated in their research. These authors also stated that although our current understanding of the deficits in the parenting practices of men who batter may be instructive with respect to supporting and protecting adult female victims and children, it does little to advance our ability to understand these battering fathers or provide opportunities for us to engage with them and promote changes in their behaviour. Peled and Peled (2007) further asserted that interventions that seek to improve the parenting approaches of these men must empathize with their experiences and vulnerabilities while simultaneously repudiating their use of violence.

The Links between Parenting and Child Safety: Child Abuse and IPV Overlap

MacDonnell (2012) noted that although the consequences of childhood maltreatment have been thoroughly documented in the literature, exploration of the overlap between IPV and child abuse and neglect did not begin until the 1980s, when it was recognized that both were part of the same dynamic of family violence. The negative impacts of witnessing IPV and the combined or additive impacts of witnessing IPV and experiencing child abuse and neglect, have been noted in the literature as having harmful effects throughout childhood and into adulthood, including issues related to physical, mental and neurological health, conduct and behavioural problems including delinquency, crime and victimization, and educational and employment outcomes (Hughes, Parkinson, & Vargo, 1989; MacDonnell, 2012; Artz et al., 2014).

Although there are conflicting statistics in the literature regarding the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child maltreatment, it is clear many times when an adult in a family is being abused, children are also victims (Edleson, 1999; McDonnell, 2012; Artz et al., 2014). Edleson (1999) wrote that between one third and one half of children who reside with their mothers in battered women's shelters are also victims of physical abuse.

White Starr (2010) remarked that the American Psychological Association has estimated that 40% to 70% of men who frequently use violence against their partners also abuse their children. MacDonell (2012), Margolin (2003), and Jaffe and Crooks (2007) took note of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence's 2007 finding that 30% to 60% of IPV perpetrators also abuse the children in the household. Bancroft and Silverman (2002) found that 49% to 70% of batterers physically abuse their children as compared with 7% of non-battering men; children of batterers also have an increased risk of being psychologically and sexually abused by their fathers. Some batterers are capable of extreme emotional and psychological cruelty toward their children without hitting or sexually abusing them (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002). These authors have also suggested that much of this mistreatment of children appears to be intended to harm, control, or intimidate their mothers. Still, Bancroft and Silverman have cautioned professionals against narrowly focusing on severe acts of abuse of children without examining the context of the surrounding tactics and behaviours of the abuser. The similarity in behavioural and attitudinal characteristics between batterers and fathers who sexually abuse their children suggests that the co-occurrence of the two types of violation may be rooted in a fundamental power orientation to family relationships by the offenders. This linkage speaks to Bancroft's and Silverman's (2002) finding that children, in particular girls, whose fathers are batterers are at significant risk of being sexually abused by their fathers, although their risk of being physically but non-sexually abused is higher still. In the same vein, it is noteworthy that Jaffe, Johnson, Crooks and Bala (2008) reported that boundary violations, including child sexual abuse, are more likely to be perpetrated by batterers, especially when substance abuse is involved.

In addition to the harm that children may experience from being exposed to domestic violence and abuse and neglect by their fathers, the parenting capacity of their mothers can be significantly impaired, resulting in the children's basic needs being unmet (Hendry, 1998). Margolin, Gordis, Medina and Oliver (2003) found that women who are victims of domestic violence are more likely to use coercive and less effective strategies for parental control, including punishment or disengagement. Margolin et al. also noted that battering may be detrimental to a woman's child rearing abilities. Their review of the available research on the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse found that being the victim of domestic violence may result in a state of hyperarousal, constricted emotions, irritability, and exhaustion, all of which can negatively influence a woman's parenting capacity. Along these same lines, Jaffe, Johnson, Crooks and Bala (2008) explained that the effects of prolonged abuse and violence may diminish mothers' parenting capacities due to anxiety, depression, substance misuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder. This apparent lack of parenting capacity can elicit questions by professionals and family courts about fitness to parent and make these women's parenting abilities a target of blame by abusive ex-partners.

In their research on the parenting of battered mothers, Margolin, Gordis, Medina and Oliver (2003), found that these mothers reported lower than average levels of structure and consistency in their relationships with their children, less encouragement of children's freedom of expression, less sensitivity, and greater reliance on authoritarian parenting strategies in the hope that the children would be well behaved and less likely to become the focus of a violent father. Edleson & Williams (2007) also documented difficulties in parenting for battered mothers, noting that mothers may alter their parenting strategies in the presence of their partners in attempts to mitigate the men's irritability or because of the violent fathers' undermining of

their authority. Thus, such mothers may overcompensate for violent fathers' parenting deficiencies by being either more harsh or permissive than they would otherwise be.

As Margolin et al. (2003) specified, although it is important not to ignore the data that suggests that women may utilize less structured, less sensitive, or more controlling parenting strategies, it is also important to not take these results out of context and use the information to further threaten or punish women and children living with domestic violence. The key is to offer appropriate assistance to women who are victims of domestic violence in ways that do not exacerbate children's exposure to less than optimal parenting. This notion is supported by Baker, Cunningham and Jaffe (2004) who identified that safety must be the first priority for professionals intervening in families experiencing domestic violence and that help with a woman's parenting should be provided only after safety has been addressed. Jaffe, Johnston, Crooks and Bala (2008) suggest that mothers who are victims of violence may need time and support to re-establish their competence as parents through opportunities to further develop their skills in nurturing and protecting their children. Specifically, they stated:

Time, protection, and support allow an adequate opportunity for a distinction to be made between the majority of victims of spousal abuse who are able to re-establish effective parenting, and the small minority of cases where the victim's mental health status will be chronic—a product of prior psychological problems and a history of repeated victimization in earlier relationships such that they cannot ever parent adequately (p. 504).

This echoes earlier work by Edleson (1999) who found that while many women experience a lessening of their caregiver capacity due to their experiences of victimization, it is often also the

case that mothers who have experienced domestic violence and are involved with child welfare are non-violent toward their children.

In discussing the dynamics of family-based conflict, aggression, and violence, Margolin, Gordis, Medina and Oliver (2003) reminded us that understanding the co-occurrence of various forms of family aggression is a complicated process that is likely to vary considerably depending on the samples used and the definitions of aggression used. This was also emphasized by Salisbury, Henning, and Holdford (2009) who suggested that because the research continues to confirm the high prevalence of co-occurring domestic violence and child abuse, assessments and interventions with families should be holistic; models of assessment and intervention that focus on just one form of aggression and ignore the complexity in which family violence occurs will have limited effectiveness.

With the overlap of harm in mind, White Starr (2010) suggested that there are connections between all forms of violence within families and that each of these forms must be addressed to end the violence. MacDonell (2012) pointed out that because there is research-based evidence of a significant and meaningful overlap between IPV and child abuse, when a family encounters child welfare for one of the issues, both should be assessed. Understanding the entangled nature of IPV and child abuse and neglect within the context of child protection shifts the focus from assessing the protectiveness of a parent who is a victim of IPV to assessing the level of risk a partner's abusive behaviour poses to both the children and their victimized parent (Health Quality and Safety Commission, 2015).

Fathers' Groups Relating to Rights, Responsibility, or Involvement

Many in the literature advocate for fathers' involvement in the lives of their children and in the child welfare process, whether they are part of the father involvement movement, the

fathers' rights movement, or from the responsible fatherhood groups (Areán, Rose, Connelly, McNamara, Parker, Burke, 2007; Brown et al., 2009; Cronholm et al., 2011; Edleson & Williams, 2007; Holden, 2010; Peled & Peled, 2007; Postmus & Merritt, 2010; Strega et al., 2008; Maxwell, Scourfield, Featherstone, Holland & Tolman, 2012; Walmsley & Federation of Child and Family Services of BC, 2009). Edleson and Williams (2007) contend that the growing movement to engage fathers and maximize their participation in their children's lives is a critical factor when considering the parenting practices of men who batter. However, they caution that despite the financial, emotional, and physical benefits to children that are extolled by the father involvement movement, there needs to be careful analysis of the complexities of domestic violence and the needs of families when involving fathers who have used violence. The goal should not be fatherhood at all costs (Edleson & Williams, 2007).

Many researchers have suggested that focusing on mothers in the child welfare process, and excluding abusive fathers, actually increases the risks and danger to mothers and children (Strega et al., 2008; Strega, Krane, Lapierre, Richardson, & Carlton, 2013). As Strega et al. (2008) noted, mothers, while being held solely responsible by child welfare systems for the care, nurturance, and protection of their children, are judged harshly when they are unable to protect their children from a violent partner. Too narrow a focus on mothers can result in "mother-blaming", particularly in situations involving domestic violence where the emphasis is placed on mothers to ensure their own and their children's safety with no acknowledgement that they are not the sources of the threats that they are expected to deal with (Brown et al., 2009). The outcome of this disproportionate focus on mothers in the child welfare process is that these women may be held solely responsible for mitigating the risks to the children from their partner's use of violence, while maltreating fathers avoid the consequences of their use of

violence and its impacts on the children (Walmsley & Federation of Child and Family Services of BC, 2009; Harne, 2011; Maxwell et al., 2012).

Scott and Crooks (2004) noted disagreements regarding whether or not fathers who maltreat their children, including those who expose their children to domestic violence, should be encouraged to take a continuing role in the lives of their children and stepchildren. They showed that while some advocate supporting those fathers who wish to improve their parenting, others call for little to no contact between domestically violent fathers and their children. With this in mind, Scott and Crooks argued that rather than automatically attempting to limit contact in difficult situations, there are numerous theoretical and practical reasons to intervene with abusive fathers; they posited that such intervention has the potential to increase paternal accountability and responsibility.

Scott and Crooks (2004) also point out that focusing the child welfare process and interventions exclusively on the mother–child relationship can result in limited resources for children’s care and inadequate risk assessment and management during the period of child welfare involvement. As most children maintain an emotional connection with their fathers, even in the face of such abuse, and wish for ongoing contact, Scott and Crooks argue that it may be in their best interest to “safely nurture a relationship between an abusive man and his children” (2004, p. 96).

As noted by Harne (2011), proponents of fathers’ rights further underline the importance of father involvement. However, while the father involvement movement and responsible fatherhood groups frame fatherhood in terms of responsibility to children and benefits to children and society, fathers’ rights groups frame father involvement only in terms of men’s rights (Brown et al., 2009; Edleson & Williams, 2007; Strega et al., 2008). The various father

involvement groups also differ in their views of IPV committed by men. While the father involvement movement and responsible fatherhood groups generally denounce men's use of violence, fathers' rights groups are generally unwilling to acknowledge that domestic violence is usually initiated by males. In fact, they argue that men are as likely to be as victimized by domestic violence as women are (Edleson & Williams, 2007). As Flood (2010) found, some fathers' rights groups assert that women routinely fabricate allegations of domestic violence with the aim of gaining an advantage in family court or to unjustifiably deny men contact with their children. Flood also found that when domestic violence is acknowledged by fathers' rights groups, it is characterized as marital discord with both parties sharing responsibility, rather than a systematic exercise in power and control. Pointing out that these claims have been refuted by four Australian studies, Flood concluded that:

... allegations are rarely made for tactical advantage, that false allegations are rare, that child abuse often takes place in families where there is domestic violence, that such allegations rarely result in the denial of parent contact, and that fathers are at least as likely to make false allegations (p. 336).

Groves, Van Horn, and Lieberman (2007) researched two programs offering therapeutic interventions to children who have witnessed violence, and noted that even though most mothers who left the relationship did so to protect themselves and their children, they agonized over denying their children relationships with their fathers. Tubbs and Williams (2006) remarked that most mothers, despite experiencing traumatic relationships with their children's fathers, believed that contact with fathers was necessary for their children's developmental and mental health needs. These authors stated that although many mothers took steps to increase children's safety while having contact with their fathers, most believed that the domestic violence directed toward

them was not transferable to their children. This reflects women's tensions about balancing their children's need for contact and safety when making decisions about their children's ongoing involvement with their fathers (Tubbs & Williams, 2006).

Although some children are afraid of their fathers and want no contact with them, many children, even those abused by their fathers, do want relationships with them (McMahon, Neville-Sorvilles, & Schubert, 2000). McMahon et al. questioned what it means when a child's need for a better relationship with his or her father or a father's desire to be a good parent is reduced to the issue of fathers' rights (2000), pointing out that the notion of fathers' rights in family relationships denotes ownership and entitlement and may reinforce the ownership and entitlement already operating within families experiencing domestic violence. Children's best interests may be better served by the development of family relationships that are based on equality and care; family relationships based on power and control may leave children in need of protection from those meant to care and nurture them (McMahon et al, 2000). Groves, Van Horn, and Lieberman (2007) have suggested that those tasked with making decisions for children must balance the tensions between recognising the harm done to children, the potential risk for further harm, and the children's desire for a relationship with their father.

Flood (2010) found that although most mothers were initially supportive of contact between their children and the children's fathers, few were able to secure safe arrangements, such as supervised access (Flood, 2010). In addition, mothers may not identify the fathers to child welfare child protection workers because they are afraid of losing their children, of a partner manipulating the child protection workers to believe the violence is the mothers' fault, or of being directed to leave the abuser in the mistaken belief that this course of action will be safer for the mother and her children (Postmus & Merritt, 2010; Harne, 2011). Separation actually

increases the risk of escalating violence and should not be recommended without first putting adequate safety measures in place (MacPherson, 2010; Harne, 2011).

Although it is widely recognized that both biological and social fathers have low levels of engagement with the child welfare process, there are many proactive practical measures that can be used to promote their involvement, such as visiting fathers in the home, providing support services during hours that accommodate working fathers' employment schedules, and emphasizing the importance of fathers' involvement to their children's wellbeing (Maxwell et al., 2012). However, fathers may be reluctant to become involved in the child welfare process for multiple reasons, such as doubt regarding their ability be good fathers; concern that involvement with child welfare may escalate problems with the criminal justice system, or that involvement will negatively impact relationships with new partners; and fear of losing custody of their children (Maxwell et al., 2012).

Erikson and Hester (2001) stated that despite the recognition of the gendered features of violence in intimate partner relationships, fatherhood is still to a large extent constructed as non-violent. With that in mind, Fox and Benson (2004) argued that until it can be shown convincingly that a father who has used violence poses no risk to children, advocating for his continued involvement or for family preservation policies may be premature. Crooks, Scott, Francis, Kelly, & Reid (2006) stated that facilitating healthier child–father relationships must be accomplished without compromising the safety of the children or their mothers.

Featherstone and Peckover (2007) argued that the view that all fathers contribute to their children's wellbeing overlooks the complexity of men's lives and the dangers they may pose. In addition, they have asserted that this simplistic view creates difficulties for practitioners who are required to have a positive attitude toward violence-perpetrating fathers while taking

responsibility for protecting children and their mothers from further violence and harm. Brown et al. (2009) noted that given the risks, feminist scholars understandably caution against wholesale involvement of fathers in the child welfare process for fear of perpetuating the longstanding issue of overlooking men's use of violence. Harne noted that although legislation recognises that exposing children to domestic violence is a form of child maltreatment, "there has been a strange silence in government policies in identifying and naming such fathers as abusers or in questioning their parenting" (2011, p. 1).

Recommendations for Assessing, Responding or Intervening

Baker, Cunningham, and Jaffe (2004) established that, from a historical perspective, domestic violence services have developed dramatically, with many innovative practices having been introduced. The first North American shelters for abused women opened their doors less than 30 years ago (p. 3). Since that time, Baker et al. (2004) noted, there has been a "clear commitment by all levels of government as well as the general public that domestic violence is a serious criminal and social problem" (p. 3). They continue:

... first and foremost, we must find effective ways to end domestic violence to eliminate the tragic toll of lives and human suffering associated with it. Second, successful interventions must address not only the needs of children but also their parents, who are the adult victims and perpetrators (p. 4).

Baker et al. (2004) further suggested that interventions that perceive children's needs as being independent from their parents' needs will fail to support and advance safety and healing.

Evaluation and Assessment

The mounting social and professional awareness of the negative effects on children from exposure to domestic violence has drawn attention to the need for effective tools for assessing risks to children from parents and guardians who abuse (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Baker, Cunningham, & Jaffe, 2004; Jaffe, 2014). Bancroft and Silverman (2002) argued that custody and visitation plans for men who have been abusive toward their spouses should take into account whether these batterers are likely to undermine the authority of the children's mothers, interfere with the mother-child relationship, or cause tension between siblings.

Given the debates in the research and the responsibility to victims to prevent further harm, risk assessment tools are particularly needed by child welfare personnel, custody evaluators and family courts, therapists, women's services, batterer intervention programs, and programs for children (Bancroft & Silverman, 2004). Jaffe (2014) asserted that:

Separating parents with a history of domestic violence need to receive appropriate screening and assessment on the nature of the violence, the impact of the violence on the adult victim and children, and the interventions required by the perpetrator before a safe parenting plan can be designed (p. 187).

Jaffe cautions professionals against prioritizing shared parenting arrangements without formulating an understanding of the dynamics of the domestic violence and a careful assessment of the risks to the victim and the children. He expresses concern that without both key independent actions, domestic violence victims may be forced into shared parenting for fear of being labelled hostile parents. Mothers who attempt to protect their children from harm and further exposure to domestic violence are often perceived as attempting to alienate the children from the father when in fact many studies have indicated that most mothers who are victims of

violence would prefer their children have ongoing and safe contact with their fathers believing it to be in their children's best interest (Araji, 2012; Elizabeth, Gavey, & Tolmie, 2010; Jaffe, 2014). Stover (2013) maintained that to yield the best outcomes for families, assessment tools that measure fathers' compatibility to treatment approaches must be developed. In addition, Stover indicated that although children's safety needs must be assessed and any attempts by the fathers to manipulate the children or the mother must be considered, excluding the fathers from treatment and their children's lives at best creates a patchwork approach to bringing an end to abuse.

Bancroft and Silverman (2004) proposed a comprehensive risk assessment model that they suggest is particularly useful for evaluating the post separation risks to children from their domestically violent fathers, with a caution to professionals to avoid assuming that children are safer once a couple has separated. Assessment of risk to children post-separation requires as much caution as when intervening with an intact family (Baker, Cuningham, & Jaffe, 2004). Bancroft and Silverman also suggested that an abuser's danger to children, while the couple is still residing together, may be offset "to some extent by their mother's ability to protect them" (2004, p. 102). They noted that factors such as the mother's strengths and abilities as a parent, and her ability to access supportive and legal resources for herself and her children, must be examined along with the risks posed by the offender in order to assess the mother's ability to protect herself and her children. In order for assessors to not fall into the trap of characterizing a victim as "failing to protect", Bancroft and Silverman cautioned that the assessment model that they proposed must be applied with "careful and compassionate assessment of the mother's protective capabilities and her willingness to work collaboratively with child protective personnel" (2004, p. 101-102).

