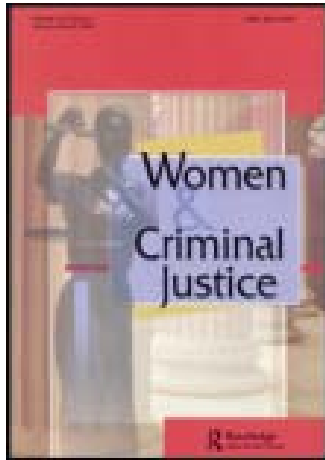


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When Abuse Happens Again: Women's Reasons for Not Reporting New Incidents of Intimate Partner Abuse to Law Enforcement

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When Abuse Happens Again: Women's Reasons for *Not* Reporting New Incidents of Intimate Partner Abuse to Law Enforcement

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Although most women abused by intimate partners experience a patterned behavior of abuse (by either the same or new partners), little is known about their decision making regarding whether to call the police for subsequent abuse. The current study found that 90 percent of women who had encountered the criminal legal system for previous intimate partner abuse victimizations did not contact the police for some or all recurrences. Qualitative analysis was conducted among a sample of 102 women regarding their reasons for not re-engaging the legal system for subsequent victimizations.

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The results suggested 5 overall reasons as to why women involved with the criminal legal system choose not to engage the system again.

KEYWORDS criminal legal system, intimate partner abuse, law enforcement, official reporting

INTRODUCTION

Research has made tremendous strides in the past four decades in recognizing intimate partner abuse (IPA) as a serious public health issue.¹ Each year approximately 5.3 million incidents of IPA are perpetrated against adult women in the United States, causing 2.0 million injuries, with 550,000 of those necessitating medical treatment (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control 2003). Lifetime estimates among a sample of victims within a health care setting were reported to be 34 percent for physical assault and 44 percent for psychological abuse (Thompson et al. 2007). In 2008, males murdered an estimated 1,817 females in single-victim/single-offender incidents (Violence Policy Center 2010). Although young adults (18- to 24-year-olds) made up 11.7 percent of the general population between 1998 and 2002, they made up 42 percent of partner violence victimizations (Durose et al. 2005). The cost of IPA extends beyond \$5.8 billion yearly, two thirds of which is specific to direct medical and mental health care (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control 2003).

Because of the high social and individual costs of IPA, unprecedented changes were made in the response of the criminal legal system (CLS) to IPA during the 1980s and 1990s.² Examples of changes that have occurred in the CLS's response to IPA over time include the passage of legislation making domestic violence a crime, the availability of protection orders and battered women's shelters, changes in law enforcement and prosecutorial responses, and recognition of the need for offender accountability in terms of offender sanctions and treatment. These changes resulted from the combined impact of the documentation of the plight of women abused by current and former intimate partners, the second wave of the feminist movement, successful court cases brought by battered women against police departments who failed to arrest their abusers, and research indicating that arrest deterred abusers from reoffending (see Belknap 2007 for an overview). As expected, the implementation of mandatory arrest statutes and/or departmental policies resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of arrests for domestic violence and had an impact on the number of cases reaching the court system. For the most part the CLS maintained a punitive response to domestic violence, even in cases in which victims did not want their partners arrested and charged (Cattaneo et al. 2009; Hare 2010).

A significant body of research documents the risk of recurring IPA (whether by the same or new partners) even after a CLS intervention (e.g.,

Bybee and Sullivan 2005; Cole, Logan, and Shannon 2008; Fleury-Steiner et al. 2006). Despite a punitive response to domestic violence by law enforcement (e.g., arrest), some IPA survivors may still fear that police will not adequately address their victimization with the necessary level of seriousness that it requires.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Survivors' Decisions to Contact the CLS Authorities

Lee, Park, and Lightfoot (2010:195) identified IPA survivors' decisions to seek help from the police as "often the most critical moment" in their help seeking. Moreover, although IPA is the most common violent crime reported to the police (Ventura and Davis 2005), a significant body of research suggests that most IPA cases are never reported to the police (e.g., Catalano 2007; Gartner and Macmillan 1995; Jasinski 2003; Lichtenstein and Johnson 2009; Podana 2010; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). Among a sample of 201 female victims only 55 percent reported their victimization to the police (Berk et al. 1984). Rates of reporting found by Macmillan and Kruttschnitt (2005) were even lower—between 16 percent and 33 percent of the women in their sample reported their victimizations to the police. Finally, a study using the Czech portion of the International Violence Against Women Survey found that only 8 percent of women reported IPA to the police (Podana 2010).

