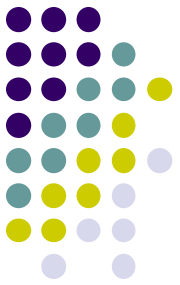


The Protective Strategies of Abused Mothers: Usage and Efficacy

Kendra Nixon, PhD; Leslie Tutty, PhD; Lorraine Radtke, PhD; Carolyn Goard, MA; Caroline McDonald-Harker, MA; Erin Van Brunschot, PhD; Christine Ateah, PhD

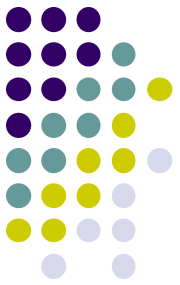
RESOLVE Research Day, November 20, 2009, Regina, SK

Acknowledgements



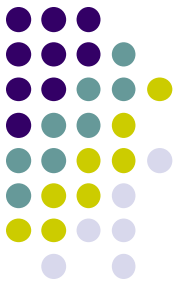
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Mothering Research Team



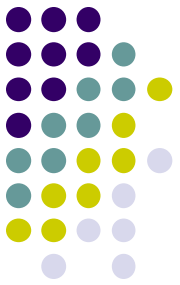
- Kendra Nixon, U of Manitoba
- Lorraine Radtke, U of Calgary
- Leslie Tutty, U of Calgary
- Erin Gibbs Van Brunschot, U of Calgary
- Carolyn Goard, ACWS
- Caroline McDonald-Harker, U of Alberta
- Christine Ateah, U of Manitoba
- Ruth Grant-Kalischuk, U of Lethbridge

The Literature on Mothering* in the Context of IPV



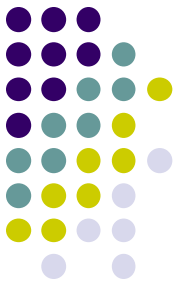
- Generally, being battered has a direct and negative impact on the victim's parenting, which in turn, endangers their children's adjustment & well-being
 - Experience greater levels of stress than non-abused mothers, therefore, may be less able to respond to children's behaviours in effective ways (Levendosky & Graham-Berman, 1998)
 - Less attentive & emotionally supportive to children (Sudermann, 1997)
 - More likely to use physical aggression than non-abused mothers (Holden & Ritchie, 1991)
 - Less able to assert authority or control over their children, putting their children at risk for anti-social behaviours (Levendosky & Graham-Berman, 2000)
 - Parental stress due to IPV may put children at greater risk of maternal neglect or abuse (Holden, Stein, Ritchie, Harris, & Jouriles, 1998)

Literature (cont'd)



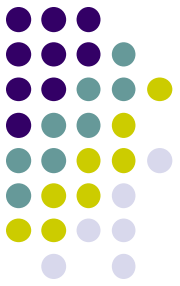
- Other research refutes claims that abused mothers are helpless, incompetent & aggressive parents
 - Abused mothers compensate by being very attentive & sensitive to their children (Letourneau, Fedick, & Willms, 2007).
 - Van Horn & Lieberman (2002): “abused mothers are ‘remarkably similar’ to non-abused mothers in their beliefs about parenting, self-reported parenting behaviours, & interactions with their children” (p. 83)

Literature (cont'd)



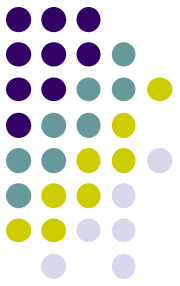
- Abused mothers were available to their children, closely supervised their children, & enjoyed being parents (Sullivan et al, 2000)
- Other researchers found no differences between abused mothers & non-abused mothers regarding their use of physical punishment (McCloskey et al., 1995; Ritchie & Holden, 1998)
- Abused women take active steps to protect and care for their children despite the violence in their lives (Hilton, 1992; Schechter & Edleson, 1994; Schechter & Edleson, 1999).

Gaps in the Literature

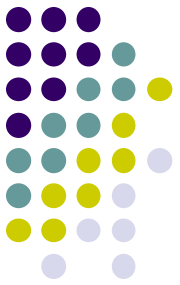


- Notably missing is a discussion of the protective strategies that abused mothers may employ to protect and care for their children
- The protective strategies are often underestimated or overlooked
- Researchers and clinicians have over-emphasized women's inadequacies and deficits in parenting their children

Healing Journey Study - Demographics

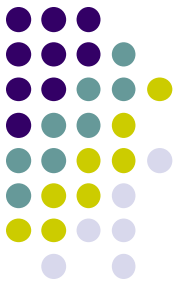


- Of the 669 women who participated in the study, 605 were mothers (90% of sample)
- Average age = 37 years (n=604)
 - Ranged from 18 years – 80 years



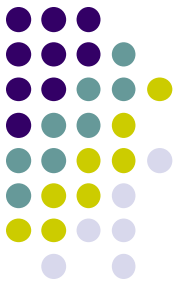
Demographics (cont'd)