Bancroft and Silverman's (2004) model of assessment guides evaluators/assessors to gather facts about the perpetrator's history of behaviour and attitudes from his partner, children, past partners, courts, police records, child welfare records, school personnel, and others with knowledge or experience of the family. The facts are evaluated after being sorted into 13 categories:

- level of physical danger to the mother;
- history of physical abuse toward the children;
- history of sexual abuse or boundary violations toward the children;
- level of psychological cruelty to the mother or the children;
- level of coercive or manipulative control exercised during the relationship;
- level of entitlement and self-centeredness;
- history of using the children as weapons, and undermining the mother's parenting;
- history of placing children at physical or emotional risk while abusing the mother;
- history of neglectful or severely under-involved parenting;
- refusal to accept the end of the relationship or to accept the mother's decision to begin a new relationship;
- level of risk for abduction of the children;
- substance abuse history; and
- mental health history.

Bancroft and Silverman (2004) suggested, as have others (e.g., Cory et al., 2008), that evaluators who are using their assessment model should pay careful attention to the knowledge and perceptions of the mother as failure to do so is the most common mistake made in domestic

violence risk assessments. With a comprehensive approach in mind, Bancroft and Silverman state that:

Evaluators need to be prepared to conceptualize each abuser's parenting as falling on a continuum, and use multiple sources of information to evaluate where on that continuum he appears to fall. It can be useful to think of three separate dimensions of risk as a perpetrator may be found to have one level of physical danger to his children, another level of sexual danger, and yet another of psychological danger (2004, p. 112).

As families often stay together even in the face of ongoing violence and children continue to have and want to have contact with the offending parent after separation, Baker, Cunningham and Jaffe (2004) point to the need to offer rehabilitation to fathers who perpetrate IPV, not only as spouses but also as parents.

Generic Parenting Programs vs. Parenting Programs for Men Who Use Domestic Violence

Crooks, Scott, Francis, Kelly, and Reid (2006) and Scott, Francis, Crooks, Paddon, and Wolfe (2007) have noted that batterer intervention programs (BIPs) have historically focused on men's relationships with their partners and women's and children's safety, but did not engage men in examinations of their parenting. Thus, BIPs alone are not sufficient to address the risks associated with battering fathers' parenting, child maltreatment, the men's experiences of being parented themselves, or the tactics and strategies that fathers may be using with their children to further control their mother. This gap is being addressed through interventions that focus on the parenting of men who use of domestic violence (Crooks et al., 2006; Scott et al., 2007).

Parenting programs for men who use domestic violence are based on a conceptual framework that advances the idea that parenting groups and visitation centers can help end

violence against women by using fatherhood as a leading approach to motivate men to change and to develop more empathy for their children and their children's experiences of the violence (Areán & Davis, 2006; Scott & Mederos, 2012).

Many parenting programs for men who use domestic violence are based on the principles of accountability and connection for men; holding men accountable for their use of violence and for the impacts of the violence on the children and their mothers; and building better connections between men and their children and between the children and their mothers (Areán et al., 2007). Peled and Peled (2007) took the stance that fathering interventions for men who batter must strike a balance between repudiating the men's use of violence and embracing and empathizing with their experiences and vulnerabilities, while consistently providing support and protection for the victims. Fathers have a profound impact on their children, for better or for worse, and can be supported, challenged compassionately, and held accountable to renounce their violence and repair the relationships with their children. However, continual careful assessment of their behaviour must occur, as some fathers may not succeed in making the necessary changes (Fleck-Henderson & Areán, 2004).

Parenting programs for men who use domestic violence, similar to BIPs, focus on women and children's safety and men's entitlement attitudes toward their partners (Scott et al., 2006; Campbell, Gordon, & Foster, 2008). These principles are extended in parenting programs for men who use domestic violence by also focusing on men's entitlement attitudes toward their children, the impact of violence on children, the men's experiences of being parented themselves, ways to support the mothers' parenting and the mother-child bond, and, finally, teaching the men to use reparative child-centered, versus neglectful or punitive, parenting (Government of Western Australia, 2013).

Parenting programs for men who use domestic violence use a holistic definition of domestic violence that encompasses coercive control toward all family members; child abuse and neglect and violence toward mothers are not viewed separately (Government of Connecticut, 2012). In comparison to parenting programs for men who use domestic violence, generic parenting groups focus primarily on child rearing and behaviour management strategies. This focus may result in increased attempts by these fathers to coercively control the children versus nurturing them. A referral to a generic parenting program may simply provide these fathers with information that can be twisted to further control and manipulate the children and undermine or criticise the mothers' parenting. More importantly, the focus on parenting issues rather than the fathers' use of violence may inadvertently endanger both the mothers and the children by allowing these fathers to avoid accountability for their use of violence and the impacts to the entire family (Government of Western Australia, 2013).

Supervised Visitation

Decisions about visitation can be complex and should consider the children's and their mothers' ongoing safety (Government of Connecticut, 2012). Bancroft and Silverman (2002) suggest that the central goal of supervised access in cases of IPV should be the safety and security of the children; additionally, the children's relationships with their siblings and their non-battering parent should be supported. Supervised visitation may ensure that children receive the benefits of ongoing and safe relationships with their fathers (Areán et al., 2007; Campbell et al., 2008; Jaffe et al, 2008).

Areán et al. (2007) suggested that although supervised visitation is a form of batterer accountability, demonstrated accountability for the use of IPV need not be a prerequisite for supervised visitation to begin or continue if contact is safe and in the best interests of the

children. Jaffe, Johnson, Crooks, & Bala (2008) recommended that supervised visitation be viewed as a transitional stage after which supervision is ceased or access is stopped altogether depending upon both the change demonstrated by the father and the child's adjustment.

When safe and appropriate, children's healing can be promoted by therapeutic and supportive conversations occurring between the parent and the children about why there is a need for the contact to be supervised (Areán et al., 2007). Campbell and colleagues (2008) have conceptualized supervision types as falling on a continuum from simple observation of the parent's conduct and interactions with the children, to supportive supervision where the supervisor offers parenting support to the parent, to therapeutic supervision conducted by a licensed mental health clinician.

Additionally, visitation that is supervised by a family member should be premised on the family member's acknowledgement of the batterer's violence without blaming the victim, and of concerns about the children's safety and risks (Government of Connecticut, 2012). Campbell et al. (2008) advise that all visitation supervisors, whether professional or family members, must understand the tactics used by many battering fathers to control and intimidate their ex-partners including using visiting times to control the lives of their ex-partners.

Policy Recommendations

The use of risk assessment tools for assessing the parenting of men who batter, the impacts to children, and the ongoing risk that battering fathers pose is a key recommendation. The assessments thus created should then be used to guide decisions regarding supervised visitation and attending parenting groups. Due to the evidence of a meaningful overlap between child maltreatment and IPV, social service policy needs to have a greater emphasis on assessing for both issues when families encounter social service agencies (MacDonell, 2012; Postmus &

Merritt, 2010). Also, parenting programs utilized by child protection agencies for families who are experiencing IPV should re-examine their procedures, policies, and curricula to ensure that the programs integrate information about IPV, with a focus on safety for adults and children (Schechter & Edelson, 1994).

Suggestions from the Literature for Further Research

Holden, Barker, Appel and Hazelwood (2010) contended that although children of men who use violence are at risk for behavioural problems and physical abuse, few studies have investigated the child-rearing behaviours of these fathers. They also noted that most studies that have investigated child rearing associated with domestic violence have focused on the quality of mothering as opposed to the quality of fathering. Fox and Benson (2004) noted that the “extensive research and clinical literature on family violence gives surprising little attention to the father role of men who batter their female partners” (p. 359). Salisbury (2009) found this gap in the research perplexing, considering the significant overlap between domestic violence and child abuse; she noted that the role of these men in the child abuse has been “grossly under-evaluated” (p. 233).

Fox and Benson (2004) and Holden et al. (2010) have emphasized the limitations of current studies regarding the parenting practices of men who use violence against their children’s mothers. Holden et al. pointed out that the current evidence is limited by its reliance on self-reports from mothers, and sampling from battered women’s shelters or child welfare agencies; conversely, other studies examined reports from fathers alone with no corroborating evidence from partners or the criminal justice system. Fox and Benson analyzed data from two waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) that had been completed in 1988 and 1994 respectively, along with data from the 1990 US Census, and published their findings in

2004. Fox & Benson found that when it came to the routine activities of parenting, family life, and time spent with children, data from the two waves revealed few differences between violent and nonviolent fathers. They point out that the NSFH data was a valuable resource for elucidating the broad outlines of marital violence as it affects family quality, stability, and child outcomes. However, they also note that their analysis of the data likely minimized the effects of the more severe forms of domestic violence as they were unable to distinguish among the types of violent men and the violence used with these data. Fox and Benson concluded there is a need for more research using a variety of methodological approaches on fathering by men who use violence (2004).

Summary

Child welfare practitioners and government agents tasked with responding to battering or IPV need to develop a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of battering to prevent even greater harm to mothers and their children (Saunders, 1994; Hendry, 1998; Bancroft, 2002; Prinz & Feerick, 2003; Silverman et al., 2004). Saunders (1994) and Prinz and Feerick (2003) identified gaps in the literature regarding: evidence of intervention effectiveness; the impacts of IPV on parenting and family functioning; the role of child factors such as age in predicting developmental risks and resilience; medical and health consequences of exposure to IPV; and the nature of the child-system interaction in response to IPV. Postmus and Merritt (2010) found that:

The literature is growing with recent attention given to exploring the risk and resilience factors that may mediate the impact of exposure including such factors as the child's age and developmental stage; gender; intrapersonal strengths; the nature of the interventions or support given; and the number and types of other victimization experiences (p. 309).

The last point may be of particular interest for child welfare practitioners given the victimizing experiences the children have from their exposure to their fathers' violence and parenting behaviours and from being the direct victims of abuse and neglect in their families. Many authors in the literature have spoken of the significant overlap between IPV and child abuse (Jones, Gross, & Becker, 2002; Crooks, 2006; Wolfe, Crooks, Chiodo, & Jaffe, 2009).

Child protection workers in BC are encouraged by policy to tie the children's safety to the safety of their mothers when intervening (MCFD, 2010). While this type of intervention is an important first step, it may overlook the needs of children to be protected over the long term from strategies that fathers who batter typically employ both to maintain power and control over the mothers of their children and to escape accountability for their use of violence and coercion. These strategies can include undermining the mothers' parenting and authority, threatening the children with violence and intentionally exposing them to dangerous situations in order to intimidate or retaliate against the mothers. They may also enlist the children as spies to report on the whereabouts and activities of their mothers; or pressure, coerce, or incite children, especially adolescents, to use violence against their mothers. The result is that children are often used as weapons against their mothers by men who batter. This can cause emotional harm to the children and disrupt the bonds between the children and their mothers, fathers, each other, and other significant family members (Saunders, 1994; Bancroft, 2002; Bancroft, 2010; Jaffe, 2014).

As noted above, the literature provides a great deal of information on the potentially damaging effects to both children's development and the relationships with their mothers (Saunders, 1994; Bancroft, 2002; Bancroft, 2010) of being exposed to domestic violence (Artz et al., 2014) and the negative parenting of men who batter. Saunders and Bancroft elucidated that the harm done by batterers' negative parenting is not well recognized within child welfare

(Saunders, 1994; Bancroft, 2002; Bancroft 2010). The lack of information in the literature indicates that we know very little about how child welfare assesses and responds to this type of parenting and its negative impacts on children. Although numerous articles and books in the literature have made recommendations for assessing and responding to the parenting of men who batter, very few have done so with specific reference to child welfare. Of the 100 articles, books and government publications reviewed for this study, only 10 referred to child welfare responses to the parenting of men who batter.

While the scope of my study is too narrow to speak to the medical and health consequences of children's exposure to violence and the role of child factors in the prediction of developmental risk and resiliencies, my study does have the potential to inform the development of effective interventions with respect to the parenting of men who batter, the impacts on children and family functioning, and child welfare responses. It also has the potential to inform child welfare and family court decision-making regarding child placement and access plans for children both in and out of government care. The study aims to fill some of the previously mentioned gaps in the literature regarding child welfare's responses to the parenting of men who batter using the case study method and rigorous pursuit of themes that will inform child protection practice.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As noted in Chapter 2, although there is a wealth of information describing the parenting of men who batter, its effects on children, and suggestions for policies and practices that address the needs of these children, there is little information on how child welfare actually assesses and responds to this parenting and its impacts on children. As a result, little information is available on child welfare's application of the policies and practices suggested in the literature, or the outcomes of such applications. This study aims to begin filling these gaps in the literature by exploring how one child welfare office that routinely receives and responds to child protection reports regarding IPV toward children's mothers accounts for the parenting of men who batter in their assessment practices and service provision plans using the case study method.

Research Aim and Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine how child protection workers from a particular child welfare office in BC account, in their assessment practices and service provision plans, for the parenting of men who batter. The study examines and describes how the protection workers assessed the children's short- and long-term safety and intervened accordingly when battering had been found to occur. It also examines how the mothers and involved child protection workers conceptualized, interpreted, and described the parenting behaviours and attitudes of fathers whose battering had come to the attention of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).

Methodological Overview

My study was located in one child welfare office that routinely receives and responds to child protection reports regarding IPV toward children's mothers. I chose a qualitative research method because qualitative inquiry is generally carried out in the natural setting of the phenomena being studied. The natural setting in this case was a child welfare office that I was familiar with and had been given access to by the local MCFD's community services manager and team leader. Through a network of professional relationships, this office learned of my intention to carry out the study and came forward to participate, as they wanted to advance their practice regarding domestic violence. The central interest of the study was to learn how child protection workers account for the parenting of men who batter in their assessments and service delivery plans, and in the in-depth accounts that the workers and the mothers could provide. Merriam (2009) and Yin (2014) identified that a qualitative approach is suitable for allowing the meanings that participants place on their experiences to emerge. I interviewed child protection workers and mothers to gather detailed accounts of how they defined, interpreted, and made sense of the parenting behaviours of the fathers. This was of particular importance to the research question of how the workers accounted for the parenting behaviour of the men who battered because, as Friend (2000) noted, the way a problem is framed or accounted for is important, as it will inform the responses to the problem.

Only the mothers and child protection workers, not the offenders, were interviewed for this study. The information gleaned from interviewing an offender, while potentially valuable, would not be worth endangering his victim's long-term safety plans by re-involving the offender in a process associated with the victim, however indirect. Research has shown that service agencies' involvement with a domestic violence offender and his victim can lead to an offender's

perception that there is a disruption in the power balance between the couple leading to a possible increase in the risk of violence (Baker, Cunningham, & Jaffe, 2004; Coryet al., 2008). Out of concern for the victims' safety, the perpetrators of the domestic violence were kept unaware of their partners' participation in the study.

One advantage of the qualitative case study approach is because as Yin suggested, case study is particularly suited to exploring phenomena in complicated contexts; in this case the study explored the complicated contexts of child welfare practice *and* the parenting of men who batter within the context of domestic violence (Yin, 1994, 2012, 2014). In addition, as pointed out by Hakim (2000), once a body of research evidence has been accumulated on a topic, a selective case study can focus on particular aspects or issues to refine the knowledge. As previously noted, there exists a body of research detailing parenting behaviours and attitudes of men who batter but very little on the responses of child welfare workers to the complex problem of battering. A case study requires multiple sources of data and data collection methods. The data for this study included case file reviews, interviews with child protection workers, MCFD document reviews, and interviews with mothers who have been battered; thus, it meets the requirement for multiple sources (Hakim, 2000; Yin, 1994, 2012, 2014). A limitation of this study is the absence of the voices of the children and the perpetrators, who were not interviewed. I attempted, however, to consider their voices as I completed the in-depth literature review and the review of the MCFD case files.

Overview of the Case Study Method

Winegardner (2001) described qualitative research as a methodology that studies things in their natural setting and is grounded in the assumption that social environments and social issues are constructed by the interpretations of the individuals involved. This means that

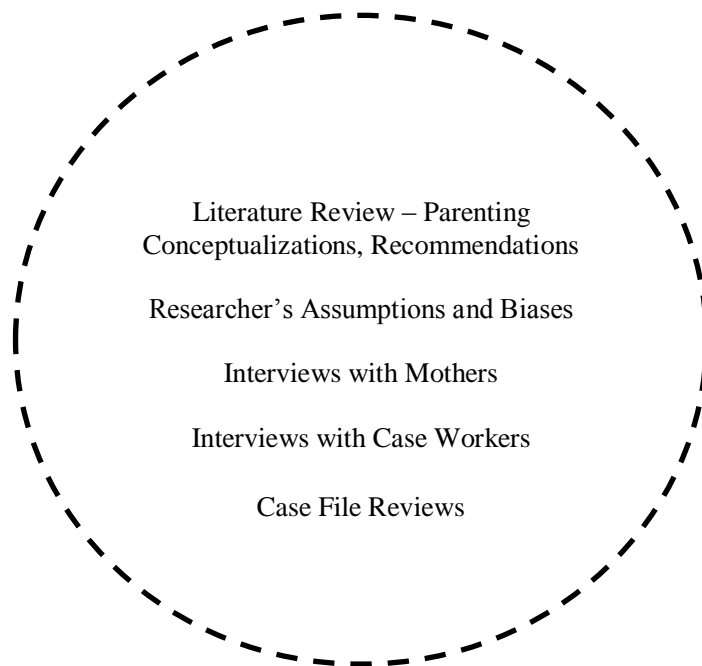
qualitative research is carried out to “make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 1–2). Merriam (1988, 2009) noted that the generally accepted characteristics of qualitative research include an overarching focus on understanding the meanings people have constructed, and a focus on gaining the study participants’ perspectives without excluding those of the researcher. It is based on an inductive approach to knowledge generation where the findings take the form of themes, categories, concepts, and theories induced from the data and grounded in the context itself. The reporting of the findings and conclusions is usually narrative and thickly descriptive, and makes use of the participants’ own words (Merriam, 1988; 2009; Winegardner, 2001).