Even with underreporting, domestic violence calls constitute approximately half of all violent crime calls to police departments. For example, 49 percent of the violent crime calls received by the Washington, DC, Metropolitan Police Department in 2000 were for domestic violence incidents (Cassidy, Nicholl, and Ross 2001). Criminologists and scholars in related fields have sought to understand victims' reasons for not reporting crimes to the police. Across crime types, studies commonly report that reasons for not reporting include fear of reprisal, not viewing the incident as a serious matter, and dissatisfaction with the CLS. Among IPA victims specifically, several themes emerge in women's decisions not to report IPA. For example, Fleury et al. (1998) used a sample of 137 women recruited from a battered women's shelter to identify the three most common reasons why women with abusive partners did not contact the police. These reasons included being prevented by the assailant from calling, not having a phone, and having the desire for privacy. These themes have been echoed and expanded on by other researchers. For example, several studies have highlighted the role of privacy concerns as well as shame/embarrassment in women's IPA reporting decisions (e.g., Durose et al. 2005; Felson et al. 2002; Langan and Innes 1986). In fact, using data from the National Crime Victimization Survey, Catalano (2007) reported that the most frequent reason given for not reporting intimate partner violence to the police was

that the incident was a private and personal matter. Between 2001 and 2005, on average, almost 40 percent of male and 22 percent of female victims gave this reason.

Other studies suggest that women do not contact the authorities because of a fear of retaliation, reprisal, and/or escalated abuse from the abuser (Brookoff et al. 1997; Catalano 2007; Durose et al. 2005; Felson et al. 2002; Fleury et al. 1998; Singer 1988). Still other research points to women's beliefs that the IPA incident was not serious enough to report as well as concerns that the police may not take their victimization seriously (Catalano 2007; Durose et al. 2005; Podana 2010; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). Finally, some women do not report IPA because they are protecting their abuser, they still have an emotional connection to the abuser, and/or they are financially dependent on their abuser (Brookoff et al. 1997; Catalano 2007; Durose et al. 2005; Dutton 1993; Felson et al. 2002).

Survivors' Evaluations of Their Contact With CLS Authorities

Similar to the research on IPA survivors' likelihood of reporting their victimizations to CLS authorities, research has focused on survivor's evaluations of the police and prosecutorial process. Among a sample of 50 abused women, 43 percent rated the police response as positive or encouraging, while 49 percent rated the police as discouraging, and half reported that the police minimized their injuries (Erez and Belknap 1998). A more recent study of 820 IPA survivors found that the women reported more positive than negative aspects of their interactions with the police, although about a third of the women said that the police said "there was nothing they could do" and a quarter reported that the police "acted bored" (Cattaneo 2010:251). Yet another study of 95 female victims of domestic violence found that 75 percent of the women had the most favorable rating of the police ("very helpful") and an additional 16 percent rated the police as "somewhat" or "very" helpful (Apsler, Cummins, and Carl 2003).

Several studies have examined how experiences with the police and court systems are influenced by procedural justice factors (Gover, Brank, and MacDonald 2007; Tyler 1984, 1988; Tyler and Folger 1980). According to this philosophy of justice, victims who feel that representatives of the criminal legal system treated them in a just and fair fashion are more likely to engage the system in the future. Procedural justice outcomes for victims therefore include feelings of fairness, justice, and respect. Early research indicated that victims' satisfaction with the CLS was based on whether they viewed the outcome in their case as fair (Thibaut et al. 1974; Tyler 1988). This line of thinking was supported by Davis and Taylor (1997), who highlighted the influence of positive interactions between victims and representatives of criminal and social service agencies on reporting victimization. According to

Stover and colleagues (2010), victims who received the intervention were more likely to feel respected and were 5 times more likely to call the police for subsequent violence. Hence, women may not contact law enforcement for subsequent abuse because they felt that they were not initially treated in a procedurally just way (i.e., felt respected and treated with dignity). This essentially removes the victims' opportunity to seek redress for the victimization. That is, not engaging the CLS could have a negative impact on victims' recovery processes.

CLS-System-Involved Survivors' Reports of Their Likelihoods of Recontacting the CLS

Although numerous studies have examined why women do or do not call the police regarding IPA victimization, only a limited amount of research has been devoted to understanding women's decision making in recontacting the CLS among those who have already had experiences with the system regarding a "target" IPA victimization. Cattaneo (2010) found that on a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 being the most likely to recontact the police in the case of future abuse by an intimate partner, women overwhelmingly (3.37 average) indicated that they would likely recontact the police. As expected, research consistently finds that women with more positive evaluations of the CLS (usually the police) in a target IPA case are more likely to report intentions to reuse the system in subsequent IPA victimizations, and most specifically, that what they wanted the CLS to do, they in fact did (e.g., found the abuser guilty or not guilty; Apsler et al. 2003; Cattaneo and Goodman 2009; Fleury-Steiner et al. 2006). Similarly, those who reported negative experiences with the CLS (women who reported that they were admonished for not pressing charges previously, blamed for the violence, and instructed to mend their relationship with the offender) were significantly less likely to reuse the authorities for future IPA (Fleury-Steiner et al. 2006). In addition, many previous studies used shelter samples (Fleury et al. 1998; Johnson 1990) to examine reporting behavior as opposed to samples composed of women already involved with the system living in a variety of settings (Fleury-Steiner et al. 2006).³