- Racial Background (N = 605)
 - Caucasian: N = 266 (44%)
 - Aboriginal: N = 261 (43%)
 - Métis: N = 45 (7%)
 - Latina: N = 12 (2%)
 - African: N = 11 (2%)
 - East Indian: N = 4 (<1%)
 - Asian: N = 4 (<1%)
 - Middle Eastern (Arabic): N = 2 (<1%)



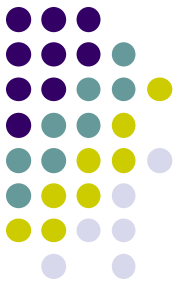
Demographics (cont'd)

- Average annual income = \$22, 232
 - Ranged from \$0 - 235, 000
- Employment (N = 593 responded)
 - Working Full-time: 125 (21%)
 - Working Part-time: 70 (12%)
 - Working Casually: 24 (4%)
 - Not working: 374 (63%)



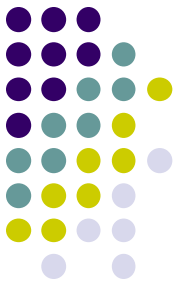
Demographics (cont'd)

- Education (N = 604):
 - 43% did not complete high school
 - 21% completed Gr. 12 or equivalent
 - 12% had some post-secondary
 - 23% had completed post-secondary
 - 1% had completed a graduate degree



Demographics (cont'd)

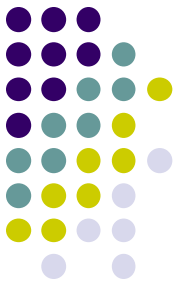
- Number of children:
 - 1 child (N = 120; 20%)
 - 2 children (N = 185; 31%)
 - 3 children (N = 128; 21%)
 - 4 children (N = 85; 14%)
 - 5+ children (N = 87; 14 %)
 - One mother had 17 children
- Average age of “child one” (<18 yrs.) = 8.76 years



Mothers' Relationship Status

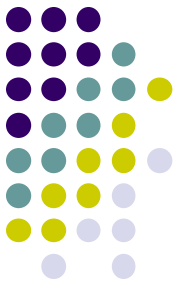
- Relationship Status (N = 604)
 - Ex-common law: N = 202 (33%)
 - Separated: N = 134 (22%)
 - Ex Boyfriend/Girlfriend: N = 89 (15%)
 - Divorced: N = 58 (10%)
 - Married: N = 45 (7%)
 - Common law: N = 39 (6%)
 - Boyfriend/Girlfriend: N = 26 (4%)
 - Other: N = 11 (2%)

The Healing Journey Study: Protective Strategies



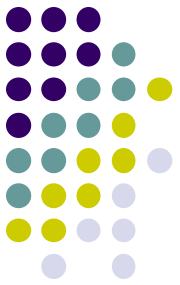
- Parenting questionnaire includes a section to assess abused mothers' protective strategies
- Women were asked if they ever used a variety of strategies (20) to protect their children from direct abuse or from any negative consequences associated with living in a home where abuse occurs
- If yes, women were asked to rate the effectiveness of the strategy (0 = not helpful and 4 being very helpful)

Protective Strategies (cont'd)



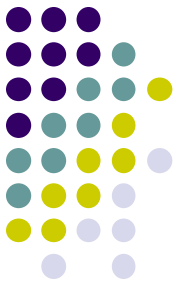
- What were the three most helpful and why?
- What were the three least helpful and why?
- Women were also asked if there were “*other ways that you have protected your children from abuse*” but were not included on the list

Preliminary Study Findings – Formal Strategies



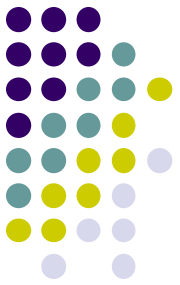
Protective Strategy - Formal	Yes	No
I contacted the police	N = 152 (25%)	N = 184 (30%)
I contacted a professional or community service	N = 183 (30%)	N = 157 (26%)
I tried to get a protection order (e.g., restraining order)	N = 112 (18.5%)	N = 224 (37%)
I contacted child welfare	N = 49 (8%)	N = 290 (48%)

Preliminary Study Findings – Informal Strategies

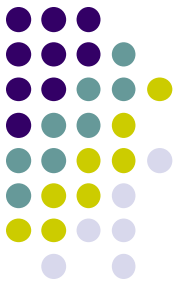


Protective Strategy - INFORMAL	Yes	No
I was affectionate with them	N = 322 (53%)	N = 24 (4%)
I did things to help them feel good about themselves	N = 313 (52%)	N = 34 (6%)
Avoided a situation that I thought might lead to violence	N = 265 (44%)	N = 86 (14%)
I told my family and friends about the abuse	N = 235 (39%)	N = 111 (18%)
I tried to make up for their witnessing by giving them more attention or spending more time with them	N = 224 (37%)	N = 120 (20%)
I taught them about the problems associated with drugs/alcohol	N = 193 (32%)	N = 153 (26%)