Creswell (1998) remarked that, “those undertaking qualitative studies have a baffling number of choices of traditions” (p. 4). He identified case study as one of the five traditions of qualitative inquiry, along with biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography. Winegardner (2001) also noted that case study is a method of conducting qualitative research and that, while the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they are not synonymous. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) stated, “A case study is both a process of enquiry about the case and the product of the inquiry” (p. 444)”. Winegardner (2001) noted that case study is well established in the qualitative research tradition and is exceptionally useful for studying “issues of people in the real world”, for testing hypotheses, and for modifying existing theory (p. 18). Merriam (1988) presented case study as a research design in its own right and defined case study as “an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, an institution or a social group (p. 9). Anastas (2012) stated, “The case study method can be a useful tool for examining assessment and intervention issues as they arise in professional practice” (p. 106).

Yin (1994) pointed out that case study is neither a data collection method nor simply a research design but rather a complete research strategy. Yin (1994) defined case study as an empirical inquiry that:

... investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. In other words, you would want to use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions — believing they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study (p. 12–13).

In this case, the contextual conditions of interest were the parenting behaviours within the complex context of domestic violence, and the strategies and interventions utilized by the child protection workers within the context of child welfare practice in one particular MCFD office. The child protection team comprised child protection workers with varying educational and experiential backgrounds. Yin (1994, 2012) pointed out that a “case” is generally a bounded entity, whether a person, an organization, a behavioural condition, event, or other social phenomenon, but the boundaries of the case and its contextual conditions may be blurred. The complexities, boundaries, and data sources of this case study are depicted below in Figure 1.

Figure 1*Elements of Bounded Case Study: MCFD Child Welfare Office*

Yin (1994, 2012, 2014) and Hakim (2000) pointed out that case studies rely on multiple sources of data that converge in a triangulating fashion and are particularly useful in researching “best practices” and policy implementation. . In this study the multiple sources of data were reviews of the family service case files, interviews with child protection workers and clients, and reviews of MCFD documents including policy and practice guideline documents. See Table 1 for a complete listing and description of the documents reviewed. Each of the policy and practice guideline documents reviewed are intended to provide instruction and guidance to child protection workers on how to carry out their duties in BC. Each document was reviewed individually to identify any references to the parenting of men who batter and to note any subsequent instruction to child protection workers for assessing and responding to the parenting behaviours and minimizing the impact on the children’s safety and wellbeing.

Yin (1994) noted that case study contributes to our knowledge of individual, organizational, social, and political phenomena and allows the researcher to “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (p. 3). There is a desire to understand complex social phenomena and to describe the real-life context in which it occurred (Yin, 1994). My study explores the child protection workers’ and mothers’ descriptions of the parenting behaviour of men who batter and the professional child welfare responses to the behaviour which is a set of complex individual, organizational, and social phenomena. It is not possible to separate clearly these phenomena from their context, as the child welfare responses to the parenting of men who batter are influenced by how the mothers and child protection workers describe and interpret the parenting behaviour and by the policies and guidelines that direct the child protection workers’ practice.

In addition, Yin (1994, 2012, 2014) pointed out that case study is useful when a “how” or “why” question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control. In this study, I looked at *how* mothers and case workers conceptualized, described, and assessed the parenting behaviours of the fathers, *what* the child welfare responses were and their effectiveness in the opinions of both the child protection workers and the mothers, and *why* the particular interventions were chosen.

Case study also comes with limitations, namely concern regarding possible lack of rigor from less than fastidious work, the danger of biased views influencing the findings and conclusions, and the length of time needed to complete such a study. (Yin, 1994, 2012, 2014; Merriam, 1988). Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) pointed out that the main strength of the case study method — its ability to provide thick descriptions that readers can compare to their own situations and to identify themes and patterns in the report that brings the case alive for readers

— can also be a disadvantage due to the difficulty in generalizing the findings and the practical problem of disguising the identity of the organization or individuals that were studied. However, Gall, Gall and Borg also point out that the researcher’s perspective on the phenomenon under investigation will be revealed in the study, thus enabling the readers to compare their own perspectives on to those of the researcher. Merriam (2009) pointed out that “the special features of case study research that provide the rationale for its selection also present certain limitations in its usage” (p. 33). The “thick” descriptions so useful for studying educational innovations, for evaluating programs, and for informing policy may also be too lengthy or involved to be easily used by policy makers and educators (Merriam 1988, 2009). Merriam (2009) also warned that readers may assume from the detailed descriptions that “case studies are accounts of the whole”, rather than a smaller picture, “a slice of life” (p. 33). Much can be learned from a particular case, and readers can learn vicariously through the researcher’s narrative description (Merriam, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

Like all graduate students conducting research involving human subjects, I was required to submit an application for Research Ethics Approval for Human Participant Research to the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB). The application form is an institutional protocol based on the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research involving Humans. The Policy is available at:

www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default/.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS) is a joint policy of Canada’s three federal research agencies — the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The

policy states that “as a condition of funding, the Agencies require that researchers and their institutions apply the ethical principles and the articles of this policy and be guided by the application of the articles” (p. 5). I received funding from a Bombardier Award from Social Sciences and Humanities Research Canada, a Fellowship from the University of Victoria, and a University of Victoria President’s Scholarship to complete this study, and as such had a commitment to conduct this research ethically and treat the participants with fairness and respect.

The policy and research approval process are meant to ensure that the research involving human subjects is conducted meeting:

... high scientific and ethical standards that respect and protect the participants. Thus, researchers’ commitment to the advancement of knowledge also implies duties of honest and thoughtful inquiry, rigorous analysis, commitment to the dissemination of research results, and adherence to the use of professional standards (p. 7).

Although it is recognized that all research carries some risk to the participants, according to the TCPS, approved research applicants are expected to accurately articulate the risks and to spell out the strategies that will be used to mitigate those risks. The potential benefits of the research should outweigh any risks and in this case, the risks were minimal. I accessed case file data that was not intrusive to the participants. Case file data is routinely shared under controlled conditions between and among MCFD front line staff, and School of Child and Youth Care students and Social Work students who are completing practicums at MCFD worksites and who have signed confidentiality agreements. I was the only person who reviewed the file records for this study; my review did not intrude on the child protection workers’ or clients’ experiences; moreover, both workers and clients were aware of and agreed to the review of the file records.

I interviewed child protection workers about their experiences with particular closed files. Child protection workers regularly engage in case file debriefing and reviews with other case workers and supervisors as part of their reflective practices and therefore were not likely to experience the interviews for this study as more than minimally intrusive. In order to mitigate any risk that interviews and case file reviews might cause embarrassment or feelings of being criticized, this possibility was brought to the attention of the case-workers in the consent process. The child protection workers were experienced workers, likely to be well versed in the practices of self-care necessary for this type of reflection on their practice.

I interviewed clients after their case files had been closed. As the intent of the interviews was to focus on the clients' perceptions of how their children's fathers functioned in their parental role and the clients' perceptions of the case workers' assessment of and responses to those parenting behaviours, the questions were not intended to invite clients to relive the traumatic experiences of past violence. I recognized the possibility that the clients might experience emotional responses to being questioned about and speaking of the parenting behaviours of their ex-partners and the child welfare process, and therefore discussed this possible risk during the consent process with the clients prior to the interviews taking place. The clients were advised of counselling resources available to them within their community at no cost to the client.

In addition to the approval to conduct the research by the Human Ethics Research Board, approval was sought from and granted by the community services manager of the regional MCFD office. See Appendix A.

Methods

Location of study. In BC, it is the CFCSA (*Child, Family and Community Service Act*, 1996) that delegates the authority and responsibility to carry out child welfare. The MCFD and various delegated Aboriginal agencies are tasked with receiving, assessing, and responding to information from the community about families and their children who may be at risk of experiencing maltreatment due to parental abuse or neglect. Maltreatment may include children's exposure to domestic violence between their parents/caregivers and the aftermath of that exposure. The region in which this study was carried out had been identified by both MCFD and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) as having an incident rate of domestic violence that was higher than the provincial average. Since the initial 2004 release of the Best Practice Approaches: Child Protection and Violence Against Women policy document, the child protection staff in the area, both individually and as a team, had been actively pursuing and participating in a variety of initiatives with the intent of advancing their practice with families who are experiencing domestic violence (MCFD, 2004). These initiatives included regular team discussions regarding domestic violence interventions, participation in numerous research projects regarding domestic violence, and regular attendance at domestic violence practice seminars and conferences. In addition the team members were involved in community collaboration projects such as the development of information sharing protocols between MCFD, the local anti-violence agency, the RCMP, and Crown Counsel regarding the risks domestic violence poses to women and their children, safety planning for women and children, and interventions such as monitoring of men charged with domestic assault by community corrections officers or applications of protective intervention orders under the CFCSA by child protection workers. The team members were enthusiastic about participating in this study as

another means to advance their practice with domestic violence. The study took place in a smaller MCFD office, serving approximately 30,000 people of many cultures.

Anastas and MacDonald (1994) stated that caution must be used in case study research to ensure that the descriptions of individual cases are not so explicit that the participants are identifiable. In order to protect the identities of all the participants in the study, neither the location of the MCFD office and region nor any identifying features of the clients will be revealed. The office's community services manager approved my recruitment of the participants and my reviewing the file records.

Sampling and recruitment of participants. As Anastas and MacDonald (1994) noted: When there are several similar cases available for study, the case to be studied can be randomly selected from among them. Similarly, a systematic method of selection could be used, as in stating that the case to be studied will be the next referred that meets certain selection criteria for the type of problem or intervention needed. Either method of case selection, when feasible, would tend to reduce selection bias by introducing explicit, impersonal rules for choosing the case (p. 277).

Given my familiarity with the people who worked at the office where the case study took place, an MCFD supervisor conducted the recruitment process in order to ensure that I did not introduce a selection bias. This study utilized both above mentioned methods of selection: a predetermined selection criterion was developed to identify the initial file choices, but the final choices were random. The initial sampling came from a compilation of 30 family service files, closed within the previous five years, in which domestic violence was the main child protection concern. The final sample comprised the first four files where both the child protection worker and the client involved agreed to participate in the study.

Anastas and MacDonald (1994) and Anastas (1999) have noted that studies that have in-depth data collection and analysis often limit the sample size to avoid the investigator being overwhelmed with data and therefore becoming selective with data. Accordingly, I restricted the number of participants to four mothers and four child protection workers, deeming this number to be sufficient to provide depth and manageability of data, and to allow “adequate knowledge transfer from researcher to reader” (Stake, 2005, p. 455). The sample of participants comprised two groups: the adult victims (mothers) of domestic violence who had previous involvement with MCFD child protection workers under the CFCSA and whose cases had been resolved and closed; and the primary child protection workers who had managed the mothers’ family services files prior to their closures. Two of the child protection workers had Bachelors of Social Work degrees, and two had Bachelor of Arts (Child and Youth Care) degrees.

The child protection workers were recruited via an email invitation I sent to them after attending team meetings with the staff to explain the purpose and scope of the research, potential impacts of the study on participants, the recruitment process, and confidentiality (see Appendix B). In the email, the child protection workers were invited to contact me directly if they were interested in participating, thereby ensuring that the identities of the participating workers were known only to myself. I then contacted those workers who had contacted me directly to answer any questions they had as potential participants, and to set up in-person interview times and dates with those willing to participate.

Similarly, the clients were contacted by telephone by a supervisor (who had not previously been involved in the case) who briefly explained the study and asked the clients if they were interested in receiving more information about the study from the researcher (see Appendix B). If a client expressed an interest in receiving more information, the supervisor then

asked for permission to pass contact information on to the researcher. I then contacted the clients by phone to discuss in greater detail the purpose, process, risks, and benefits of the study. If a client then agreed to participate, I scheduled an in-person interview. This process ensured that the identities of the clients who consented to participate were known only to me, as the supervisor who called the clients did not know which of the former clients eventually consented to participate.

Data collection. The need to use multiple sources of information is far greater in case study than in other research methods and in fact is “a major strength of case study data collection” (Yin, 2014, p. 119). This is supported by both Hakim (2000) and Merriam (2009) who suggested that case studies are usually based on two or more methods and sources of data collection, ensuring the trustworthiness in qualitative research. Hakim also stated that the use of multiple sources of evidence allows case studies to present more rounded and complete accounts of social issues and processes. Yin (2014) defined triangulation as including multiple researchers, multiple studies, and multiple sources of data. He noted that using multiple sources of data is intended to corroborate the findings and seek converging evidence, with the ultimate goal of making the findings or conclusions more convincing and accurate. The short time frame for a student thesis limits the triangulation to multiple sources of data. In this study, triangulation was limited to case file reviews; reviews of MCFD documents such as policies, standards, and training materials for delegation under the CFCSA (prior to amendments to the CFSCA in June 2014); and interviews with both clients and their child protection workers. By interviewing both participants involved in each case file, I could judge whether the insights, meanings, and explanations gathered from one participant were corroborated by the other, as suggested by Yin (2014).

Yin (2014) noted that, “one of the most important sources of case study evidence is the interview” (p. 110). He further noted that “you can ask interviewees about their interpretations and opinions about people and events or their insights, explanations, and meanings related to certain occurrences” (p. 111). As both the clients’ and case workers’ experiences of the child welfare process and their interpretation and perceptions of the fathers’ parenting behaviours were central to this study, I used semi-structured interviews to gather as many details in the interviewees’ own words as possible. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) advised, “If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them” (p. xvii). Once the participants for the study were established, I contacted them and made arrangements to meet with them at locations of their choosing to discuss in greater detail the parameters of the study and any potential impacts, to sign the consents to participate, and to begin the in-person interviews. The interviews occurred over an eight-week period.

Both clients and child protection workers were invited to speak about how they interpreted or defined the parenting behaviours of the children’s father/stepfather, and their experiences of the child welfare process from intake, and risk and safety assessment, through service plan recommendations and referrals, court applications, and finally, case closure. In addition, both were asked to speak about the effectiveness of the child welfare interventions with respect to the parenting of the fathers who had battered the children’s mothers. Before the interviews began, as suggested by Anastas (2012), I “covered the ground rules for the conversations” (p. 368): that there were no right answers to the questions asked, that the answers were to be based on the participants’ actual experiences, and that probing questions would be used to gather more information about those experiences and were not meant to convey that the question wasn’t answered correctly by the participant. In addition, I explained that the interviews

would be recorded on a small device that I brought to the interview, showed the participants how to turn it off and on, and gave each participant the opportunity to use the device; all participants declined the opportunity. As Yin (2014) noted, “Audio tapes certainly provide a more accurate rendition of any interview than taking your own notes” (p. 110). While this was indeed the case during the transcribing and analyzing processes, my use of the recorder was above all a strategy to avoid the distraction of taking notes during the interviews.

Anastas and MacDonald (1994) pointed out that less structured interview methods may increase the risk that the interviewer will influence and shape the data by the nature of the questions asked, or even by what is not asked. Conversely, the authors suggested that the risk of miscommunication or misunderstanding increases with more structured interview methods. To safeguard against these challenges, I chose a semi-structured approach that balanced questions focused on gathering the relevant data with the use of probing or clarifying questions. In addition, Anastas and MacDonald (1994) stated, “Interview judgement and self-discipline are the only protection against both kinds of distortions of the data” (p. 361). I reflected on this potential challenge throughout the interview process to mitigate any distortions of the data being collected while ensuring the relevance of the data. Each interview was completed within 60 to 90 minutes.

The semi-structured interviews with clients were guided by the following questions:

1. How would you define/describe or think about the parenting attitudes and behaviours of your children’s father/stepfather?
2. What were your children’s responses to their father/stepfather’s parenting behaviours?
3. How was your information, in relation to your children’s father/stepfather’s parenting behaviours, used during the child welfare process?

4. What, if any, child welfare interventions were recommended or mandated in response to your children's father/stepfather's parenting behaviours?
5. How helpful were the recommended or mandated child welfare interventions in relation to your children's father/stepfather's parenting?

The semi-structured interviews with case workers were guided by the following questions:

1. What is your professional training and background?
2. How would you define/describe/conceptualize the parenting behaviours and attitudes of the father?
3. What information did you draw upon to define/describe his parenting behaviours?
4. What, if any, information in relation to his parenting behaviours did you utilize when making child safety assessments?
5. What, if any, interventions did you utilize, recommend, or mandate in response to his parenting behaviours?
6. What guides or influences your practice with respect to the parenting behaviours of men who batter?

In addition to the guided questions, I asked for clarification and probed for more details as suggested by Kvale (2009) by asking questions such as, "What did you mean by that?", "Can you say more about that?", and, "Will you give me an example of that?" These types of questions give the researcher a more in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences from their points of view and draw on what Kvale refers to as the "art of second questions" (2009, p. 139). Completed interviews were downloaded onto a computer, transcribed verbatim using a computer transcription program, and analyzed soon after.

Once the interviews were completed, the case files were reviewed and the following data recorded by hand for analysis:

1. The current family constellation and who lives where.
2. The context and details of the domestic violence (e.g., degree, severity, and history of the violence).
3. Child characteristics (number of children in the household, ages, behavioural and developmental challenges and strengths).
4. Father/stepfather's parenting behaviours as described by the child protection worker, mother, father, child(ren), and others.
5. Mother's response to father's parenting behaviours.
6. Children's response to father's parenting behaviours.
7. Child protection responses to father's parenting behaviours (including assessments of risk and safety).
8. Interactions between child protection workers, family, and others with respect to father's parenting.

As Hakim (2000) noted:

... some understanding of the nature and original purpose of any set of records is important not only with reference to the quality, consistency and completeness of the data they provide, but also for the interpretation that can be placed on the results (pp. 51–52).

As an experienced MCFD child protection worker well versed in the file review process for MCFD family service file records, it was a relatively simple process to locate the particular information being sought for this study within the substantial amount of data contained in each client's file. I located the family constellation information in the File Snap Shot Summary

located at the beginning of each file. The information regarding the context and details of the domestic violence, child characteristics, and parenting information and the mother and children's responses was located in the Intake/Investigation Section, which documents the reported child protection concerns and the immediate child welfare response, and in the Risk Assessment Section, which documents and assesses all the information gathered during the investigation and assessment phase regarding the child protection concerns. I located information on specific child protection responses to the identified protection concerns, along with the interactions between the child protection worker and the family with respect to the father's parenting in the Legal Section, the Risk Reduction Plan Section, and in the child protection workers' case notes. The Legal Section documents the legal responses to the child protection concerns. The Risk Reduction Plan Section documents the recommended services and strategies that the family is to follow or complete to address and mitigate the identified protection concerns.