Few studies have examined why victims do not contact the police when they have formerly been involved with the CLS. The goal of the present study is to identify and examine CLS-involved women survivors' reports about why they did not call the police for subsequent IPA victimization. Although Fleury-Steiner and colleagues (2006) addressed this in a previous study, their study reported women's intentions about whether they would reuse the CLS. The current research builds on Fleury-Steiner and colleagues' (2006) study because it examines women's *actual decisions*, not intentions, to reuse the CLS after a prior IPA case in which authorities were involved. This study also examines what victims' friends say about reporting. Furthermore, this study

adds to the minimal literature that has focused on understanding women's decision making in recontacting the CLS among those who have already had contact with the system.

Friends' Opinions About Calling the Police

Research has documented the importance of friends' support to women in abusive relationships. When victims are asked about their disclosures of IPA, friends are frequently identified as the people, or among the people, most likely to know (Belknap et al. 2008; Rose, Campbell, and Kub 2000). Furthermore, when women are asked to rate levels of support among those who know about the IPA, friends are often reported by women as the most or among the most supportive (e.g., Belknap et al. 2008; Bosch and Bergen 2006; El-Bassel et al. 2001). In their efforts to minimize the abuse to themselves, some women do not disclose their IPA victimization to friends or other potential supporters (Dunham and Senn 2000), particularly if they are still with their abusers (Belknap et al. 2008). In addition, abusers often isolate women from their friends and other supporters, and some friends become less willing to support the women over time (Waldrop and Resick 2004), especially if the women stay with their abusers (e.g., Belknap et al. 2008). One study that included friends' support in an overall "social support" summed variable found that women with more social support reported better mental health, whereas institutional support (a variable that combined the women's levels of support from police, prosecutors, victim advocates, etc.) was unrelated to the women's mental health (Belknap et al. 2008). Similarly, another study reported that suicide attempts were lower among survivors of IPA whose friends supported them than those without supportive friends (Meadows et al. 2005). Given the influence that friends can have on whether a victim reports IPA to the police, it is important to examine whether friends do in fact support victims' decisions to contact law enforcement about their victimization.

The Current Study

This study is interested in whether this unique sample of women who previously engaged the CLS but did not report recurrences of IPA to law enforcement describe similar reasons for not reporting to those documented in previous research. In addition, we were interested in extending the extant literature to an examination of social network influences on reporting decisions by asking women about their friends' views of reporting. It is important to note that we did not want to constrain women's responses by merely providing them with a list of reasons described elsewhere. Instead, we were interested in how women already engaged with the CLS responded to open-ended questions about why they did not report IPA to the police. This

data-driven bottom-up approach allowed us to pursue the possibility that this sample may generate reasons not mentioned in previous literature.

METHODS

Participants and Sample

This study is part of a larger longitudinal study examining the effects of an interdisciplinary victim outreach program on the engagement of IPA survivors with the CLS. A community sample of women residing in an urban area in the western United States was recruited from police reports of IPA referred to researchers (see DePrince et al. 2012a, 2012b, for additional details associated with the larger study). These cases involved adult female victims and male offenders (as opposed to dual arrests). A diverse sample of IPA survivors ($N=236$) was enrolled in the study between December 2007 and July 2008. Survivors were interviewed at three points in time over the course of 1 year. Of 236 women who were interviewed at Time 1, 205 women came back for at least one follow-up visit. At Time 2, 81 percent ($n=192$) of the women who completed Time 1 interviews were retained; at Time 3, 80 percent of the participants from Time 1 were retained ($n=189$).

At Time 2 and Time 3, women who indicated experiencing IPA since their prior interview made up a subset of women who were asked additional questions about reporting IPA to the police. Specifically, these women were asked what proportion of IPA incidents they reported to the police. Those who stated that they did *not* report all incidents were also asked about the top three reasons for not reporting some abuse to the police. If women had difficulty generating multiple reasons, interviewers referred to a list of 12 options that were used as prompts (e.g., “wouldn’t be believed,” “too minor, not a police matter,” “didn’t want children to lose a father”). All women generated at least one spontaneous response to the question “Why didn’t you call the police?” and some women also endorsed additional categories that were provided. This demonstrates the bottom-up, participant-driven nature of the resulting coding categories.