Informal Strategies (cont'd)



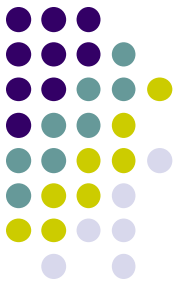
Protective Strategy - Informal	Yes	No
I taught them a safety plan	N = 162 (27%)	N = 180 (30%)
I separated them from my partner	N = 162 (27%)	N = 166 (27%)
I physically fought back against my partner	N = 125 (21%)	N = 206 (34%)
I threatened my partner so he/she would stop abusing me	N = 118 (19.5%)	N = 212 (35%)



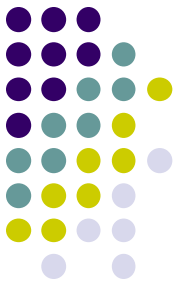
Informal Strategies (cont'd)

Protective Strategy - Informal	Yes	No
I threatened my partner so he/she would stop abusing me	N = 118 (19.5%)	N = 212 (35%)
I disciplined them so my partner would not	N = 109 (18%)	N = 220 (36%)
I provoked a violent incident when my children were not present so that the violent episode would be finished by the time they returned	N = 56 (9%)	N = 271 (45%)

Preliminary Study Findings – Relationship Strategies



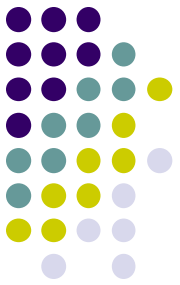
Protective Strategies - Relationship	Yes	No
I parented them alone	N = 269 (44.5%)	N = 74 (12%)
I ended the relationship with my partner	N = 205 (34%)	N = 131 (22%)
I remained in the relationship with my partner	N = 123 (20%)	N = 222 (37%)
I returned to the relationship with my partner	N = 61 (10%)	N = 279 (46%)



Most Helpful Strategies

- Participants listed 19 “most helpful strategies”
- Not applicable: N = 181 (30%)
- Miscellaneous: N = 20 (3%)
- Missing or Uncodable: N = 47 (8%)

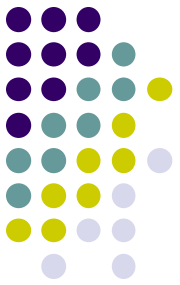
Protective Strategy – Most Helpful (N= 602)	No. of Participants
1.) Ended the relationship with abusive partner	N = 89 (15%)
2.) Parented children alone	N = 35 (5.8%)
3.) Avoided a situation that I thought might lead to violence	N = 32 (5.3%)



Least Helpful Strategies

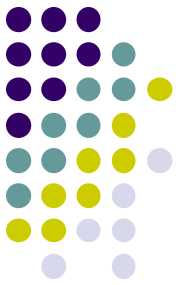
- Participants listed 20 “least helpful strategies”
- Not applicable: N = 250 (41.5%)
- Miscellaneous: N = 7 (1%)
- Missing or Uncodable: N = 67 (11%)

Protective Strategy – Least Helpful (N = 602)	No. of Participants
1.) Contacted the police	N = 89 (15%)
2.) Physically fought back against my partner	N = 32 (5.3%)
3.) Remained in the relationship with partner	N = 28 (4.7%)



Other Strategies

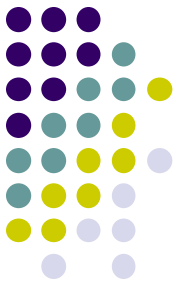
- Women employed numerous other strategies to protect and care for their children
 - Avoided potential abuse: N = 22
 - Educated children about abuse: N = 17
 - Taught children how to protect and take care of themselves: N = 11



Discussion

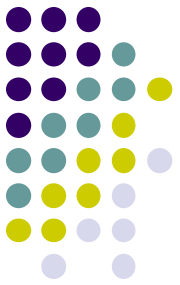
- Abused mothers use a variety of protective strategies
- Variability in women's usage of protective strategies
- Variability in the effectiveness of strategies
- Informal strategies perceived to be more helpful than formal ones
 - As professionals do we acknowledge? Are we including in our assessments and/or case management?

Recommendations for Future Research



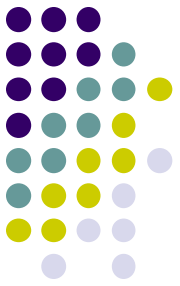
- Need for an in-depth examination of abused mothers' protective strategies
- Specific groups of abused mothers
 - Women living in northern or remote areas
 - Indigenous women
 - Immigrant women
- Standardized measure to systemically assess the protective strategies of abused mothers?

Conclusion



- Limited (or perhaps erroneous) assumptions about abused mothers' parenting strengths may lead to unnecessary, inappropriate, or intrusive intervention (i.e., child protection)
- As researchers and social service providers working with abused mothers, we must be aware of mothers' strengths and protective abilities
- Empowering mothers by focusing on their parenting strengths may be more helpful than presuming ignorance or incompetence on the part of these mothers because they are abused

Questions or Comments?



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