The information from the file reviews was ultimately used to corroborate the findings from the analysis of the interviews as suggested by Yin (2014), and to seek both converging and diverging evidence. Although documents are stable and can be reread multiple times for accuracy, I reflected throughout the review process on Yin's (1994, 2102) belief that a weakness of administrative or archival documents as data sources may be the biases of the original recorder and of the researcher. Yin therefore suggests that steps should be taken to counteract these biases wherever possible. I considered throughout the file review process whether confirmation bias was occurring for either the original recorder of the file information or for me. I asked myself questions such as: "Is there another explanation to account for this conclusion or hypothesis?", "Is more information needed here to draw this or any other conclusion?", "Is there

enough concrete evidence to support this conclusion?” and “Would someone with other professional experiences make the same interpretation/conclusion?”

Once the interviews and file reviews were completed, I conducted a document review. The purpose of a document review, as suggested by Yin (1994, 2012), is to corroborate and extend the evidence from other sources in the study in order to increase the trustworthiness and applicability of the findings. I structured my review of the documents as follows: I reviewed the pertinent MCFD policy and practice guidelines; the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*; and other relevant BC government policies, readily available to all MCFD child protection workers and the general public, which guide the practice of all MCFD child protection workers when carrying out the duties and responsibilities for child protection work in BC. I reviewed the documents for explicit references to the parenting behaviours of men who batter and any guidance for assessing and responding to any associated child protection concerns. The title, nature, and quantity of documents reviewed are listed in Table 1.

Table 1Type and Quantity of Documents Reviewed

| Document Name | Document Type | Quantity |
|---|--|-----------|
| Family Service Files | Client Case Files | 4 |
| <i>Child Family and Community Services Act, 1996</i> | Child Welfare Legislation for province of British Columbia | 1 |
| Best Practices Approaches: Child Protection and Violence Against Women (2004, Revised 2010) | MCFD Practice Policy/Guidelines | 2 |
| Child and Family Development Service Standards, 2003 | MCFD Child Protection Response Standards and Policy | 1 |
| Violence Against Women in Relationships Policy, 2010 | Provincial Domestic Violence Policy | 1 |
| Family Development Response or Investigation: Determining the Most Appropriate Response to Child Protection Reports, (2004) | Practice Guidelines | 1 |
| The Risk Assessment Model for Child Protection in BC, 1996 | Risk Assessment Tool Procedures Manual | 1 |
| Best Practices in Child Protection Involving Custody and Access Guidelines, 2010 | Practice Guidelines | 1 |
| The BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1998 | Child Protection Handbook for Service Providers | 1 |
| | Total | 13 |

Data analysis. Hakim (2000) notes two common errors in analyzing and presenting case study data. One error is to present an overwhelming mass of detailed evidence in the findings. The other is to report only the researcher's conclusions without presenting carefully chosen central themes along with questions and issues addressed by the study. I began the data analysis process by listening to the recorded interviews in their entirety numerous times to get a broad sense of the interviewees' perspectives. I then fully transcribed the interviews, giving ample opportunity for themes and patterns to emerge. These were documented on sticky notes and collected on flip charts according to the major organizing ideas established by the interview questions, as suggested by Kvale (1996) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009).

To ensure an accurate analysis and reporting of the central themes that emerged from the data, I relied upon Thomas's (2011) constant comparative method for analyzing case study data, reading and rereading the interview transcripts multiple times, comparing the themes from the interviews with the themes from the family service file and MCFD file reviews, and presenting the themes in the findings using direct quotes from the participants to highlight the themes. Thomas suggests that the aim of this analysis is to "emerge with the meanings that are being constructed by the participants (including you) in the situation" (p. 172).

I chose to use the major organizing ideas of the interview questions (conceptualizations of the parenting behaviours, information used to assess child safety, interventions utilized in the child welfare process and effectiveness of same) as broad categories to both analyze the data and report on the findings. The themes and patterns that emerged from the interview and case file data were arranged according to the major ideas of the interview questions and analyzed for convergence and divergence of information (Kvale, 1996; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Yin, 1994). As suggested by Marshall and Rossman (1999), during the process of identifying

emerging themes I critically examined and challenged patterns that seemed plausible and asked myself if there were other explanations for the linkages between the data and data sources.

Using the interview questions as broad categories, I identified and organized themes and patterns from the child protection workers' and mothers' interviews and from the case file reviews. I used sticky notes on flip chart paper to chart the themes and patterns. I then reviewed the MCFD documents for references to the parenting of men who batter, and for any recommendations for assessing child safety and for responding. The next step was to compare the themes from the interviews and the case file reviews, looking for convergence and divergence. This information was also charted using sticky notes on flip chart paper. Finally, I compared the themes identified from the participant interviews and case file reviews with the information identified from the MCFD documents review regarding parenting, assessing, and responding, looking for convergence and divergence among the themes and patterns identified as, suggested by Thomas (2011). I looked for how the themes connected together, where there were unanimous areas of agreement, and where there were areas of contradiction.

In order to avoid the pitfall of presenting an "indigestible mass of detailed evidence" as cautioned by Hakim (2000), I also relied upon Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) idea of a narrative approach to interview analysis whereby the researcher asks, "How can I re-construct the original story told to me by the interviewee into a story that I want to tell my audience?" (1996, p. 185). After analyzing and documenting the themes and patterns, using the participants' own words where possible, I briefly summarized and wrote each file's story in paragraph form for this thesis report. The stories described what happened, why, and what it meant more broadly in terms of the existing child welfare guidelines and policies used by that particular MCFD child welfare office at the time of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Reflecting on Researcher Bias

Hakim (2000) stated, “One of the best approaches to choosing a thesis topic is to build on any special knowledge or opportunities that one already has” (p. 63); and that, “The principal weakness of case studies is that results can be shaped strongly by the interests and perspectives of the researcher” (p. 63). The focus of this case study was a good fit for me, both as a seasoned child protection worker with an undergraduate degree in Child and Youth Care who has worked in the office used in this study, and as a mother with her own past experiences of being victimized by domestic violence. This fit, however, came with some special considerations to manage researcher bias. In terms of methodological considerations, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested including a thorough description of the researcher’s credentials and predispositions, a detailed description of the methods used to carry out the study, and a description of the measures used to increase the probability of trustworthiness. In addition, Anastas and MacDonald (1994) noted that the capacity for self-observation and self-criticism, with an appreciation of the standards of critical review by others, are the best safeguards in the interview process (p. 368).

It is likely to strike the reader that my previous experiences, both personal and professional, although likely to add to the thoroughness of this study, may have also contributed to researcher bias. In order to safeguard against potential bias, I engaged regularly in self-reflection during the gathering and analysis of data, questioning my conclusions and the meanings I placed on the data, looking for alternative meanings and explanations, giving prominence to the participants’ own words, and identifying where themes converged and diverged, in the data. It is an ongoing ethical requirement for child protection workers to gather and assess information regarding the functioning of families in an objective fashion. I employed the same ethical principle during this study to mitigate the possibility of researcher bias. The

interview questions were themselves a potential source of bias and may have suggested to the participants that I had a preconceived idea that the parenting behaviours of their ex-partners were problematic. I believe this potential bias was mitigated during the interviews when I allowed the participants time to answer the questions in their own words without interruption from me and regularly checked with the participants to ensure that we had a shared meaning of what they were expressing. I asked many probing questions for clarity and I encouraged the participants to clarify and correct my understanding of their answers. In this way I ensured that the data that was recorded during the interviews contained very little ambiguous information to be analyzed later. During data analysis, I regularly asked myself questions such as, “Is there another conclusion that can be drawn from this data?” and “What might I be overlooking?” and “How might my own experience be at play here?”

Quality and Trustworthiness

Merriam and Merriam (2009) stated that “all research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner” (p. 209). Being able to trust research results is especially important to professionals in applied fields, such as education, in which practitioners intervene in peoples’ lives (Merriam & Merriam, 2009). This principle is applicable to this research, which is intended to provide useful knowledge for practitioners in the field of child welfare (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

While there is much debate within the research community regarding the appropriate criteria for assessing validity and reliability in qualitative research, Merriam and Merriam (2009) and Yin (1994, 2012, 2014) suggested that issues of validity and reliability are properly addressed through careful attention to the focus and design of the study; the ethical manner in which the investigation is carried out; and the ways in which the data are collected, analyzed, and

presented. In contrast, Thomas (2011) referred to the aforementioned criteria as indicators of quality in qualitative research rather than indicators of validity and reliability. He suggested that the traditional notions of validity and reliability should not be the principal concerns for assuring quality in case study research, arguing instead that it is the uniqueness of the interpretation and analysis that are significant.

According to Thomas (2011), the quality of a case study depends on the conception, construction, and conduct of the study, all of which were explained in detail in other segments of this chapter. Although many decades apart, Thomas (2011) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) have all argued that a study's quality is increased when there are clear explanations of the context. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that providing thick descriptions will make clear the complexities of the contexts and the ways these contexts interact; in this case the complexities of the contexts of domestic violence and child welfare will be explored in detail in the Findings section of this report.

In order to assure quality and increase the trustworthiness of this study, I have used two methods of data collection (interviews and document reviews) and several sources of information (interviews with case workers and mothers, case file reviews, MCFD documents review, literature review). As suggested by Anastas and MacDonald (1994), a systematic method of sample selection was used based on predetermined explicit and impersonal selection criteria to reduce selection bias. This enhanced the quality of the study.

In addition, I submitted an application for approval to the Ethics Approval for Human Participant Research of the HREB detailing the methodology and methods used to carry out this study and diligently followed the approved processes to carry out the investigation. Wherever possible, I used the participants' own words to illustrate conclusions drawn in the findings.

The Issue of Generalization

Merriam (2001) stated that generalization speaks to whether or not a study's findings can be applied to other settings or situations. Merriam further noted:

The question of generalizability has plagued qualitative investigators for some time. Part of the difficulty lies in thinking of generalizability in the same way as investigators using experimental or correlational designs (p. 208).

Merriam (2001) also pointed out that case study is chosen as a research method “precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true to the many” (p. 208). Merriam suggested that rather than assuming that a lack of generalizability in the traditional sense is a limitation of case study design, one can take the “world view of qualitative enquiry in which there are multiple constructions of reality, where the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis and where understanding and meaning are of paramount importance” (pp. 211–212). In addition, Merriam (2009) argued that formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development and that the value of a single sample is underestimated. Although Merriam (2001, 2009) believed that generalization is overvalued, like Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) he suggested that there are strategies that can be utilized to enhance the possibility of generalizing the results of case study: (a) using thick rich descriptions providing enough detail that it can be seen to what degree the phenomenon being studied matches some other situation of interest, (b) describing how typical the phenomenon being studied is, and (c) using a multisite design. I utilized the first two strategies but not the third. When presenting the identified themes from the participants' interviews, I used verbatim passages to elucidate the themes and the meanings identified by the clients. In addition, I

completed an extensive literature review that identified how typical the problematic parenting is of men who batter their children's mothers.

Like Merriam (2009), Yin (1994) pointed out that one of the common criticisms of case study method is that it provides little basis for scientific generalizability, and noted that this same criticism used to be levelled against scientific experimentation. Thomas (2011) pointed out that the purpose of case study is different from the kind of enquiry where formal generalizations are expected to follow. The purpose of case study is to explore in depth and from many angles, how and why something has occurred or is the case in order to get a rich picture and gain analytic insights. He pointed out that this is, in fact, the essence of good science. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) echoed that purely descriptive case studies have often helped to advance scientific innovation.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Denzin and Lincoln (2013) agreed that knowledge may be transferrable by readers even when not formally generalizable, particularly if information is provided in the form in which they usually experience it. They may be able to derive naturalistic generalizations that will prove useful for enhancing their understanding. Much of what I found in this study relied upon the themes identified from the analysis of the interviews with child protection workers and former clients. Rubin and Rubin (2005) noted that interviewing people who have first-hand experience with the problem under investigation, and listening carefully to their answers and asking more questions, provides you with a "good, rich, and credible answer to your research question" (p. ix). In addition, these authors noted that the purpose of such interviews is to "determine what happened, why, and what it means more broadly", in the hope that the conclusions can be generalized to broader processes (p. 7).

Data Presentation

The intended aim for my data presentation is to relate practice (the reality of a social phenomenon) to theory as suggested by Marshall and Rossman (1999). These authors stated that, “descriptive data are summarized, then linked to more general theoretical constructs” (1999, p. 117). With regard to my study, the descriptive data from interviews, case file reviews, and MCFD documents were linked with theories, conceptualizations, and best practice suggestions found in the literature regarding the parenting behaviours and attitudes of men who batter and the subsequent child welfare responses. As suggested by Kvale (1996) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) I have used direct quotes from the participants wherever possible to highlight relevant themes and patterns to permit the reader to draw conclusions.

In summary, this research was conducted using case study methodology and took place at a particular MCFD office in BC. The study relied upon data collected through interviews with mothers who had been battered by their partners and were previous clients of MCFD, interviews with the child protection workers who managed the participant mothers’ files, reviews of the associated family service files, and reviews of the MCFD documents that guided child protection practice at the time of the study.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter I report on the key themes of this case study that I identified through analysis of the client family service file reviews, the MCFD policy and guideline documents, the interviews with mothers and the interviews with their Child Protection (CP) Workers. In order to protect the client's confidentiality, I assigned each client one of the following names; Alice, Brenda, Caitlyn, and Donna. Likewise, I assigned each client's CP Worker the following names: Anna, Sam, Karen and Tara. As described in detail in the Methodology Chapter, the case for this study was one particular child welfare office that routinely receives and responds to child protection reports regarding intimate partner violence toward children's mothers.

MCFD Document Review

As previously noted in the Methodology Chapter, I reviewed the following MCFD documents for explicit references to the parenting behaviours of men who batter and any suggested guidance for assessing and responding to the associated child protection concerns. Although I reviewed and analyzed the Family Service Files before I reviewed and analyzed the MCFD policy and guideline documents, the order is reversed here so the reader will have more context for the client's stories that follow.

As depicted below in Table 2., the commonality between all the MCFD policy and guideline documents reviewed is that, with the exception of the Best Practice Approaches: Child Protection and Violence Against Women document which specifically guides child protection responses to domestic violence, there are no other explicit references to the parenting of men who batter. In addition there are no recommendations for assessing or responding to this parenting as a child protection concerns.

Table 2Name and Type of Documents Reviewed for Parenting References and Recommendations

| <u>Document Name</u> | <u>Document Type</u> | <u>Reference to Parenting of Men who Batter</u> | <u>Recommendations for Assessing Child Safety and for Responding</u> |
|---|--|---|--|
| <i>Child Family and Community Services Act, 1996</i> | Child Welfare Legislation for province of British Columbia | ✗ | ✗ |
| Best Practices Approaches: Child Protection and Violence Against Women (2004) | MCFD Practice Policy/Guidelines | ✓ | ✗ |
| Best Practice Approaches (Revised 2010) | MCFD Practice Policy/Guidelines | ✓ | ✓ |
| Child and Family Service Standards, 2003 | MCFD Child Protection Response Standards and Policy | ✗ | ✗ |
| Violence Against Women in Relationships Policy, 2010 | Provincial Domestic Violence Policy | ✗ | ✗ |
| Family Development Response or Investigation: Determining the Most Appropriate Response to Child Protection Reports, 2004 | Practice Guidelines | ✗ | ✗ |
| The Risk Assessment Model for Child Protection in BC, 1996 | Risk Assessment Tool Procedures Manual | ✗ | ✗ |
| Best Practices in Child Protection Involving Custody and Access Guidelines, 2010 | Practice Guidelines | ✗ | ✗ |
| The BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1998 | Child Protection Handbook for Service Providers | ✗ | ✗ |

Each document that is noted in Table 2 is reviewed below:

Child, Family and Community Service Act, 2011. The *Child, Family and Community Services Act, 2011* (CFCSA) lists the circumstances under which a child needs protection, directs child protection workers to assess the child's circumstances contained in child protection reports and lays out the means and ways that children can be protected if the assessments of the reports indicate that a child is in need of protection. Although the CFCSA recognizes that a child may be physically, sexually or emotionally harmed by a parent's conduct it contains neither explicit references to the parenting of men who batter as a circumstance under which a child may need protection nor any references to the subsequent child safety assessments and/or recommended responses.

Best Practices Approaches: Child Protection and Violence Against Women 2004 and 2010. I reviewed both the 2004 and the 2010 versions of the Best Practice Approaches: Child Protection and Violence Against Women. Both documents are based on a practice principle that the best responses to domestic violence are ones that link child and mother safety and specifically guide CP Workers to ask questions pertaining to the nature and severity of the violence toward the mother as a way of assessing the safety of the child.

Although the main child protection focus throughout both versions of the document is on the harm done to children from their exposure to violence toward their mother, the 2010 version refers explicitly to the following list of father's parenting factors when assessing the risks to children from exposure to violence from the offending parent and when developing safety service plans for the children to have visitation with the offending parent:

- Exposing children to threats or acts of violence toward the children's non-abusing parent
- Undermining the mother-child relationships and maternal parenting and authority
- Physical or sexual abuse of the children

- Poor role modelling
- Parenting style that is rigid or authoritarian
- Parenting style that is neglectful or permissive
- Psychological abuse and manipulation of the children, particularly during access visits in an effort to control the mother
- Abduction of the children
- Exposing the children to violence in a battering father's new relationship.

Despite this information on assessing the possible risks to children from the aforementioned parenting behaviours, beyond the reminder that visitation arrangements should be consistent with children's treatment needs and their safety needs and that a safety plan should be developed for any unsupervised access that the children have with their fathers, no further directions are provided. The document does have an appendix entitled Assessing for Violence Against Women in Relationships before Conducting Family Group Conferences (FGC) or Mediation in which FGC coordinators or mediators are encouraged to ask women if their partners have ever threatened to kidnap the children, reported them to MCFD, physically abused the children or disciplined or touched them in a way that made the mothers uncomfortable, asked the children to spy on their mothers, forced the children to watch their fathers' abuse their mothers, or encouraged them to abuse their mothers.

Violence Against Women in Relationships Policy (VAWIR), 2010. The VAWIR policy document sets out the roles and responsibilities of various government ministries/agencies, including MCFD and Police, when responding to reports of domestic violence. The document notes that the presence of domestic violence is an indicator for the co-existence of child maltreatment and cites evidence that suggests that 30 to 40 per cent of children who are exposed

to domestic violence are themselves directly physically abused. The document does not however, make any reference to the parenting of men who batter or make any recommendations for assessing or responding to this risk.

