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Female Victims' Perceptions of Civil Protection Order Effectiveness in Rural Tennessee

Thomas Warren Tharpe
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Thomas Warren Tharpe

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Abstract

Female Victims' Perceptions of Civil Protection Order Effectiveness in Rural Tennessee

by

Thomas Warren Tharpe

MA, American Military University, 2012

BS, Bethel University, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

November 2019

Abstract

Domestic violence is a serious social issue that affects victims across all spectrums of life. While domestic violence crosses all geographical boundaries, researchers have found that women residing in rural areas experience increased severity and more extended periods of abuse than their urban counterparts. Existing literature focusing on rural female domestic violence victims and their subjective perceptions of civil order protection is limited and little is known about abuse victims' satisfaction with civil protection orders in keeping them safe from future incidents of violence. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the effectiveness perceptions of rural female victims of domestic violence regarding their civil protection experiences. A phenomenological analysis was used to uncover the meanings that 10 participants put on their civil protection order experience. The study was conducted using the advocacy coalition framework as the theoretical foundation. Data were inductively analyzed to identify common emergent themes among the participants. The research findings indicated that the majority of participants perceived civil protection orders as ineffective in discouraging future incidents of domestic violence. The findings also revealed that most participants viewed the protection orders as a necessary tool to combat domestic violence and expressed the need for improvements of civil protection orders. Positive social change may result through policymakers addressing issues of concerns related to effectiveness identified in the study, thereby helping reduce domestic violence-related incidents.

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my late mother, Mary Marie Tharpe, who always believed that education was vital to success and who always supported my educational goals.

To Henry County, Tennessee, Sheriff David Bumpus (1998–2006), who gave me my first job opportunity in law enforcement: Your commitment to combating domestic violence serves as a model for law enforcement and the criminal justice system.

Thank you to Decatur County Tennessee Sheriff Roy Wyatt (2006–2014), who hired me to be a court security officer. This opportunity allowed me to have hands-on experience in dealing with civil protection orders and the chance to interact with victims of domestic violence, which gave me the idea for this research.

I also want to dedicate this research study to every woman who has died or been injured at the hand of their abuser throughout Tennessee. The best way to honor your memory is by continuing to review, revise, develop, and implement new policies aimed at preventing and combating this senseless age-old crime.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Dr. Melanye Smith (dissertation chair), who has mentored me through this process. I also would like to acknowledge Dr. Carolyn Dennis (committee member) and Daniel Jones (university research reviewer) who also assisted me in achieving my educational goals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of rural female victims of domestic violence regarding the effectiveness of civil protection orders. I used face-to-face interviews and a phenomenology approach to better understand the effectiveness of such orders in a rural setting. Pain (2015) argued that while most research on domestic violence has been conducted at a global level, it is also essential to examine the phenomena within personal and everyday environmental contexts to address the needs of domestic violence victims.

There is limited research literature regarding civil protection orders and their perceived effectiveness among women residing in rural regions. This target group can provide firsthand knowledge regarding their civil protection order experiences; their unique perceptions and opinions can offer valuable insight in this qualitative study. Rosenberg and Grab (2015) maintained that perception analysis regarding various domestic violence policies could implicitly allow for expanded variables when attempting to measure the effectiveness of domestic violence programs and policies. Calton, Grossmann, and Cattaneo (2017) noted that researchers should ask victims of abuse directly about their experiences when attempting to measure intervention policies such as civil protection orders. Calton et al. (2017) advocated that the abuse victim's firsthand knowledge is unique because it helps in assessing whether the criminal justice system is providing adequate services to meet the needs of victims attempting to escape violence. Cattaneo, Grossmann, and Chapman (2016) suggested that relying on numerical data to measure civil protection order satisfaction can prove misleading because it ignores abuse victim's perspectives regarding their experiences. Broidy, Albright, and Denman (2016)

reported that relying strictly on statistical data could also fail to capture an accurate assessment of domestic violence or domestic violence-related research because the majority of domestic violence offenses (subsequent assaults and protection order violations) are unreported in official crime statistics.

The understanding of how women residing in rural regions view the effectiveness of civil protection orders may provide policymakers with useful information about how to improve civil protection order policy. Such policy changes may help to improve the quality of life for rural female victims of domestic violence, while also addressing any possible safety issues identified by research study participants. This overall process should help in assuring victims of abuse that the criminal justice system is serious about protecting them from harm by continually evaluating and implementing civil protection order changes as needed.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of (a) introduction of study, (b) background of study, (c) problem statement, (d) purpose of study, (e) nature of the study, (f) assumptions, (g) scope and delimitations, (h) limitations, (i) significance of the study, and (j) definition of terms. The primary focus of the research question is on abuse victims' perceptions regarding civil protection orders and their effectiveness. The conclusion of Chapter 1 offers implications for possible social change and a summary review of the chapter.