Measures

IPA was measured using the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2; Straus et al. 1996). The CTS2 is a widely used and well-validated instrument for assessing conflict in intimate relationships.⁴ CTS2 items endorsed in this study included psychological, physical, and sexual aggression and injuries. The CTS2 was expanded so that additional items measuring offender stalking behaviors could also be endorsed. At each interview, the CTS2 was used to assess whether additional incidents of IPA had occurred since the previous interview. Women were considered to have experienced additional incidents of IPA if they endorsed any CTS2 items.⁵

Qualitative Data Analyses

To identify rich descriptive patterns of a particular phenomenon, this project used qualitative methodology. The qualitative responses provided to the open-ended reporting question about why subsequent abuse was not reported to the police were initially examined (by a primary coder) for high-frequency responses in order to generate thematic categories. The coding categories were derived from the actual data from the bottom up, based in grounded theory and the constant comparative method (Glaser 1965; Lincoln and Guba 1985), recognized as one of the most effective means of coding qualitative data (Maxwell 1996; Maykut and Morehouse 1994; Powell 1997; Westbrook 1994). Segments of text expressing similar ideas were grouped together, resulting in an initial 19 categories (see Table 1 for frequencies of responses from each of these categories). At this point, a second independent rater double-coded 15 percent of the responses across the 19 categories. Interrater reliability indicated a high rate of agreement, $\kappa = .86$ ($p < .000$). The standard kappa range for almost perfect agreement among raters is .81 – 1 (Landis and Koch 1977). For the 102 women who said that they did not report at least one incident to the police that occurred during the study period, the frequency of specific reasons for not reporting, in the initial 19 categories, are provided in Table 1.

During the next phase of coding the initial 19 categories were collapsed into five broad themes. This was done after we identified similarities in

TABLE 1 Initial 19 Reasons for Not Reporting New Incidents

Category	Frequency ($N=102$)
1. Not serious enough to involve police	44%
2. Negative impression of police	25%
3. Doesn't want to deal with the courts	17%
4. Doesn't want him in jail/court doesn't offer acceptable alternatives	16%
5. Negative legal consequences for her	12%
6. Negative past incident with police	10%
7. Fear of offender	9%
8. Concerned about social services taking the children	7%
9. Concerned about children losing a father	7%
10. Financial burden on her	7%
11. Financial dependence on him	6%
12. Self-blame	5%
13. Negative reaction to outcome of previous incident	5%
14. Believed/hoped he would change	5%
15. Doesn't want him to get in trouble (unspecified)	4%
16. Worry the police won't believe her	4%
17. Financial burden (unspecified)	1%
18. In love	1%
19. Other	64%

Note: The sum total does not equal 100 because women could give multiple reasons for not reporting to police.

category content (e.g., responses such as a negative impression of the police, negative past incident with the police, negative impression of the outcome of a previous incident, and doesn't want to deal with the courts were merged to form a new category, *dissatisfaction with the criminal legal system*). The five categories remaining after consolidation were (a) not serious enough or concern that she would not be taken seriously, (b) dissatisfaction with the criminal legal system, (c) negative consequences for her and the children, (d) love/protection of the offender, and (e) fear of the offender. Additional information about the coding process associated with these five categories is provided in the Results section.

At Time 3 questions were also asked about friends' opinions concerning reporting, including questions about the percentage of friends who have experienced IPA and friends' perceptions about calling the police for IPA. Women's qualitative responses were streamlined to fit a discrete number of categories (percentage of friends who have experienced IPA: "none," "a few," "half," "a lot"; friends' opinions about calling the police: "you should call," "you shouldn't call," mixed ["some say call, some say don't"]). These findings are presented in the Results section.

RESULTS

This analysis includes a subset of 102 women who reported at least one abuse item on the CTS2 at Time 2 and/or Time 3 (i.e., during the study period) that they did not report to the police. There were 74 women at Time 2 and 74 women at Time 3 who were asked about subsequent reporting, for a total of 102 women asked about reporting at some point during the study period. Of the subgroup of 114 women experiencing additional IPA during the study period, only 12 said that they reported *everything* to the police. It is worth noting that 102 women stated that they did not report *everything* to the police, suggesting that even among women who choose to report some abuse, some IPA is often excluded. The bounding periods for Time 2 and Time 3 were similar; respondents were asked about IPA in the prior 6 months (since the last interview) and reasons for not reporting. Therefore, responses for not reporting at Time 2 and Time 3 were combined to represent IPA not reported during the study period.

The subgroup of 102 women who stated that they did not report at least one incident of IPA during the study period reflected a diverse sample in terms of age, race, income, education, and marital status. Women's ages ranged from 19 to 63, with an average age of 33 ($SD = 10.64$). Women reported their ethnic/racial backgrounds as follows: 49 percent White/Caucasian, 24 percent Black or African American, 1 percent Asian/Asian American, 1 percent Pacific Islander, 9 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, 6 percent other, and 44 percent Hispanic or Latina. An examination of income, education, and marital status further illustrated the diversity within the sample.