Child and Family Service Standards, 2003. The Child and Family Service Standards are the overarching policies that direct child protection responses. This document makes no references to the parenting of men who batter, nor does it make any recommendations for assessing or responding to this particular child safety factor.

Family Development Response or Investigation: Determining the Most Appropriate Response to Child Protection Reports. This document provides a set of guidelines for CP Workers to use when determining the most appropriate response to a child protection report. It differentiates between a child protection investigation and a family development response, a response that is a more supportive/collaborative approach to a child protection report than an investigation. Although the document suggests that a family development response may not be appropriate in all cases of domestic violence, particularly in life-threatening situations, situations that require medical intervention due to the violence or situations where the violence is escalating, there are no references to the parenting of men who batter or recommendations for assessing and responding to the associated risks.

The Risk Assessment Model for Child Protection in BC, 1996. The Risk Assessment Model for Child Protection in BC (1996) is the tool that is used to assess children's risk of future harm when a child protection report is received and investigated. It is also used to inform risk reduction plans for families receiving protective family services through MCFD. Although it speaks to risk factors that are specific to family violence, family identity, parent's expectations of

child and severity of abuse/neglect (of a child) along with a recognition that family violence is highly correlated with threats to a child's safety, it makes no explicit reference to the parenting of men who batter as a risk factor and provides no recommendations for responding to this child protection concern.

Best Practices in Child Protection Involving Custody and Access Guidelines, 2010. This document provides practice guidelines to assist CP Workers with assessing and responding to child protection reports during custody and access disputes. Although the document suggests that CP Workers assess whether domestic violence occurred in the parental relationship before separation and whether or not children were exposed to that violence, the document makes no reference to the parenting of men who batter or recommendations to respond to this child risk.

The BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1998. This handbook is written for community members and service providers and explains the duty to report child abuse/neglect, and sets out the circumstances under which a report must be made. These circumstances occur when a person has a reason to believe that a child has been, or is likely to be, physically harmed, sexually abused or sexually exploited by a parent or by another person and the parent is unwilling or unable to protect the child, or if the child has been or is likely to be physically harmed because of neglect or emotionally harmed by the child's parent(s). There are no explicit references to the parenting of men who batter and subsequently no recommendations to address this protection concern. Although the document makes a brief reference to Children Who Witness Abuse programs as a means of supporting children who have witnessed abuse in their families, it makes no specific reference to domestic violence.

Taken together these documents set the stage for how the CP Workers approached their work in this case study. What follows are the mother's stories as told by the mothers, the CP Workers and the mothers' family service files.

Clients' Cases/Stories

Alice's case/story. Alice became involved with child welfare when a report was made indicating that her child may be at risk of exposure to domestic violence and to punitive parenting practices of her partner. Information in Alice's family service file indicated that a protection report was received regarding an argument that occurred between Alice and her partner, who had a history of coercion and assaults against a previous partner. The report indicated the argument allegedly involved step-dad hitting mom with a role of wrapping paper. The argument was alleged to be about step-dad putting his step-son (3 years old) in his room for 2 hours as punishment.

When the CP Worker attended her home to assess the report, Alice and her partner were interviewed together. Although Alice had concerns about her partner's parenting of her son and had taken to being the sole disciplinarian of her son to protect both her son from her partner's harsh parenting and her relationship with her partner, she was unable to safely express her concerns to the CP Worker as her partner was present during the interview; nor was she asked by the CP Worker about his parenting. The CP Worker simply accepted Alice's partner's claim that he used age appropriate strategies. As a result of this assessment, no interventions regarding his parenting were offered and the opportunity was lost to facilitate changes in Alice's partner's parenting. Alice did not find the brief involvement with child welfare to be helpful to her family. She would have preferred the CP Worker to stay involved for a longer period of time and to have

used her mandated authority to ensure her partner attended appropriate services to address his aggression and parenting issues.

In her interview with me, Alice described her partner's parenting as authoritarian and punitive as follows:

Uhm, more than 50% of the time I don't agree with it [his parenting]. Uhm, he's very strict, uhm, as his mom puts it, when he gets, you know, when he gets his way, it's punishment. So, uh, that's uh, I think that one of our biggest arguments is because he thinks that our boy... and that he should be, you know, by age five should be out cutting wood and all that stuff. That's how he [my husband] was raised, but I see it a total different way... right?

Alice identified that because of her partner's punitive parenting of her son, she came to the decision to always be the disciplinarian:

Uhm, when I give him a chance to do it [parent or discipline their son], cause like I've already said I don't, he's there to play with him and comfort him and all that stuff, I don't really give him a chance to make decisions on what should be done if my son does something wrong or whatever.

Uh, he's my son and you know, and "if you ever treat him like that again, you're out".

As this statement was not explicit, I reflected it back to her and confirmed that she meant she would end the relationship with her partner if he were to mistreat her son again.

When Alice was asked to describe her son's responses to her partner's parenting she indicated that her son was afraid of him as follows:

... he's basically whimpering, like he's in trouble cause that's what will happen, like, "I've really done something wrong", like, "there's a truck in the middle of the hallway and it should not be there".

When Alice was asked to clarify what she meant by her son "whimpering", she stated that her child is anxious and cowers in response to her partner's authoritarian discipline.

The parenting concerns that Alice described did not appear in the case file prepared by Alice's CP Worker Anna, who seems to have based her ideas about Alice's partner's parenting from a joint interview with Alice and her partner in their living room. Only Alice's partner was

questioned about his disciplining practices with Alice's four-year-old son. As previously noted, Alice indicated in the interview for this study that she would have found it more helpful if the child protection worker had interviewed the couple separately, creating more safety for her to speak freely. In contrast to Alice's description of her partner's parenting, Anna conceptualized his parenting as follows:

The issue was around, part of this issue was around disciplining the child and the father was very appropriate in his responses to me in terms of, it was around time out [the child protection report had indicated that the time outs used by dad as discipline for the four-year old were in excess of 2 hours]. And the dad was saying, was talking about how when this little guy does something that's not acceptable the time out would be for a short duration in accordance with his age. And I thought, "well that was, you know, pretty bang on".

So that seemed very reasonable. In addition, Anna indicated:

But I do not recall mom confirming that he had ever put the child in the room for hours on end or that he was inappropriate with the child or that she was really upset about his disciplining practices.

When Alice was asked if she had any discussion with the child protection worker about her partner's parenting, she replied:

Mmmmmmm, not that I recall. No, maybe it came up and she asked me a question and I answered but that would have been it, 'cause I don't recall anything like that.

Alice's CP Worker Anna stated that she didn't use any information regarding Alice's partner's parenting in the child safety assessment, noting her focus was mostly on assessing the possibility that domestic violence was occurring in the household:

You know, I think I was more focused on, was there violence or trauma in their relationship? I don't think I really, I think, I just didn't get a bead that this was the issue. I didn't get that from mom. I didn't get that from what the father was saying to me.

Alice's file indicated that the only information used to assess the safety of Alice's child was the information that confirmed a verbal argument did in fact occur regarding parenting styles. Both parents denied the allegation that step - dad hit mom with a role of wrapping paper.

Given this and Anna's assessment that the child was not in need of protection, no formal assessment regarding parenting or the child's safety was done.

Alice stated she would have preferred the CP Worker Anna to stay involved for a longer period of time and to have used her mandated authority to ensure her partner attended appropriate services to address his aggression and parenting issues. In contrast, Anna indicated that she did not make any recommendations for either Alice or her partner as Alice had contact with a family support worker and her partner had previous contact with a Drug and Alcohol Counsellor. Alice's file included a letter from Anna to Alice indicating that Alice's file was being closed upon assessment of the report after speaking with the child, Alice, her partner and others, as Anna "did not identify any child welfare concerns". Anna also stated in the closing letter to Alice that, "both of you shared with me that you are engaged with support services with a family support worker, and drug and alcohol counselling, and are looking at attending some couples counselling to work on relationship issues". It seems that Anna felt that based on her assessment, sufficient resources were in place, so she closed the file.

Anna has a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and completed a practicum at a women's center prior to being hired by MCFD as a child protection worker. When asked what guided her practice with respect to the parenting behaviours of men who batter, she replied with the following:

What guides my practice? I mean, we have uhm, we have a framework for looking at violence so some of those tools speak to uhm, men's behaviors and how men are within relationship that will impact their parenting styles, so issues of control, issues of entitlement, you know, "I'm right, you're wrong, this is the way it's going to be". There's research that had been shared, there's information from co-workers, there's debriefing situations and learning from that.

Thus it would seem that what was primary for Anna was her perception that since Alice and her partner denied the presence of intimate violence this meant that there was also a de facto absence

of abusive parenting on behalf of the father, despite what had previously been recorded in Alice's file.

Alice saw things quite differently from Anna. She told me that the child welfare intervention wasn't helpful, in part, because she and her partner were interviewed together, so she wasn't able to speak freely about her concerns, particularly about her partner's parenting and because she would have preferred more support and encouragement and reinforcement from the CP Worker for her partner to do what he needed to do. In addition, when she was asked what would have been more helpful she stated:

Uhm, more options, maybe more check-ins, like you know, "are you guys taking the course"? or something like that. Just more uhm, it doesn't seem like you want to take my son away, uhm, less of that feeling and maybe more of, "I'm going to help you through this and this is what you can take and this is the information that I have".

Brenda's case/story. MCFD became involved with Brenda's family when a report was received of a second domestic assault of Brenda by her partner. Brenda's partner was already on probation for the previous assault and was required, as a condition of his probation order, to complete both phases of the domestic violence programming through the community corrections office in addition to the Triple P Parenting program (Sanders, 2008). Brenda's family service file showed that Brenda's partner was required by her CP Worker Sam, to move out of the family residence while Sam completed his assessment of the child protection report.

The information in Brenda's family service file, documented by her CP Worker Sam, showed that because the file was considered "low risk" due to both parents acknowledging the domestic violence *and* cooperating with the CP Worker's assessment, a formal investigation would not be required. A less intrusive family development response was used meaning a formal assessment of risk, beyond the acknowledged risk of domestic violence (the two known physical

assaults), was not required nor completed. Although Brenda and Sam both expressed to me concerns regarding Brenda's partner's parenting, no assessment of Brenda's partner's parenting approach or of the impact of this approach on the children's safety occurred during the child welfare process. The main focus of the interventions used was on addressing the violence toward Brenda and the children's subsequent exposure to the violence. Despite this, Brenda found the child welfare interventions to be helpful to her family.

During my interview with Brenda, she described her partner's parenting, as "culturally strict" *and* verbally and emotionally abusive. She identified her family's culture as Coast Salish:

So he's pretty strict but in a cultural way, he's very stern on following the cultural teachings that have been passed on to him from his, he was raised by his grandmother. I mean physical contact, even a slight push or even holding me to the bed or whatever or even verbal abuse, he [my partner] was, his words can be very harsh and I've started to tell him that because I don't like the way, when he speaks to our daughter like that. Yes, or even name calling and putdowns.

When I asked Brenda to describe her daughter's responses to her partner's parenting she indicated that her daughter would cry when her father used a harsh tone with her but also that her daughter was able to assertively tell her father that he hurt her when he used verbal abuse toward her:

Uhm, she [daughter] says, "you hurt my feelings, please don't say that" [to her father], so she's outspoken".

Uhm, she cries if he uses the harsh tone but there are also good times.

Although Brenda indicated to me that she had had conversations with her CP Worker Sam about her concerns regarding her partner's parenting, Sam described her partner's parenting quite differently than she did. Sam described his parenting as "irresponsible", rather than abusive:

Uhm, I've never seen him interact directly with the children. Uh, however, the sense that I got from mom and the grandparents was that he was very good one on one with the kids, very interactive and playful. Uh, he uhm, if I had to conceptualize it, he really had a

lack of responsibility in his parental role. Uh, he uhm, not a lack of initiative but more a lack of ownership, lack of ownership in his fatherly, uh, not just in fatherly, he just, as a parent of, of what's happening in the family and so a real sense of one on one behavioural actions but less in his, in relation to his, the other half of the couple and other half of the parenting responsibility.

When I asked Sam what information in relation to the father's parenting behaviours was utilized in the child safety assessments, he replied:

None, because the risks are based upon, his uhm, his inability to treat his partner in a safe way right. So, they are completely two different issues. In this case, I mean, the fact that he is controlling towards his partner, obviously he's not putting the child, he's not putting the child's needs ahead of himself and ahead of the couple, however, the distinction I make is, that he doesn't have the ability, he has the ability to put the children's needs first one on one, when the interaction is one on one but he doesn't have the ability to do it when, when it's towards his partner that he struggles and I had no evidence that he was using the children to control her.

Although Brenda's CP Worker Sam did not make any recommendations for interventions regarding Brenda's partner's parenting, one of his probation conditions was that he must complete the Triple P Parenting program. However, there was no information recorded in the file by Brenda's CP Worker to indicate that Brenda's partner had completed this program before the child welfare involvement ended and the family service file was closed. Brenda's CP Worker recommended the following interventions:

- Partner to initially move out of home as an initial safety plan
- A longer-term safety plan signed by Brenda's partner agreeing that he would not use physical or verbal violence toward mom and would leave to "cool off in the event of a heated argument"
- Brenda and her partner to attend the Islands of Safety Program (Indigenous culturally based family violence safety planning program with a focus of offender accountability to increase safety of partner)

- Brenda's partner to follow through with and adhere to his probation conditions; terms which included his completion of both phases of the domestic violence intervention program utilized by probation officers along with the previously mentioned Triple P Parenting program

Brenda's CP Worker has a BA in Child and Youth Care and worked in Out of Care Programs and a group home for youth prior to being hired by MCFD to practice child protection work. He described what guides his practice regarding the parenting behaviors of men who batter with two opposing beliefs. One belief was viewing an offending father's parenting as a separate risk or issue from his violence toward the mother; the other belief was that some violent men use their children and their role as parent to control their partners. These somewhat opposing beliefs were illuminated when I asked Sam what information in relation to Brenda's partner's parenting was used in the child safety assessments:

None, because the risks are based upon, his uhm, his inability to treat his partner in a safe way right. So, they are completely two different issues. I had no evidence that he was using the children to control her.

Thus, given Sam's belief that an offending father's parenting is a separate risk or issue from their violence toward the mother coupled with the absence of an assessment of Brenda's partner's parenting approach, it would seem that Sam believed that the interventions used to address Brenda's partner's violence toward her were sufficient to increase child safety.

Interventions regarding both his and Brenda's concerns about her partner's parenting were not deemed necessary and the file was closed. Despite this, Brenda found the involvement of the Ministry and the interventions utilized in the child welfare process to be helpful as indicated by the following:

It was like a big load was lifted off me, I was like, ok, he has to do this for himself and he has to prove to the child protection worker that he can do this....He started to really

recognize when he, he told me recognizes the feelings in his body when he's about to get angry so that helped him, he was able to calm himself down before it got to the point of escalating.

Caitlyn's case/story. Caitlyn and her family became involved with MCFD when a report was made by a community professional alleging that Caitlyn's partner had grabbed her step-son by the back of the neck and that her step-son was afraid of his father. Throughout the course of the investigation, it became apparent to the CP Worker and to Caitlyn, that her partner's actions toward Caitlyn were coercive and violent. As a result, Caitlyn's partner was required by her CP Worker to live outside the family home, only have access to the children that was supervised, complete both phases of the Family Violence Intervention program, attend mental health and substance use services and have a mental health/ substance use assessment. Although the CP Worker Karen asked Caitlyn about her partner's parenting and did include information about his parenting in the child safety assessments, Caitlyn said she was reluctant to disclose to the child protection worker any negative information about her partner's parenting. She told me that she withheld much of this information with the hope that if she painted his parenting behaviour, and the children's responses, in favourable lights, the child welfare involvement would end and her partner could move back home.

During the interviews for this study, both Caitlyn and her CP Worker described Caitlyn's partner's parenting as abusive, manipulative, alternating with a distinct lack of involvement with the children or their development. Caitlyn also told me that once she and her partner were separated, he began to use his contact with their child as a means to control and harass Caitlyn. Although, none of the interventions employed by Caitlyn's CP Worker Karen resulted in any behaviour change for her partner, other than his abusiveness becoming more covert, she described the child welfare involvement in her life as "pivotal". She told me that the

conversations with Karen regarding the violence toward herself and the impacts to her children helped her to clearly assess her situation and end the relationship with her partner.

During my interview with Caitlyn she described her partner's parenting as uninvolved, inconsistent and occasionally abusive:

Ya, I don't know, the first word that comes to mind is absent...he doesn't play an active role in [our sons'] life.

He still doesn't pay any attention, he lets the boys run and play on their own, no bathing, not typical parenting, reading, none of that, its playing video games, playing in the pool, so otherwise when he is active with the kids, he's pretty good but it's so rare. There's no active role.

Caitlyn described three particular incidents that were disturbing to the children:

My partner was absolutely flipping out one night when it happened [violence] and uhm my stepson went home to his mom and said "I don't want to go back"... that's how it started, whenever he [my partner] was angry at my stepson he would blame my stepson for all this stuff that's gone on [involvement with MCFD].

He [my partner] grabbed my stepson by the collar.... my partner even grabbed him by the shirt years before this whole Ministry thing went down.

When our son was two, my partner picked up his highchair and threw it across the dining room with our son standing beside me...tucking himself behind my leg, wrapping himself around my leg.

Caitlyn also described to me how she had taken on exclusive responsibility for the care and discipline of the children before she and her partner separated as follows:

...it was always touch and go with my partner with the kids you know. He was moody. He would sleep mid way through the day. I opted to take control of raising the kids, doing basically everything so a not, uhm, stress him out and then the kids see it.

Caitlyn told me about the ways that her partner used the children or contact with the children after their separation to control her:

Calling me the C word at drop off because I don't want to stand there and argue with him. With A. [our son] in the back seat.

I know A [son] is exposed to [my partner telling him] "mommy hates me and your mamma and poppa". He will say things in front of [our son] like, "your mom hates me, hates my new girlfriend and hates my mom and dad, your mam and poppa, your mom hates us all you know." He's trying to teach my five-year old that I hate, when I don't.

When I asked Caitlyn how the children responded to her partner's parenting she stated that both of the boys expressed fear during the times that her partner was violent as indicated by the following:

My stepson went back to his mom's [after a visit with his dad and step-mom Caitlyn] and said his dad was freaking out on me [step-mom Caitlyn] and he was scared of his dad and doesn't want to go [to his dad's] home.

When Caitlyn was asked how her 2-year-old son responded when he witnessed his father throw his highchair across the room, Caitlyn said:

He was two, he just moved behind me with his hands around my leg right. He created me as the barrier, ya it makes sense. I don't know why I just thought of that. Cause it does, it happens a lot in front of the kids. It happened a lot in front of the kids, his blow ups.

Caitlyn's CP Worker Karen characterized Caitlyn's partner's approach to parenting in a similar light as Caitlyn. Karen characterized his parenting to me as manipulative, entitled, with him putting his needs above the children by focusing his attention on avoiding the consequences of his violence rather than focusing on the wellbeing of the children:

...he was very focused on himself so he couldn't meet the needs of his children. [The] intake came about when his son, who was not living with him, disclosed to a doctor some anxiety about his dad. Some fear about his dad, that his dad had been rough with him. He was blaming his son and saying, "oh, this is bad, it's all my son's fault for saying something, he knows better, he knows better than to tell his mom". The father was saying, "he shouldn't have done that, he knows that his mom is trying to get custody", and so rather than focusing on the fact that he had been abusive, he was blaming his son and that didn't recognize that his son was scared and was trying to get his own need for safety met.

Whether he was blaming his partner, blaming his children, whether he was blaming his employees or coworkers or parents, there was always someone to blame. And so that was part of his parenting too because sometimes he was blaming the kids.

The investigation substantiated the aggression Caitlyn's partner used toward his son and also confirmed that he used physical and verbal aggression and coercion and control toward Caitlyn on a regular basis. Much of what Caitlyn and Karen described to me about Caitlyn's partner's parenting was also documented in Caitlyn's family service file. His parenting

behaviours, as described by Caitlyn, her parents and her step-son's bio-mother were noted in the file as uninvolved and aggressive, alternating between "being aggressive with his oldest son and competing with his son's bio-mom for his affection by buying his son things". The documentation also stated that Caitlyn's partner had said that his oldest son was not a "credible source of information."

Caitlyn told me that she was interviewed by the CP Worker about her partner's parenting and that the information she provided was used in the risk assessment. However, Caitlyn did not give the CP Worker accurate information and explains below:

Much of what I've told you so far didn't come out. I know I said that his parenting was good. So, if I said, "he's a great parent, the kids love him, uhn, they run to the door and tell him they love him, ya daddy's home da da da", I figured in my head that would show them that he was a safe father at least and maybe that would bring him home faster.

In my interview with Caitlyn's CP Worker Karen, she confirmed that she had utilized the information about Caitlyn's partner's parenting in the child safety assessment. She told me that she used information that Caitlyn had shared with her directly and also used information that she "gleaned" from her conversations with the father. However, she also indicated the following:

If I did that investigation again now, as opposed to then, I would factor it [the father's parenting behaviors] in more now than I did then. That's just more learning. I think I was more focused on the fact that he had been abusive to her [Caitlyn] and yes of course the children are impacted by that...there was some consideration for his parenting, but I could have been more focused on it than I was at the time.

Caitlyn's risk assessment in her family service file indicated that dad's aggression with his older son on "at least one occasion", his minimization of his actions toward his son, his stating that his son was "not a credible source of information", his blaming his son for causing him "troubles" in his custody and access dispute with his son's bio-mom and his competing with his son's mother for his affections were evaluated in the formal risk assessment.

Although there was no distinct category in the risk assessment tool regarding parenting behaviours in general or parenting behaviours of men who batter in particular, Karen attempted to document and evaluate the above noted parenting behaviours in the following categories: Parental Expectations of Child; Parental Acceptance of Child; Child's Response to Parent; Child's Mental Health and Development; Family Violence; and Parent's Response to Identified Needs. The lack of a distinct category regarding parenting behaviours, particularly within the context of domestic violence, resulted in a patchy assessment of Caitlyn's partner's parenting of his children. In the final risk analysis section of the risk assessment, Karen documented that:

father could benefit from a parenting program or father's group, education regarding the developmental ages and stages of children and their various physical and emotional needs. It would be of particular benefit for father to be educated regarding the impact upon children of witnessing physical, verbal and emotional abuse.

There was no record in the file that Caitlyn's partner was required to attend and complete any program designed to ameliorate his negative parenting behaviours. This was confirmed to me by Caitlyn.

As Caitlyn's son and step-son were assessed as being in need of protection in the risk assessment, a risk reduction service plan was developed documenting the following required interventions in order to reduce the risks to the children: Caitlyn's partner to reside outside the family home and to attend and complete a family violence program and continue seeing a psychiatrist for treatment of Bi-Polar Disorder; Caitlyn to participate in the women's portion of a violence intervention program; and a further assessment for both children regarding the impact of their father's violence toward their mom/step-mom on the children and a mental health assessment for the older son.

In her interview with me, Caitlyn agreed with Karen's sentiments that the focus of the child welfare assessment and interventions, were more on protecting the children from further exposure to the violence toward her and less on her partner's parenting of the children including the physical abuse of her step-son:

They ended up focusing more on the domestic violence between my ex-partner and I than parenting issues or violence toward the children which was how it [the child welfare involvement] was initiated because D [stepson] said, "daddy grabbed me by the neck". That freaked everybody out. It went from him not be able to see the kids at all but always being able to see me provided the kids weren't around, to him having supervised visits as long as him and I were not in the same room together. They always kept my ex-partner and I apart because it was our dynamic that ended up being more the focus, our fighting.

Caitlyn also told me about her ambivalence regarding her partner's contact with their children believing that contact between the children and their father was what they needed and wanted but was also harmful to them:

Well what's best for me would be to cut my ex-partner off completely and make sure he never sees A [son] again but what's best for A may not be that. Nothing about him is positive for A and his growth. He can't teach A anything good. It's my dad and I that teach him how to ride a bike. It's my dad and I that teach him how to fish. He's [my partner] never taught him one thing. He's not good for A. Mentally he's not good for A. Emotionally, he's not good for A. BUT, A loves his dad. It's a total catch [catch 22], you go into protection mode.... I'm not there to make sure A is protected from that if he was.

Caitlyn told me that her ex-partner became more covert in his abuse and controlling behaviours *after* interventions:

I mean, the Family Violence Project, ultimately taught my ex-partner the kind of things to say and the ways to behave, but they don't change your behavior....so he knows the right things to say by the end of his course even to his older son, to me, to all of us, but it didn't change.

When asked about the Ministry holding him accountable for his use of violence and exposing his children to it, Caitlyn replied, "They didn't change anything. They made him fearful. They probably made him smarter." Caitlyn also stated that ultimately, her ex-partner blamed her more for his use of violence when the Ministry held him accountable.

Caitlyn's CP Worker, Karen, has a BA in Child and Youth Care and was hired by MCFD as a CP Worker upon graduation. Karen indicated that her training, research and information that she's read, have taught her that women who have experienced violence will feel judged by CP Workers, go "underground" or not report future episodes of violence if they are met with inappropriate social responses from whomever they are working with. She further indicated that MCFD risk assessment guided her practice.

It would seem then that because the risk assessment that Karen relied upon to inform her decision making regarding appropriate interventions did not have a distinct category for documenting and evaluating the parenting of men who batter and its impacts to the children, the concerns that Karen shared with Caitlyn regarding her partner's parenting did not translate into the risk reduction service plan and the required interventions. Despite Karen's concerns, the patchy risk assessment didn't easily allow for Karen to account for Caitlyn's partner's parenting in the risk reduction service plan. As previously noted Caitlyn didn't find the child welfare interventions recommended to her partner to be helpful. However, when I asked if the Ministry's interventions/involvement were helpful for her, Caitlyn indicated that they were but also noted that the positives changes for her occurred after the MCFD interventions were over and not during as illuminated by the following:

Pivotal. It changed my outlook on everything. this whole situation changed everything for me. It weighed on my mind when the Ministry was gone, this process and the embarrassment, even to the people I love that never judged me, my best friend, my parents, this is embarrassing to me.

That I was involved in a process like this. That I allowed this to happen in our home and in front of our children, to get to where we were, uhm, it was life changing for me. It's probably one of the main reasons I ended up leaving him. I just kick myself for not doing it while the Ministry was involved 'cause I would have had a lot more help.

Donna's case/story. MCFD became involved with Donna, her partner and her children (aged 5, 4 and 2 years-old) when information was received that Donna had been physically and

sexually assaulted by her partner. This was her partner's second charge of domestic assault toward Donna. In the interview for this study, Donna described to me her partner's parenting, as uninvolved, inconsistent and punitive/authoritarian. Donna also told me that once she and her partner were separated, he used his access with the children to further harass and control her. Donna's CP Worker Tara, did not have conversations with Donna about her partner's parenting or Donna's concerns. As a result, no assessments of his parenting or the impacts to the children and their safety were completed and no interventions for dealing with his parenting deficiencies were recommended. Instead Tara focused exclusively on mitigating the risks associated with Donna's partner's substance misuse and use of violence toward Donna. Tara required Donna's partner to move out of the family home, have access with the children that was supervised due to his substance misuse, and complete both phases of a domestic violence program offered to him through community corrections as a condition of his probation order. The file documentation, completed by Donna's CP Worker Tara, showed that the supervised access requirement was dropped once Donna's partner provided a clean drug screen which indicated that he was no longer using illegal substances.

Donna found these approaches to be unhelpful and described her ex-partner becoming more of a "smooth talker" and "sneakier" in hiding his abuse/violence after being involved in the child welfare process and completing violence programming. Donna told me that she would have preferred to have been followed longer by child welfare.

When I asked Donna to describe her partner's parenting, Donna described it as uninvolved, inconsistent and punitive/authoritarian as follows:

As far as any parenting responsibility [he] was uninvolved. He wanted nothing to do with it. He absolutely though, considers himself to have done every single thing...he raised those children.

Mom cooks, mom cleans, mom takes care of the kids, dad should be able to go to the bar and hang out with his buddies.

He had two sides to him depending on what kind of mood he was in. He was either super dad and full of energy and had to be doing really cool things, or he had this angry frustrated, you can't do anything right side.

Donna told me the following example to illustrate her partner's his angry/punitive parenting:

A [our oldest son], every single night at dinner would spill his cup, of whatever, water, milk, and he [my partner] would get soooo angry, pick him up, shake him and "what the hell is wrong with you" and [be] just furious.

Donna also told me, that prior to her and her partner's separation she had exclusive responsibility for disciplining the children:

When it came to the tough decisions as far as disciplining the kids, things that you don't want to do, I did my best, but was completely unsupported in that.

When I asked Donna about her children's response to her ex-partner's parenting, she focused on their disappointment, particularly their oldest son's disappointment, when her partner didn't follow through with his access:

You could see a little stress but, "daddy's my superhero" and is still. He is the greatest thing on the face of the earth [to the children] and even now when he disappoints him, doesn't show up, picks them up to have them for the weekend and drops them off somewhere else and takes off, they stick very firmly to "he loves us, but he's busy and that's ok"...

Donna told me that she believed her partner used the children and his contact with them as a means to control and harass her:

He has access Saturday afternoons until Monday mornings..... 75% of the time, he has opted out of, or picked up and dropped [the children] off at his parents' house, or taken them [the children] and changed his mind because he has an appointment.

I've struggled a lot with not telling them [the children], you know, when they come home and say, "we didn't see daddy last weekend 'cause you wouldn't let us go, why wouldn't you let us go?" I can't say, "well, actually, your dad phoned me and wanted to go out and get drunk". They've blamed me and made me the bad guy.

When Donna was asked, when the children's dad started this kind of behavior, Donna replied:

Uhm, on my way to the police station, the morning we split up. He told me, “if you go to the police, you will never see your children again”. I also feel scared if I do, if I do something, if I try harder to stop some access, that he is going to fight harder, use them harder and they are going to get more caught in the middle and more hurt.

In contrast to Donna’s description of her partner’s parenting as uninvolved, inconsistent and punitive/authoritarian, her CP Worker Tara described it to me more in terms of entitlement and lack of involvement as a parent:

I don’t remember him speaking about the children very much, if at all. He was more concerned about the perception of himself and what had happened and then minimizing the actual event [physical and sexual assault of the mother]. He wanted to let me know that he had been responsible for the children’s day-to-day care and not his partner, which I found a little odd because he worked fulltime and she didn’t. [He wanted to know], “how could he see them more because he really missed them?”

A lot of uhm, times when his kids were at his parent’s place or his grandma’s place for his supervised access, he wasn’t there. So, he didn’t seem that interested in necessarily parenting them.

There was inconsistent information regarding Donna’s partner’s parenting and any impacts to the children recorded by Tara in Donna’s family service file. Tara had documented that Donna’s four-year old had told Donna that “daddy told me you are a bad mommy and soon I will be able to live with him”; that Donna’s partner had shown up at the children’s daycare attempting to take the children despite the supervised access condition; that her partner had indicated he would not financially support the children if he was not having access with them and that he had exposed the children to ongoing violence and coercion toward their mother. Despite this information regarding Donna’s partner’s parenting the risk assessment indicated:

both mom and dad have a good knowledge of age appropriate behavior with consistent and realistic standards. Both parents set safe and reasonable limits with age appropriate consequences.

As previously mentioned, Donna told me that that she did not have discussions with the CP Worker regarding her partner’s parenting:

I didn't say a lot about his parenting when we split up... nobody really asked me about him as a parent. It was very much, "this woman has been abused, so the kids aren't safe with him".

Donna told me that the focus of the child safety assessments was on the children's exposure to their father's violence toward her and that the interventions used reflected this focus. This was confirmed to me by the documentation in the family service file and by Tara when she told me that she did not consider any information regarding Donna's partner's parenting in the child safety assessments. Tara gave the following reasons for that decision:

He didn't seem to be in any shape or form any kind of primary parent. Further along [the child welfare process], he wanted to have them [the children] come spend nights at his new place and I did have some concerns about whether he was, uhm, whether he had the ability to do that on his own given the young ages of his children.

There was a notation made by Tara in Donna's family service file stating that Donna's partner's supervised access would need to be observed to determine his capacity for unsupervised access but there was not documentation to indicate that this had occurred. There was a letter on file from Tara, addressed to both parents, advising both to stop arguing over Donna's partner's access and develop an access schedule as "it is in the best interest of the children (and whole family for that matter) that a schedule should be decided upon as soon as possible".

Donna's CP Worker has a BA in Child and Youth Care and volunteered in children's community recreational programs before being hired by MCFD to practice child protection work. When asked what guided her practice regarding the parenting behaviours of men who batter, she replied:

The best interest of the child. Whether they are going to be safe. Whether they are going to get the support they need from that parent and whether the parent is going to use his access simply to piss off the other parent or whether he truly wants to be involved with them. The willingness of that parent to participate in getting a better understanding of what his children need, if that's the case, and being able to articulate that to me. The knowledge that I've gained is that men in this situation do, often use their children as a,

hmm, tool slash weapon against their partner and not because they have any interest in the child in mind at all. So, instead of just saying “dad has the right to see his children”, how about, “his children have a right to be protected and be safe and happy with either parent?”

Donna’s CP Worker also indicated a belief that children are safer once parents separate and begin new relationships.

In contrast to Tara’s belief that children living in situations of domestic violence are safer once their parents separate, Donna had ongoing concerns about her children’s safety and wellbeing and expressed to me her ambivalence regarding her partner’s contact with their children also believing that denying the children contact would be harmful to them:

I feel very stuck, that he will never learn and my kids are going to get towed along for the rest of their life and there’s nothing I can do about it. I feel like, if he got hit by a truck it would be the best thing that ever happened to these kids. But, I need to let them figure out who he is on their own. I’m also scared if I try harder to stop some access, he is going to fight back harder, use them harder and they are going to get more in the middle and more hurt. I don’t want to break my kids.

Donna told me that her partner became more covert in his abusive and controlling behaviours after interventions:

He has some court Family Violence Project court ordered thing he had to do and I don’t think he learned a thing. He went to court for the assault charges and the Judge said, “what did you learn”? and he said, “that I should have left her sooner”. I don’t think that he’s changed in the slightest way...other than he may be better at getting sneaky.

Like using the kids, he’s just, [learned] how to slide things in without getting into trouble and I think he may be figuring out how the legal system works, but really, what am I going to do about that ‘cause nobody is going to stop him from seeing his kids because he told the kids, “mommy is fat” or because he told the kids, “mommy’s car wasn’t clean enough or mommy wouldn’t let you see me”. Really, the Ministry has more to worry about.

Donna told me that the Ministry involvement and interventions weren’t helpful and stated:

I really liked Tara but I felt very much like the things I was saying, they didn’t matter, “we’re busy here, we’ve got real cases to deal with”, that’s how it felt. And as much of a pain in the butt as it was to have a child protection worker checking in, I would have liked to be followed longer and had more opportunity to have in-depth conversations about the things that I thought were really important.

Despite Donna's concerns about her partner's parenting and its ongoing impacts to the children during access with their father, her partner's parenting was not evaluated in the child safety assessments. It seems that Donna's CP Worker Tara closed her file believing that the children were safe once Donna and her partner separated and he was engaged in programs for domestic violence as part of his probation order terms. Additionally, although Tara told me that she knows that there is a connection between domestic violence and negative parenting of men who batter, and a risk that these men will use their access to further harass their partners, this link was never drawn in the child safety assessments or reflected in the interventions recommended for Donna's partner. In fact, Donna was advised to stop fighting with her partner about his access with the children and develop a plan for his ongoing contact.

Themes from Data Analysis

What follows are the themes identified using Thomas's (2011) constant comparative method from my analysis of the interviews with the mothers and their CP Workers and reviews of the family service files and MCFD documents. The themes are organized into the broad categories of conceptualizations of parenting behaviours, information used to assess child safety and interventions utilized in the child welfare process and the effectiveness/ helpfulness of the interventions according to the mothers.

Conceptualizations of fathers' parenting behaviours: Paternal autocrats.

Thematically speaking what stands out in the mothers' stories about the fathers' parenting is their autocratic orientation toward their children and their intimate partners. Three of the four mothers interviewed described their children's father's parenting as uninvolved, inconsistent or punitive/authoritarian. The fourth mother, Brenda, described her partner's parenting as "strict in

a cultural way” while also using verbal coercion and abuse with the children (Brenda identified that her family’s culture is Coast Salish). Additionally, two of the mothers described ways that their children’s fathers used the children or contact with the children to control the mothers such as verbally abusing the mother at access drop off and pick up or arranging access and not following through or repeatedly cancelling and then telling the children it was their mother’s fault that they didn’t see their father.