The median annual income (which included salary and nonsalary sources) was \$7,500 ($M = \$10,335$; $SD = \$11,352$), with total annual income ranging from \$0 to \$69,600. Four percent of women reported less than an eighth-grade education, 25 percent reported some high school, 21 percent had completed high school, 30 percent reported attending some college, 10 percent had earned an associate's degree, 5 percent had earned a 4-year college degree, 3 percent had earned a postgraduate degree, and 1 percent had some other type of education (e.g., trade school). Slightly less than half of the sample reported having ever been married (45 percent). In terms of women's current relationship status, 42 percent were single and never married, 24 percent were divorced, 8 percent were separated, 6 percent were married, 12 percent were living with someone, and 7 percent reported "other."

Reasons for Not Reporting to the Police

Responses were coded in the category *dissatisfied with the criminal legal system* if participants mentioned a negative impression of the police, negative past incident with the police, or negative impression of the outcome of a previous incident or said they did not want to deal with the courts. Almost half (47 percent; $n = 48$) said that they did not report the abuse because of being dissatisfied with the CLS. Quotes from four women are representative of responses in this category: "they (the police) go the neighbors, interrogate me, it feels like witch hunt," "he would go to jail and get right back out," "...they issue a warrant and they pick him up and he gets right back out...so what is the point of reporting?" and "involvement with the courts is a pain" (see Table 2 for quotes from additional women). This category included women with a variety of opinions about the CLS, some of which were based on past experience with the system ("once you've been treated badly, insulted by the police, you tend not to call," "the first case, it was dismissed"). Although several women mentioned dissatisfaction with a specific aspect of the CLS (e.g., the police, the courts), many others mentioned being unhappy with the system as a whole (e.g., "I want it to be mandatory that he goes to anger management but they never do that," "they wouldn't have done nothing," "I don't like the police and I have problems and issues with the [district attorney]").

Responses were coded in the category *felt that it was not serious enough or concerned that she would not be taken seriously* when a participant indicated a variety of reasons why she thought the incident was not serious enough to get the police involved, or if she expressed a belief that involving the police would be futile because they would not believe her description of events. A total of 39 percent ($n = 40$) of respondents felt that it was not serious enough or were concerned that they would not be taken seriously. Quotes from three women are representative of the responses in this category: "I don't think it was serious enough or a big deal," "wasn't sure I would

TABLE 2 Examples of Responses Within Five Categories of Reasons for Not Reporting

Category	Examples/quotes
Dissatisfied with the criminal legal system	<p>I didn't want to deal with the whole police scene Police sometimes act like it is your fault He would go to jail and get right back out. . . . They issue a warrant and they pick him up and he gets right back out. . . . so what is the point of reporting? They [the police] go the neighbors, interrogate me, it feels like witch hunt I don't think that jail or prison is the thing he needs, he needs some kind of help, I want it to be mandatory that he goes to anger management or self-improvement but they never do that, they only give him jail time all the time—they are not considering what would really help Involvement with the courts is a pain Things happen again and I worry about proving it and going through a trial so no sense in reporting</p>
Felt that it was not serious enough or concerned that she would not be taken seriously	<p>I don't think it was serious enough or a big deal Because it was only one slap, it wasn't that bad. If it was worse, I probably would have reported it. I would only call the cops if it was serious and there was nobody else around I could call for help I thought I wouldn't be believed Felt like the police are tired of coming out, they say, "Why are you letting the guy come back?" I don't want to call cops, I won't be believed because of my past arrest history Wasn't sure I would be taken seriously by the police; he has a military background so I thought the police would find him more believable. . . . I thought I wouldn't be believed because we were in a relationship</p>
Potential negative consequences for her and/or the children	<p>Worried I would be arrested Concern for my job Drinking was involved on both our part, didn't want police to get into that If we were both taken [arrested] who would watch my daughter? I don't want my children to lose a father Worried about losing custody of my babies He mentions immigration status and tries to use it against me I figured we would work it out and that I would suffer if I file charges. . . .</p>
Love of and/or desire to protect the offender	<p>I guess I just loved him too much I love him and he's the father of my kids—no matter what has happened, we've been there for each other through thick and thin, and sometimes people have problems, but well, I know his dad hit on him, and I understand that Because he is a tiny man and they would tear him up in jail, I have compassion for him, I love him even though he is an idiot Obviously loving him I love him I was naïve—I was in love I guess I just loved him too much To protect him because he has a history with a previous girlfriend and most things just happen when he is drunk</p>

(Continued)

TABLE 2 Continued

Category	Examples/quotes
Fear of the offender	Being scared of what he will do Out of fear from the people that he knows, out of fear he would take it out on me Scared of him Not knowing what he would do in response, scared. . . I didn't call the police previously because I thought he would hurt me and kill me He threatened to beat me up Fear. . . I thought he would hurt my family, he's threatened my friends He threatened to hurt me if I reported. . . I started to call but hung up. . . I was scared

Note: Women could give multiple reasons for not reporting to police. Of 102 respondents, 87 percent cited at least one of the reasons in this table for not reporting incidents of abuse that occurred during the study period. Sample responses in this table represent common responses among the 102 women.

be taken seriously by the police, he has a military background so I thought the police would find him more believable . . .,” and “I thought I wouldn't be believed because we were in a relationship” (see Table 2 for quotes from additional women). It is important to note that this category was not composed solely of women reporting “less serious” forms of IPA on the CTS2. Women who thought it was not serious enough to report included those who experienced physical assault and injury. Quotes from four women are representative of the range of responses associated with the belief that it was not serious enough to report: “it wasn't as bad as before,” “if he just pushes me, we'll handle that ourselves,” “because it was only one slap . . .,” “you don't think it's all that serious, you can heal if it's physical.”