Three of the four mothers interviewed indicated that they took on exclusive responsibility for caring for and disciplining the children. Two indicated they took full responsibility to avoid the risk of the children triggering the father’s anger, or to protect the children from abuse or witnessing violence toward the mother. One mother also identified that by protecting her child from her partner’s anger, she was also protecting the relationship with her partner because she would not continue a relationship with him if he were to harm her child.

Three of four mothers described the children having negative responses to their father’s abusive, punitive or authoritarian parenting behaviours. Two of the mothers described their children’s fear of their father. Brenda described her child being able to assertively tell her father that he hurt her when he used verbal abuse toward her.

Similar to the mother’s negative descriptions of the fathers’ parenting approaches, three of the CP Workers in this study described the father’s parenting in predominately negative terms. Alice’s CP Worker described Alice’s partner’s parenting as age appropriate, but had only spoken to the father, not the mother, about his parenting and disciplining strategies. Brenda’s partner was described as lacking in parental responsibilities but was good one on one with the children. Caitlyn’s partner was described as manipulative, and entitled, putting his own needs above the children by focusing more on denying his use of violence and avoiding the consequences of the

violence than on the well-being of his children. Donna's partner was described as uninvolved, inconsistent and punitive.

Information used to assess child safety: Fathers' parenting ignored. Overall, the data revealed a "hands off" approach where the fathers' parenting was concerned in the assessments of child safety. Two of the four mothers were not interviewed by the CP Workers about their partner's parenting. The other two mothers were interviewed about their partner's parenting, but only one mother's information was used in a formal risk assessment of her partner's parenting and its impact on the children's safety and wellbeing.

While all four CP Workers noted that the focus of their assessments of child safety was almost exclusively on the risks to the children from their exposure to domestic violence toward their mother, one CP Worker did indicate that she considered the mother's and father's information regarding the father's parenting in the child safety assessments. The fourth CP Worker indicated he did not consider the father's parenting in the child safety assessments as the father's parenting and his use of intimate partner violence were "completely two different issues". Although 3 out of the 4 family service files reviewed had documented references to the parenting of the children's fathers, only one file had documentation indicating that the father's parenting was assessed as part of the child safety assessment process (Risk Assessment Model).

Interventions utilized in the child welfare process: "Patched attempts"¹. In the main, the interventions used to end the abuse in these mothers' families were "patched attempts"² as they only took into account the fathers' violence toward the mothers without

¹Stover, C. S. (2013). Fathers for change: A new approach to working with fathers who perpetrate intimate partner violence. *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 41(1), 65-71.

² ibid

mitigating the harm to the children from the fathers' parenting. According to the four mothers' descriptions of the interventions that were recommended or utilized in the child welfare process, none were designed to address the fathers' parenting within the context of domestic violence, although it was recommended to one father that he take a generic parenting program. The two mothers who expressed the most concern about their ex-partners' parenting, and their children's ongoing contact with their fathers noted that the focus of the child welfare interventions used was on protecting the children from further exposure to their father's violence toward themselves with little mention of the potential for the children's exposure to the detrimental parenting behaviours of these fathers.

Similar to the theme of the participating CP Workers focusing the child safety assessments on the presence of domestic violence, 3 CP Workers acknowledged that they focused the interventions primarily on lessening the risk of further violence toward the children's mothers and the children's subsequent exposure to this violence. These same interventions did not address or mitigate the risks associated with the children's fathers' parenting behaviours within the context of domestic violence.

Three CP Workers directed the fathers to attend a violence intervention program with a focus on intimate partner violence. One of these CP Workers also referred the father to a generic parenting program in the hope that the father would learn how his use of violence toward the children's mother impacted his children and would ultimately correct his parenting of his children.

Three fathers were advised to reside outside of the home for a period of time and were directed to have only supervised contact/access with their children. Two CP Workers, who utilized supervised access for the fathers indicated that the reasoning for requiring the fathers'

access to be supervised did not include any risks associated with the fathers' parenting during access visits. The third CP Worker explicitly stated that any risks to the children, while having access with their father, were reduced as soon as the parents separated.

Two of the mothers, who permanently separated from their partners due to the violence, expressed ambivalence and doubts regarding their children's ongoing contact with their fathers, believing that contact with their fathers was, at the same time, needed and wanted by their children but also harmful to them.

Only one mother indicated that their family's involvement with MCFD, and the subsequent interventions that were utilized, were helpful for creating more safety in her family. Two other mothers found the entire process to be unhelpful, with no change in behaviors in the fathers, while another mother found the Ministry involvement to be "pivotal" in helping her come to terms with her experiences of violence and to ultimately end the relationship with her ex-partner. In addition, two mothers wanted the CP Workers to be more involved with their families on a longer-term basis. Finally, two of the mothers reported that their ex-partners became more covert in their abusive and controlling behaviours *after* interventions.

Two of the CP Workers in this study had BSWs; the two others had BA CYC degrees. Their work experiences were varied and included no previous work experience in the human services prior to coming to MCFD to practice child protection work, working in a community recreational program, a women's center, a group home for youth and an "Out of Care program" that supports children and youth. All four CP Workers indicated awareness that men who use violence in their intimate partner relationships may also have problematic parenting behaviours, including using the children, or their contact with them, as a means to further control their mothers.

In summary, although all four CP Workers indicated awareness that men who use violence in their intimate partner relationship may have problematic parenting behaviours, when viewed in light of the themes from the mothers' and CP Worker's interviews and the reviews of the mothers' family service files, this notion was not reflected in practice. If fathers' problematic parenting came up, it was noted as an afterthought. This may be connected to my finding that despite there being numerous prompts in the MCFD policy and guideline documents for CP Workers to be aware of the connection between men's use of violence in intimate partner relationships and inadequate parenting of the children, this linkage did not appear in the child safety assessment tool. When viewed in their totality, these documents did not have consistently clear and robust linkages between domestic violence and the parenting of men who batter, nor did the documents guide CP Workers to investigate and assess the potential risks to child safety from the parenting of men who batter. This resulted in the concerns held by both mothers and CP Workers, regarding the fathers' autocratic parenting approaches, being ignored, neither assessed in the child safety assessments nor addressed by the child welfare interventions. The following chapter will be a discussion of the significance of the relevant themes from the analysis in light of the literature review.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The interviews with mothers and Child Welfare workers, along with the reviews of the MCFD documents and the mothers' family service files revealed numerous themes in relation to how Child Protection workers account for the parenting of men who batter in their child safety assessments and service plans. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the significance of these findings in light of the literature reviewed. As mentioned in Chapter 4, I use the broad organizing ideas from the interview questions to report on the importance of these themes in light of the literature review. These categories are paternal autocrats, fathers' parenting ignored, "patched attempts", and the effectiveness/helpfulness of the interventions according to the mothers. I will also explore the implications of these results to the field of child welfare, and make recommendations for changes to policy and practice and areas for further research.

Results in Relation to Relevant Literature

Conceptualization of fathers' parenting: Paternal autocrats. The mothers' conceptualizations and descriptions of their children's fathers' parenting, as uninvolved, inconsistent or punitive/authoritarian, were consistent with the majority of the literature. Many in the literature described the parenting practice/behaviours of men who use violence in their intimate partner relationships as rigid, controlling, authoritarian, under involved, neglectful, irresponsible, self-centered, entitled, and manipulative which are similar to the common characteristics that lead to battering of the children's mothers (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Baker & Cunningham, 2004; Cunningham & Baker, 2007; Edleson & Williams, 2007; Van Horn & Lieberman, 2007; Jaffe, 2008; Scott & Lishak, 2012). In addition, violent fathers were

described in the literature as having more negative affect toward their children while demonstrating less warmth, support and nurturance than non-violent fathers (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Baker & Cunningham, 2004; Cunningham & Baker, 2007; Edleson & Williams, 2007; Van Horn & Lieberman, 2007; Jaffe, 2008; Scott & Lishak, 2012). Groves, Van Horn and Lieberman (2007) highlight that what is most concerning about the studies that confirm the link between fathers' violence toward their children's mothers and negative parenting practices is that there is also a link between these negative parenting practices and negative outcomes for children. The findings in my study mirror the previously identified link between violence toward the mothers and negative parenting practices of the fathers in that, three of four mothers described the children having negative responses, including fear, to their father's abusive, punitive or authoritarian parenting behaviours. It is also important to note that despite the children having negative responses to their fathers' parenting, the children also had positive responses and wanted to have continued contact with their fathers. These case stories therefore add weight to existing concerns about the parenting of perpetrators of IPV.

Three of the CP Workers in this study used similar negative terms to describe the fathers' parenting behaviours and attitudes as the terms used by the mothers and the literature. They were described as lacking parental responsibility but being good one on one with the children, putting their needs above those of the children, manipulative, entitled, uninvolved, inconsistent and punitive. This consistency with the extant literature is important to the field of child welfare as it highlights that children may be harmed not only by their exposure to the violence toward their mothers but also by their exposure to their father's parenting practices as noted by Bancroft and the necessity for detailed assessments of child safety in cases of domestic violence (2002; 2010).

Although there was general consistency between the mothers' and CP Workers' descriptions of the (ex)-partners' parenting and descriptions in the literature, the mothers' descriptions did differ from the literature when it comes to how fathers' rights groups frame fathers' involvement with their children. Fathers' rights groups frame fathers' involvement in terms of the men's rights. In contrast, the mothers expected that their partner's would demonstrate responsibility toward the children as involved fathers. The mothers' expectations were not supported by the CP Workers' actions regarding the fathers' contact with the children. There wasn't a comprehensive assessment during the fathers' access with their children to inform a plan to ensure the father was held accountable for the children's safety and wellbeing. When fathers' rights groups do acknowledge domestic violence, it is characterized as marital discord with both parties sharing equal responsibility, rather than one person exercising ongoing power and control over their partner (Brown et al., 2009; Edleson, 2007; Strega et al., 2008; Flood, 2010). This distinction is especially important in child welfare and child protection work because the safety and wellbeing of a child must remain the paramount consideration when responding to domestic violence rather than the rights of an offending parent (*CFCSA*, 2011). This distinction underlines how important it is for CP Workers to have an accurate picture of battering men's parenting by recognizing that many of these men's parenting approach focusses on their right to have access to the children versus the needs of the children for safety. This mirrors the ideology of fathers' rights groups that also focus on the rights of the fathers instead of the needs of the children. By not completing a full assessment of the fathers' parenting, the CP Workers were inadvertently reinforcing the notion that the paramount consideration is a father's right to access.

Two of the mothers, who separated from their partners during their involvement with child welfare, described ways that their children's fathers used the children or contact with the children to control the mothers. This included the fathers verbally abusing the mothers in front of the children at visitation drop off and pick up, attempting to cause division between the children and their mothers by speaking badly of the mother and her parenting to the children and being inconsistent in their visitations with the children in order to interfere with the mothers' activities. These findings are consistent with the existing literature which shows that post-separation, fathers increase their indirect attempts to control mothers by undermining mothers' parenting authority and relationships with the children, particularly if the abuser is restrained from having direct contact with the mother (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Baker & Cunningham, 2004; Cunningham & Baker, 2007; Groves, Van Horn & Lieberman, 2007; Campbell, Gordon, Foster, 2008). That my findings replicated what is recorded in the extant research is of particular importance to the field of child welfare. When CP Workers respond to reports of children's exposure to domestic violence, they must consider that it is the quality of the relationship that children have with the non-offending parent that mediates, over time, the harmful effects of the children's exposure (Bancroft, 2002; Bancroft, 2010; Stover, 2013). Undermining this relationship places the children at risk even if they have been removed from exposure to IPV. If the intended outcomes of child welfare interventions include reducing the risk of further harm to the children and promoting their healing then steps need to be taken to ensure the relationships these children have with their non-offending parent are not undermined by their fathers.

Three of the four mothers interviewed indicated that they took on exclusive responsibility for caring for and disciplining the children, with two indicating that they did what they could to prevent their children from triggering the father's anger, in order to also prevent abuse being

directed toward the children or themselves, so that with that, they could shield their children from having to witness IPV. This is congruent with the findings of Edleson and Williams (2007), who noted that mothers may alter their parenting strategies in the presence of their partners so as to de-escalate the men's irritability or because of the fathers' undermining of mothers' parenting authority. Understanding mothers' parenting intentions and how these are directly connected to the threatening position in which they find themselves because of their partners' violence, is therefore of vital importance for CP workers who conduct child safety assessments. Recognizing that threatened, abused and battered mothers' parenting approaches are shaped by the conditions in which they are trying to care for and protect their children matters to child welfare practice. As Jaffe, Johnson, Crooks and Bala (2008) suggest, mothers who are the victims of violence may need support to re-establish their competence as parents and opportunities to further develop their skills in nurturing and protecting their children because they too have been traumatized not because they are not competent. This is significant in child welfare practice as it underscores the importance of supporting mothers who are victims of violence rather than blaming or punishing them for the impacts of their partners' violence. As suggested by Stover (2013), wherever possible, supporting these mothers' parenting is a meaningful way to enhance the healing relationships these children have with their mothers (2013).

Information utilized to assess child safety: Fathers' parenting ignored. As noted above, while only two of the four mothers were interviewed by the CP Workers about their partner's parenting, only one mother's information was used in a formal risk assessment of her partner's parenting and its impact on the children's safety and wellbeing. In addition, although three out of the four family service files reviewed had documented references to the parenting of the children's fathers, only one file had documentation indicating that the father's parenting was

assessed as part of the child safety assessment process (Risk Assessment Model). Additionally, as noted above, all four CP Workers noted that the focus of their assessments of child safety was almost exclusively on the risks to the children from their exposure to domestic violence toward their mother with one CP Worker indicating he did not consider the father's parenting in the child safety assessments as the father's parenting and his use of intimate partner violence were two "completely two different issues".

Thus, although all four MCFD CP Workers indicated awareness that men who use violence in their intimate partner relationship may also have problematic parenting behaviours, including using children, or their contact with them, as means to further control their mothers, this was not consistently reflected in the child safety assessments or the interventions that were recommended/mandated for the fathers. This disconnect, between knowledge and practice, was mirrored in the policies, guidelines and assessment tool that guided the CP Workers practice. These documents did not have clear and robust linkages between domestic violence and the parenting of men who batter, nor did they guide CP Workers to assess the potential risks to children's safety from the parenting of men who batter. Although there were brief references to the link between domestic violence and the negative parenting practices of men who batter in the MCFD policy entitled Best Practice Approaches: Domestic Violence and Child Protection these linkages do not appear in the overarching child welfare policies, guidelines or the assessment tool that CP Workers rely on in British Columbia to guide and inform their practice. This inconsistency between the policies, guidelines and the assessment tool suggests that it may have been the inconsistency in policies, guidelines and assessment tools that hampered the CP Workers' ability to comprehensively assess the risks to these children rather than the knowledge or experience of the CP Workers.

Also of importance is that the disconnect between these CP Workers' knowledge and practice, mirrored in their policies, guidelines and assessment tool, indicates the absence of a necessary link between research and policy and practice: The links between the perpetration of intimate partner violence, the negative parenting of the men who perpetrate this violence and the overlap between IPV and child abuse and neglect has been well documented (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002, Baker, Cunningham & Jaffe, 2004; Jaffe & Crooks, 2007; Whitestar, 2010; Jaffe, 2014). Jaffe and Crooks (2010) identified the need to take these overlaps into account when assessing the safety and best interests of children when intervening in families experiencing domestic violence. In addition to the recommendations to assess child safety in relationship to IPV, the perpetrators' parenting of the children and child abuse and neglect, Stover (2013) maintained that it is important to develop assessment tools that match these fathers' treatment goals and needs with the most suitable treatment approach to avoid a patched attempt to end abuse. When using assessment models to evaluate child safety, evaluators should pay careful attention to the knowledge and perceptions of the mother regarding their partner's parenting practices, as failure to do so is a common mistake in domestic violence assessments (Bancroft & Silverman, 2004; Cory et al., 2008). This recommendation is particularly important to this case study, as only two of the mothers were interviewed about their partners' parenting behaviours suggesting an area to strengthen in child welfare practice with families experiencing violence.

If policies, guidelines and assessment tools that guide child protection practice are there to reduce the risks of uninformed decision making rather than to impede or inhibit child protection practice when accounting for the parenting of men who batter then these documents must clearly reflect this intention. My findings suggest that where current MCFD policies are

concerned, there still exist significant gaps that may continue to result in “patched attempts” (Stover, 2013) at ending abuse.

Interventions used in the child welfare process: “Patched attempts”. There were no interventions recommended by the CP Workers that were designed to address the parenting of the fathers within the context of domestic violence. The interventions used were focused on protecting the children from further exposure to their father’s violence toward the mothers with little mention of the potential for the children’s exposure to the detrimental parenting behaviours of these fathers. This was consistently reflected in the interviews with the mothers, the CP Workers and the reviews of the family service files. As recommended by the MCFD policy Best Practice Approaches: Child Protection and Violence Against Women (2004, 2010), the CP Workers tied the children’s safety directly to their mothers when deciding upon interventions that would minimize the risks and harms to the children from the domestic violence. Three fathers were directed to attend violence intervention programs with a focus on intimate partner violence. Three were required to not reside in the home with the mother and the children. In addition, two fathers were directed to attend generic parenting programs. Of note, one father was directed to attend to both a violence intervention program and a generic parenting program in the hope that the father would learn how his use of violence toward the mother impacted his children and would ultimately correct his parenting of his children.

These interventions focused on minimizing the children’s exposure to their fathers’ violence toward the mothers, independent of the children’s exposure to their fathers’ parenting, were inconsistent with the literature. The interventions did not recognize the entangled nature of domestic violence and child abuse and neglect as suggested by MacDonell (2012). Nor did the interventions recognize that the underlying dynamics of power, control and entitlement, inherent

in the battering of women, are the same dynamics that underlie the negative and harmful parenting attitudes and behaviours associated with battering parents (Saunders, 1994; Bancroft, 2002; Bancroft, 2010; Bancroft, Silverman & Ritchie, 2011; Jaffe, 2014).

Violence intervention programs, also known as batterer intervention programs, usually focus on battering men's relationships with their partners along with women and children's safety but do not engage men in examinations of their parenting (Crooks, Scott, Francis, Kelly & Reid, 2006; Scott, Francis, Crooks, Paddon & Wolfe, 2007). In addition to the lack of focus on violent men's parenting in violence intervention programs, the literature indicates that there are risks associated with these fathers' attendance at generic parenting programs because such programs do not engage men in an examination of their entitled attitudes toward their children or their accountability for their use of violence and its impacts to the family. Referrals to generic parenting programs may actually result in increased attempts by these fathers to coercively control the children rather than nurturing them in addition to undermining and criticizing the mothers' parenting (Government of Connecticut, 2012; Government of Western Australia, 2016).

These findings are significant to child welfare because focusing assessments and interventions wholly on minimizing children's exposure to domestic violence may provide an incomplete picture of child safety. These types of interventions may not only result in missed opportunities to end violence against women and children but may also reinforce these fathers' coercive control of both the children and their mothers. As families often stay together in the face of domestic violence *and* child welfare involvement, and children continue to have and want to have contact with their fathers even after separation, there is a need for rehabilitation to the fathers who perpetrate domestic violence as partners *and* as parents (Jaffe, Baker, Cunningham,

2004). These fathers need to be invited to take full responsibility for their actions and the impacts of their abuse and violence on each member of the family. If one aspect of their abuse remains covered or ignored, these men will be denied a potential opportunity to realize the nature of their abusive actions and the opportunity to provide restitution to their families and heal themselves (Jenkins, 2006).

Two of the mothers, who separated from their partners due to the violence, expressed ambivalence and doubts regarding their children's ongoing contact with their fathers, believing that contact with their fathers was, at the same time, needed and wanted by their children but also harmful to them due to the fathers' behaviours and interactions with the children. The challenge experienced by battered mothers with regard to their children having contact with their fathers is mirrored in the literature. Tubbs and Williams (2010) remarked that most mothers, despite the traumatic relationships that they themselves had with their children's fathers, agonized over the possibility of denying the children contact with their fathers in order to keep the children safe. These mothers believed that having a relationship with their fathers was necessary for their children's development and mental health. McMahon, McAlister, Groves, Van Horn and Lieberman (2000) recognized that decisions regarding children's access to their fathers must balance the tensions between recognizing the harm done to children, the potential for more harm and the children's desire to have contact with their fathers. Flood (2010) found that most mothers, while initially supportive of their children having contact with their fathers were unable to secure safe arrangements such as supervised access.

In contrast to the mothers' views of the risks to the children from contact with their fathers' behaviours and interactions with them during access visits, the two CP Workers that directed the access to be supervised indicated that the supervision requirement was not

associated with the fathers' parenting of the children but rather due to the fathers' drug use or violence toward the mothers. One of the CP Workers stated that any risks to the children were reduced as soon as the parents separated. This is incongruent with the findings in the literature which clearly documents that after separation there is a significant risk of escalation in fathers' violence towards the mothers and with that, an increase of such fathers putting their children in harm's way while also using negative parenting practices as indirect attempts to further control the mother (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Bancroft & Cunningham, 2004; Cunningham & Baker, 2007; Groves, Van Horn & Lieberman, 2007; Campbell, Gordon, Foster, 2008; MacPherson, 2010; Harne, 2011). Further, Bancroft and Silverman (2002) have shown that these men often have the ability to parent appropriately while under observation and Bancroft and Silverman (2004) cautioned those making decisions regarding fathers' access to their children post separation not to make the error of assuming that the children are safer once the couple has separated.

Jaffe (2014) pointed out the importance of more professional education regarding the ongoing risks associated with domestic violence and the implications for parenting or access plans. The finding in my study that the CP Workers did not consider that the fathers might pose direct risks to the children during access is of concern in the field of child welfare. It speaks directly to the notion that it is accurate assessments of risk that inform the interventions chosen to mitigate those risks. In this case study, the absence of assessments of the fathers' parenting, and the impacts to the children, resulted in missed opportunities to intervene in the fathers' parenting practices with their children.

Two of the mothers reported that their ex-partners became more covert in their abusive and controlling behaviours after interventions. Although this is a concerning finding and points

the way for further research, there was no relevant information in my literature search to compare with this finding. The absence of this in the extant literature points the way for further research into the safety and helpfulness of interventions for men who use IPV in order to ensure that the interventions actually mitigate risks to the victims of IPV and their children rather than increase the risk.

Helpfulness of child welfare involvement and interventions according to mothers.

There was no consistent response from the mothers in regards to the helpfulness of MCFD involvement and interventions. Only one mother indicated that their family's involvement with MCFD, and the subsequent interventions that were utilized, were helpful for creating more safety in her family. Two other mothers found the entire process to be unhelpful, with no change in behaviors in the fathers, while another mother found the Ministry involvement to be "pivotal" in helping her come to terms with her experiences of violence and to ultimately end the relationship with her ex-partner. In addition, two mothers wanted the CP Workers to be more involved with their families on a longer-term basis. Since this topic was not reviewed for this study's literature review, this finding suggests a direction for further research with regards to matching child welfare interventions with the context and experiences of different families. As elsewhere in the child welfare research, it is well established that one size does not fit all (Alegria, Atkins, Frammer, Slaton & Stelk, 2010; Templeman & Mitchell, 2002). I therefore suggest that this established finding should be considered in our practice with mothers and children who are experiencing IPV so that the norm becomes a complete restorative response to IPV thereby ensuring that all family members are free from further abuse including when children have contact with their fathers.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Although child welfare practices that address children's exposure to their fathers' violence toward their mothers are necessary steps toward reducing the harms to children from domestic violence, child welfare responses must be expanded and strengthened to include assessments of the fathers' parenting practices and interventions to address any parenting deficits. I would suggest that child protection agencies review for, and rectify, any inconsistencies within and between their policies, guidelines and assessment tools regarding responding to domestic violence as a child protection concern.

As suggested by Jaffe, Baker, and Cunningham (2004) families often stay together and children continue to have contact with their fathers despite the domestic violence, highlighting the need for fathers who perpetrate domestic violence to be offered interventions as partners *and* parents. As suggested by the literature (Jaffe and Crooks, 2010; Stover, 2013), I also recommend, ensuring that child welfare policies include clear direction to CP Workers to assess and address the parenting of men who batter as part of a more comprehensive response to families experiencing domestic violence. Additionally, as suggested by Bancroft and Silverman (2002) and Jaffe (2014), I recommend that a comprehensive assessment of these fathers' parenting occur prior to the implementation of any programming intended to increase the safety of children and their mothers and underline that this should be done before any access is granted or any parenting plans are developed. As pointed out by Jenkins (2006) no progress toward restoring the safety of victims of abuse is likely to occur without an accurate accounting of the abuse and its impacts on others. An accurate and full accounting is a necessary prerequisite to the restorative practice of a CP Worker and the fathers' restitution toward their families.

Finally, given the documented issues associated with fathers who batter attending generic parenting programs, I recommend the further development and utilization of parenting programs for men who use domestic violence that are currently available in a few locations in BC to minimize the risks of child welfare interventions inadvertently reinforcing these fathers' coercive control within their families.

Further Research

Fox and Benson (2004) and Holden et al. (2010) have emphasized the limitations in the extant literature regarding the parenting practices of men who use violence against their children's mothers. Holden et al. noted that most of the evidence was limited by the reliance on self-reports of mothers from battered women's shelters or from child welfare agencies or from fathers alone without corroborating evidence from other independent sources. Although my study did use information from the mothers and CP Workers regarding the parenting of the men who came to the attention of child welfare, in order to ensure the safety of the mothers who participated in the study, the fathers were not interviewed. This is a limitation of this study. Therefore, there is still a need for comprehensive studies on the parenting of men who batter that encompass all voices including the voices of fathers who use violence and their children.

In addition, more research is needed on the effectiveness of interventions that are used within the context of child welfare to rehabilitate these fathers. Due to the lack of information in the literature that explored the possibility of men becoming more covertly abusive after child welfare interventions, I recommend further research on this topic to ensure the safety and suitability of the child welfare interventions.

Conclusion

Although the policy Best Practice Approaches: Child Protection and Violence Against Women (2004, 2010) identified a link between fathers' use of violence toward an intimate partner and problematic parenting of their children, there was no corresponding category/section in the risk assessment tool in which to evaluate this unique set of parenting practices or the impacts to the children's safety and wellbeing. In this case study, the CP Workers were aware that it was common for men who batter their partners to also use the children, their contact with the children and their authority and influence as a father to further control the children's mothers. Despite the knowledge of the connection between the use of domestic violence and parenting deficits, the inconsistency between the policies and assessment tool resulted in the CP Workers being hampered in their ability to apply this knowledge to their practice. Given the absence of direction to assess the parenting of men who batter in the risk assessment tool used, and the inconsistencies between the policies and guidelines, it is not surprising that despite these CP Workers' efforts and commitment to increase safety for the women *and* their children in this study, the interventions used were not focused on assessing and addressing the fathers' parenting or the associated risks or harms to the children. Tying children's safety to their mothers as suggested in the MCFD policy Best Practice Approaches: Child Protection and Violence Against Women (2004, 2010), without assessing the risk that fathers' parenting may pose to their children, independent of the risk the fathers pose to the mothers, may result in less comprehensive assessments of risk and missed opportunities to increase safety for all members of the families who have come to the attention of child welfare due to domestic violence. CP Workers are unlikely to fulfill their legal mandate to make children's safety the paramount

consideration in situations of IPV without assessing and addressing the risks associated with the parenting of these fathers, independent of whether the parents remain together or separate.

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Appendix A

February 18, 2010

RE: Research Proposal

Dear Colleen McPherson,

Further to your e-mail dated November 12, 2009 you have requested to conduct research using data gathered from work completed by social workers.

Your research proposal is to complete a case study, reviewing 4 – 5 files closed files that have been identified as ones in which the families experienced Intimate Partner Violence that included a documented pattern of coercion and control. You intend to gather information for analysis about how social workers identify, conceptualize, describe and intervene in the harmful parenting of offenders that often accompanies the violence towards the children's mothers.

You propose to interview the mothers and social workers and do extensive file reviews of the 5 identified files. The files would be randomly and blindly selected. Strict confidentiality will be maintained; staff will not be aware which files you review.

This is to confirm that I approve of your request to conduct the research as you have proposed.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing the results of your research.

Noelle Philp

Community Services Manager

Appendix B

Script for Recruiting Client Participants (spoken over the telephone to potential client participants by a Team Leader)

I'm contacting you to see if you have an interest in speaking to a researcher named Colleen MacPherson about research that she will be conducting at our local MCFD office. Colleen is also a social worker with MCFD who is currently on an educational leave of absence. The research she is conducting will form part of the graduating requirements for a Master degree in Child and Youth Care.

Briefly, her research is called Children as Weapons: Child Protection Responses to the Parenting of Men who Batter and will focus on how child protection workers assess children's short and long-term safety in relationship to the parenting behaviors of men, who have come to the attention of MCFD due to battering, and to examine how the protection workers intervene.

Participation in the study is voluntary and declining to participate in no way affect your relationship with MCFD or future services. No records will be kept of who does or does not participate in the study.

Former client participation will be invaluable to the research that Colleen intends to conduct. If you are interesting in speaking to Colleen to get more details about the study and to possibly volunteer to be interviewed, can I give her your phone number so that she can contact you directly?

Script for Recruiting Case Worker Participants (sent by email to all case workers at a South Island regional MCFD office)

Colleen MacPherson, currently on educational leave, will be conducting research in our office as part of the graduating requirements for a Masters in Child and Youth Care. The study is entitled Children as Weapons: Child Protection Responses to the Parenting of Men who Batter. She intends to complete a case study of child protection practices when working with families who have experienced domestic violence. The study will specifically focus on how child protection workers assess children's short and long-term safety in relationship to the parenting behaviors of men, who have come to the attention of MCFD due to battering, and to examine how the protection workers intervene. The study will also examine what impact the office culture and ethos and the training of workers has on the case workers' identification and description of the parenting behaviours of the men who batter and the intervention(s) utilized, recommended and/or mandated in response to the children's father's/step-father's parenting behaviours? The purpose is to contribute to a greater understanding of the complexities and challenges involved in working with families who have experienced domestic violence and to contribute to advances in practice in this particular area.

In addition to conducting file reviews, and reviews of relevant MCFD policy, standards, assessment and practice guideline documents, Colleen hopes to interview up to five case workers and former clients for the study. The interviews for workers will occur during regular work hours and will take approximately one hour to complete. Participation in this study is confidential and voluntary. The regional office will not know who has agreed or declined to participate in the study. Declining to participate will not affect your employment or professional status. Case worker participation is invaluable to the research that Colleen intends to conduct. If you are interested in discussing this project in greater detail or in consenting to participate, you are encouraged to contact Colleen directly at Colleen.MacPherson@gov.bc.ca.

Script used by the researcher Colleen MacPherson when contacting interested former clients about what the study entails for them.

Hello. My name is Colleen MacPherson. I understand that you have received a phone call from a MCFD team leader who introduced to you the research project that I will be conducting out of the Duncan MCFD office. I also understand that you expressed an interest in speaking to me further about the study. Do you still have an interest in speaking to me? Before I begin, do you have any questions that you would like to ask me?

Today I would like to give you more details about what the study is about and what it might entail for you if you have an interest in participating. As the team leader has already told you, I'm interested in looking at how child protection workers assess children's short and long-term safety in relationship to the parenting behaviours of men, who have come to the attention of MCFD due to battering, and to examine how the protection workers intervene. In order to do that, I would like to interview former clients and their case workers to get their perspectives on the parenting behaviours of their children's father and their perspectives on the interventions that were recommended. With your consent, I intend to discuss the contents of your file with your former case worker and will use the content of your file for my research. Please be assured that I will not approach your former case worker to participate in an interview, nor will I review your file, until and unless, you consent to participate. Do you have any questions you would like to ask me?

With your permission then, I would like to book a time, at your convenience, to meet with you and go over in detail the consent form to participate in the study. If you consent I would then like to continue on to completing an interview with you which should take approximately one hour of your time. Thank you.

Client Participant Consent Form

Children as Weapons: Child Protection Responses to the Parenting of Men who Batter

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled Children as Weapons: Child Protection Responses to the Parenting of Men who Batter that is being conducted by Colleen MacPherson, BA, Child and Youth Care.

Colleen MacPherson is a graduate student at the School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria as well as a social worker with the Ministry of Children and Family Development on an educational leave. You may contact her if you have further questions at cmacpher@uvic.ca.

This research is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the University of Victoria.

The purpose of this research project is threefold: (a) to deepen understanding of child protection practice when working with families where men have battered their partners, (b) to generate useful feedback to advance the delivery, responsiveness and effectiveness of child welfare practice and interventions with respect to the parenting of men who batter their children's mothers, and (c) to complete the graduating requirements for a Masters in Child and Youth Care for the researcher.

Research of this nature is important because a richer, more in-depth understanding of the complexity of the issues associated with the parenting of men who batter, the subsequent child safety assessments and interventions will inform and advance practice and promote child safety. The knowledge gained may point the way for further research regarding effective and rehabilitative parenting interventions for men who batter.

You are being asked to participate in this study because your perspective as a mother and former client of MCFD is invaluable to understanding how the parenting of men who batter is identified, assessed and responded to by child welfare interventions. Your experience and reflections will provide insights that will contribute to a greater understanding of the complexities and challenges involved.

If you agree to participate in this research, your participation will be an interview that should take no more than 60 minutes. It will be scheduled at a place/time that is of convenience for you. If you desire, bus fare and/or child care expenses will be provided to you to attend the interview. The interview will take place held between the period of May 2010 and June 2010. The interview will focus on your perspective of the parenting behaviours of your child(ren)'s father/step-father and the child welfare interventions that were recommended/offered. This interview will be audio recorded for later transcription by the researcher and will not be listened to by anyone other than the researcher.

Participation in this study may cause you some emotional discomfort from being asked questions about your experiences and perceptions of the parenting of your child(ren)'s father/step-father and/or the child welfare system and practice. A list of local support services and mental health resources will be provided to you in case you feel the need for additional emotional support. Please be assured that during the interviews Colleen will follow your lead and only information you wish to volunteer is expected. You are free to opt out of answering any question that is of concern to you. You are also free to opt out of participating in the interview at any time without consequence or explanation. If this happens, or if the interviewer sees fit to terminate an interview, and you desire support or help, Colleen will connect you with appropriate services. If during the interview, you disclose information regarding current abuse or neglect of a child(ren), the researcher is obligated to report that information to MCFD. If this should

occur, the researcher will explain the reporting process and will assist you in self-reporting the information to MCFD.

Potential benefits include: having the opportunity to discuss the meaning of your experience with the researcher, to experience the positive impacts of “having a voice” and to contribute to advances in child safety and child welfare practice. The interview process may be an opportunity for self-advocacy and empowerment. Future clients will benefit from this study.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequence or explanation. You are under no obligation to participate in whole or in part even though the MCFD is participating in the study. If you do withdraw from any aspect of the study Colleen will ask you if you would like your data to be used in the study or not. The data for consideration would include information from your interview, your file and the use of the case worker’s comment about the file. If you would like the data to be used in the study, Colleen will ask for a written consent to that effect. If not, Colleen will discard your data and it will not be used in the study. Please be assured that declining to participate or withdrawing your consent will not compromise your relationship with MCFD or any future services.

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, Colleen will ask for your continued consent at the beginning of the interview.

Colleen cannot offer absolute anonymity since you will be interacting directly with the researcher and there are some limits to your confidentiality. Due to the small size of this study, team leaders may know the names of the pool of people involved. As case workers will be interviewed about former client’s files, our case worker will know that you have participated in this study. In addition, there are legal requirements for Colleen to report any information disclosed with respect to abuse or neglect of a child. With the exception of these limits your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected. No information identifying you, your child(ren) or your child(ren)’s father/step-father will be shared with other participants or documented in transcriptions or other files. No personal identifiers will be used in the written results of the study. Computer files will be stored in a password protected computer file and paper documents will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Only the researcher will have access to those files.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: You and other participants will have the opportunity to read the final results if you choose, results may be published in academic journals and texts, and they may be presented at conferences and scholarly meetings. Results will also be shared with the University of Victoria as part of the graduating requirements for the researcher. A report will be submitted to the child welfare office. Data from this study will be disposed of when the researcher’s thesis has been completed, approximately 6 – 9 months. Electronic data will be erased and paper files will be shredded.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher at the above email address, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by Colleen.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.