Responses were coded in the category of *potential negative consequences for her and/or the children* if women stated that they did not report subsequent violence to the police for a variety of reasons, including because they were worried about being arrested (or other legal implications), losing their job, losing financial support from the offender (or other financial consequences, such as having to pay to get him out of jail), losing custody of their children, or their child losing a father. Potential negative consequences for her and/or her children were reported by 23 percent ($n = 23$) as a reason why they decided to not call the police to report IPA. Quotes from four women are representative of the responses in this category: “worried I would be arrested,” “I don't want my children to lose a father,” “worried about losing custody of my babies,” “concern for my job” (see Table 2 for quotes from additional women). It was not clear how many women had actually experienced these types of negative consequences associated with reporting IPA, although some did mention past experience (e.g., financial: “I had to bail him out . . . pay fines”).

Responses were coded in the category *love of and/or desire to protect the offender* only if a woman explicitly mentioned love or a desire to protect

the offender from harm. This was reported by 22 percent ($n = 22$) as a reason why they did not report the abuse to the police. Quotes from four women are representative of the responses in this category: “I guess I just loved him too much,” “I love him and he’s the father of my kids—no matter what has happened, we’ve been there for each other through thick and thin, and sometimes people have problems, but well, I know his dad hit on him, and I understand that,” “to protect him because he has a history with a previous girlfriend and most things just happen when he is drunk,” “he is a tiny man and they would tear him up in jail, I have compassion for him, I love him even though he is an idiot” (see Table 2 for quotes from additional women).

Responses were coded in the category *fear of the offender* if women explicitly mentioned fear, feeling scared, or being threatened. Eight percent ($n = 8$) said that they were afraid of the offender and therefore did not report the abuse to the police. Quotes from four women are representative of the responses in this category: “scared of what he will do,” “not knowing what he would do in response, scared,” “I didn’t call the police previously because I thought he would hurt me and kill me,” “he threatened to beat me up” (see Table 2 for quotes from additional women).

Of the 102 persons stating that they did not report at least one incident occurring during the study period, 87 percent ($n = 89$) cited at least one of these five reasons for not calling the police. The frequencies for the five combined categories are presented in Table 3; additional quotes within these categories, representing common responses among the 102 women, are provided in Table 2.

Friends’ Opinions About Calling the Police

One line of research within the help-seeking literature is identifying who battered women turn to for support and how supportive the disclosure recipient is (Belknap et al. 2009; Bosch and Bergen 2006). During the Time 3 interview

TABLE 3 Collapsed Reasons for Not Reporting New Incidents

Category	Frequency ($N = 102$)
Said that they did not report the abuse because of being dissatisfied with the criminal legal system	47%
Felt that it was not serious enough or were concerned that they would not be taken seriously	39%
Did not report because of potential negative consequences for themselves and/or the children	23%
Did not report the abuse to the police because of their love of or desire to protect the offender	22%
Said that they were afraid of the offender and therefore did not report the abuse to the police	8%

we asked about how respondents' friends felt about calling the police. First we asked "What do friends who have had fights like yours say about calling the police?" Among respondents' friends experiencing similar abuse, women reported the following: 47 percent say do not call, 24 percent say they should call, 21 percent say that some say to call and some say not to call, and 7 percent don't know what their friends who have experienced similar abuse think about calling the police. Many women elaborated on these answers, explaining why friends who have experienced similar abuse say not to call the police. High-frequency responses included the following: "they don't want to get their partner in trouble," "they never call the police," "they are mad at the police"/"unhappy with how they have been treated by the police," "they would be betraying him"/"calling the police means you are being a snitch." Women's friends who had not experienced IPA themselves were more likely to encourage the women to call the police than those who had experienced similar abuse. It is possible that women's friends who had never interacted with the CLS had a more favorable view of the system compared to those who had previously interacted with the system. Women reported the following regarding their friends who had *not* experienced similar violence: 8 percent say do not call, 62 percent say they should call, 7 percent say that some say to call/some say not to call, and 23 percent do not know what their friends who have not experienced similar abuse think about calling the police.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research focused on reasons why IPA victims who were initially engaged in the CLS did not contact law enforcement for subsequent IPA victimization. In order to address the problem of underreporting IPA, it is critical to understand victims' reasoning about their decisions to re-engage the system. Among 102 women who reported additional incidents of IPA during the study period, only 12 women said that they reported all incidents to the police. This suggests that female domestic violence victims who have experience with the CLS are not likely to report subsequent violence to the police. Such high rates of nonreporting indicate that domestic violence cases involved with the system represent a very small proportion of all domestic violence occurring in the general population.

The high rates of nonreporting found in this study indicate that understanding why women who experience violence do not call the police is an important public safety issue deserving of research and policy attention. Such high rates of nonreporting necessitate an in-depth and comprehensive examination of why women do not contact the police, especially those women who have already had experiences with the system. It is important to understand what specific aspect of CLS involvement influences one's decision to

not have contact with the system again. For example, survivors who once engaged the system may have felt revictimized during the process of reporting the crime to law enforcement. Past research indicates that reporting victimization experiences can be a difficult and emotional process for survivors, even when the system's response is helpful and supportive (Thompson et al. 2007).

The most common reason reported by women in this study for not reporting was being dissatisfied with the criminal legal system. In fact, almost half of the women who experienced violence during the study period did not report it to the police because of their dissatisfaction with the system. Although the basis of dissatisfaction varied, victims' dissatisfaction seemed to be strongly associated with past negative experiences with the system (e.g., they felt that the police treated them poorly, they did not agree with the outcome of a previous case). This finding is consistent with prior research suggesting that survivors who have positive experiences with law enforcement are more likely to engage the system again (Apsler et al. 2003). Similarly, Fleury-Steiner et al. (2006) reported that experiences with the system overall, but particularly with law enforcement, significantly influence subsequent intentions to engage the system. Ruback, Greenberg, and Westcott (1984) reported that the experiences victims have with law enforcement officers influence whether they will call the police again. In the current study many victims expressed dissatisfaction with the system because they were not supportive of their batterers' arrest and/or of the prosecution of their partner. In these situations it is likely that victims did not understand mandatory arrest policies when they initially called the police, and therefore an unfortunate consequence of calling the police in these situations is not having contact with law enforcement when needed in the future. Another reason women may not have contacted law enforcement because of their dissatisfaction with the system can be explained by the philosophy of procedural justice. It is possible that women who did not feel that they were respected and treated with dignity by representatives of the criminal legal system decided not to engage the system in the future.

The second most common reason women who experienced violence during the study period did not report it to police was because of a concern that what happened was not serious enough or that they would not be taken seriously. This finding is consistent with prior research documenting the common belief among victims that their violent experiences would not be viewed in a serious light (Durose et al. 2005; Tjaden and Thoennes 1998; Zorza and Woods 1994). To some extent this particular finding reflects the fact that among the majority of people in society, many believe that it is easier to keep issues of family concern out of the CLS rather than acknowledging, embracing, and responding to such issues. Indeed, much progress has been made in the domestic IPA movement in terms of how the CLS responds to violence among intimates, which can be viewed as a reflection of changing social attitudes. For example, more than 40 years ago, when

discussing the common law enforcement practice involving domestic violence, Parnas (1967:914) described “domestic disturbances” as “. . . verbal and brief, neither disturbing anyone’s peace outside the family nor threatening or physically harming any of the disputants.” Social progress is evidenced by the availability of community resources for domestic violence victims, the development of coordinated responses to violence against women, mandatory arrest policies, specialized domestic violence courts, and pro-prosecution policies. Despite the system showing forward progress in treating domestic violence as a violent crime deserving of a specialized response, this realization may not resonate among women who have been convinced by their batterers that no one will take their reports of abuse seriously and that they are making a big deal out of nothing. Thus, a woman whose self-esteem has been destroyed by the power and control exerted over her by her partner may in fact believe that others will perceive her experiences as unimportant.

Nearly a quarter of the sample (23 percent) said that they did not report because of potential negative consequences for themselves and their children. This finding supports prior research indicating that women are afraid of financial, social, and emotional consequences of calling the police (Dutton 1993; Hirschel et al. 2007). Therefore, many abused women are making a conscious decision that the quality of life for themselves and their children would be negatively impacted by their efforts to engage the system. A similar proportion (22 percent) of the sample reported that they did not report subsequent abuse to the police because of their love of or desire to protect the offender. Again, this finding is supported by prior literature (Brookoff et al. 1997; Durose et al. 2005; Dutton 1993) that documents that many women stay in abusive relationships because of their love for their partners and their hope that things will change. The final main reason victims did not re-engage the system was because of fear of their partner, and this is also a common finding in previous studies (Berk et al. 1984; Brookoff et al. 1997; Durose et al. 2005; Fleury et al. 1998). This finding indicates that many abused women do not feel that their fear of their abuser outweighs the potential help they may receive by the CLS.

In a previous study Fleury-Steiner and colleagues (2006) examined whether women *intended* to reuse the CLS and found that intentions to reuse the CLS were influenced by a number of factors. The current study reports similar findings and builds on Fleury-Steiner and colleagues’ (2006) study because it examines women’s *actual decisions*, not intentions, to reuse the CLS after a prior IPA case in which authorities were involved. Overall this study contributes to the literature by providing reasons why women who have already been involved with the CLS decide not to re-engage the system when they experience IPA again. The findings from this study are particularly valuable because they fill a gap in the literature in terms of understanding women’s decision making in recontacting the CLS among those who have already had contact with the system.

This study also addressed important new questions about what victims' friends say about reporting. In this study respondents were asked about their friends' opinions of calling the police. The most common response that friends gave was to not call the police. Only 24 percent of women stated that all of their friends who have experienced similar abuse believe they should call the police, whereas 62 percent of women stated that all friends who have *not* experienced similar violence believe they should call the police. Although it is beyond the scope of the current study, future research should further examine the role friends' opinions play in IPA reporting decisions.

It is important to point out two methodological limitations to this study. As noted previously, the data from the current study involved interviews with IPA survivors at three points in time. For this analysis our specific focus was on reasons why women who have had contact with the police for one incident of IPA do not call the police for subsequent incidents. The first interview conducted with women in this study occurred approximately 26 days after the system initiating incident. However, for many women this incident was not their first contact with the system. Women participating in this study may have had prior negative experiences with law enforcement agencies in this or other jurisdictions that may have played a role in their decision to contact the system at various points in time. The other study limitation concerns the nature of the sample. This sample represents those women who (a) researchers were able to find, (b) were willing to participate in this research, and (c) had been in contact with the CLS for at least one IPA incident. It is possible that women who experience IPA but are never engaged with the CLS are unique, and therefore it is important that the findings from this study only be generalized to those women who have had some degree of contact with the CLS.

Although the sample composition may be viewed as a potential limitation of this study, the sample can also be argued to be a benefit of the current research. The sample is unique in that all women in the sample were initially engaged with the CLS. After being involved with the system these women experienced further IPA but made the decision to not engage the system again for at least some incidents of IPA experienced during the study period. The current research fills a void in the literature about reasons why IPA is not reported to the police by examining this issue among those who have already interacted with the CLS as a result of IPA at least once. This longitudinal study also has implications for interventions designed to encourage reporting. Reporting behavior may increase by (a) addressing women's reported dissatisfaction with the CLS, (b) reassuring women that they will be taken seriously, and (c) reducing specific types of negative consequences for women and children (e.g., financial hardship).

Focusing on reasons why women who are involved in the CLS make a conscious decision to *not* re-engage the system is an important area of empirical inquiry for purposes of public safety and policy development.

Kruttschnitt and Carbone-Lopez (2009) noted that policymakers have lacked a focus on understanding why people report and do not report crime to the police. According to Gartner and Macmillan (1995), it is important for social scientists to understand reasons for nonreporting to uncover potential systemic underreporting for the provision of equal protection. In addition, Fugate et al. (2005) noted that it is necessary for those who work with battered women to comprehensively understand the barriers women face when deciding to report violence to the police. As Hickman and Simpson (2003) pointed out, victims' initial interactions with the CLS are with law enforcement officers, so it is important for future research to examine the nature of victims' experiences with the police and how these initial interactions with law enforcement impact their decision to contact the police again.

NOTES

1. In this article the term *intimate partner abuse* is used in place of *intimate partner violence*.
2. In this article the term *criminal legal system* is used in place of *criminal justice system*. Actors within the criminal legal system include law enforcement, judicial, and correctional personnel. Also included are victim advocates.
3. Many other studies reporting the rate of IPA victims who call the police are based on select samples, such as women in a battered women's shelter or victims' assistance program (e.g., Coulter et al. 1999; Erez and Belknap 1998; Fleury et al. 1998; Hirschel and Hutchison 2003; Johnson 1990; Langan and Innes 1986; Lee et al. 2010) or women in IPA cases that reached the courts (Fleury-Steiner et al. 2006). Reporting rates using the aforementioned samples is misleading, as women who go to a shelter or are involved with the courts are also more likely to call the police. However, researchers reported that only half of the women in their IPA shelter sample called the police (Coulter et al. 1999).
4. Several items on the CTS2 are not necessarily violations of the law, but this varies by context (e.g., whether a restraining order is in place). For the purposes of this study we were interested in women's reasons for not reporting any form of IPA to the police.
5. It is important to note that the sample was unique in that it was made up of women who experienced IPA, had contact with the CLS, experienced IPA again, and decided not to have additional contact with the CLS. At a minimum, these women experienced IPA twice at the hands of their partners and at least one time reached out to the CLS for help, but subsequently decided that they would not engage the CLS again.

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