Background of the Study

The term *domestic violence*, often interchanged with *intimate partner violence*, encompasses not only physical abuse but also includes sexual and psychological harm by a current or former intimate partner or spouse (National Institute of Justice, 2017). The

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2017) has labeled domestic violence as a serious problem in the United States that affects millions of people every year. Mykota and Laye (2015) noted that domestic violence could occur anytime throughout an individual's life and in various forms of intimate relationships, including dating, cohabitation, and marriages. Susmitha (2016) stated that violence against women is an age-old phenomenon in which abusers may view women as weak, vulnerable, and in a position that allows them to be exploited. Bender (2017) noted that studies involving aspects of domestic violence are more complex than other research studies because such studies involve multiple layers of social ecology (social, community, familial, and individual).

While domestic violence affects victims across all geographical spectrums, victims in rural regions encounter obstacles different from those experienced by victims in urban areas (Edwards, 2015). DeKeseredy (2015) called for increased attention to feminist understandings of violence against women in rural areas. Previous research has shown that community contextual factors have a direct influence on abuse; for example, women residing in rural regions experience higher severity of abuse (Logan, Walker, Cole, Ratliff, & Leukefeld, 2003). Edwards (2015) maintained that population density has a critical role in domestic violence, and recent evidence has shown that rural domestic violence rates are equal to or higher than urban rates. Schwab-Reese and Renner (2017) noted that rural regions tend to experience a higher frequency of domestic abuse than urban areas and that rural victims often encounter more barriers than urban victims when seeking help because of social and physical environment issues. Dudgeon and Evanson (2014) stated that profoundly entrenched gender roles, beliefs, and the

community cohesion in rural regions can complicate matters when victims attempt to solicit help in escaping abuse. Walker and Logan (2018) noted that women residing in rural areas reported an increased number of days during which they were threatened with severe harm or loss of life compared to urban women.

Civil protection orders have emerged as an essential and accessible intervention alternative for victims of abuse. Stark and Choplin (2017) reported that such orders are the preferred method of intervention by courts seeking to help victims of abuse. Civil protection orders were developed on the premise of protecting domestic violence victims by limiting or preventing contact between a petitioner (abused) and a respondent (abuser) (Messing, Vega, & Durfee, 2017). Douglas (2018) mentioned that violence could continue beyond the time the abused decides to leave the abuser, and a civil protection order may be needed to curtail violence against the abused. Current estimates suggest that more than 1 million orders are issued every year in the United States on behalf of victims of abuse (Troshynski, Mizrachi, & Magnus, 2015).

Civil protection orders were formally endorsed and standardized as a national intervention countermeasure for combating domestic violence under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994 (Murshid & Bowen, 2018). VAWA marked a historical shift from past traditional approaches to addressing violence against women by implementing a federal government responsible for addressing domestic violence (Whittier, 2016). The VAWA legislation was critical in developing (a) expanding legal punishment for domestic violence gender-related offenses and (b) additional funding incentives to assist states in adopting and implementing sweeping reform measures regarding domestic violence (Murshid & Bowen, 2018). The Office on Violence Against

Women (OVW; 2016) advocated that the VAWA ensures the right to justice, safety, and autonomy for domestic violence victims. While civil protection orders are currently used in all 50 states, each state has the sole responsibility for deciding their specific provisions (Candela, 2016). The Full Faith and Credit provision mandated under VAWA also makes civil protection orders legally valid in all jurisdictions without regard to the location of the original issuing court (American Bar Association, 2016). While VAWA concentrated on combating domestic violence across all geographical regions, it recognized that rural abuse victims were especially vulnerable and thus allocated additional resources to bolster prosecution and investigation in rural areas (Congressional Research Service, 2018).

Prior studies have revealed some benefits to civil protection orders. For example, Hawkins (2010) researched the impact that civil protection orders had in five counties located in the mostly rural Appalachian Mountains. The study revealed that although both the rural and urban participants shared common views of the effectiveness of civil protection orders, rural participants revealed encountering more obstacles related to obtainment and enforcement.

Spitzberg (2002) found that the violation rate of civil protection orders was 40%, meaning that they are effective 60% of the time. Holt, Kernic, Wolf, and Rivara (2003) noted that participants who were awarded civil protection orders experienced repeated abuse less often than those who did not obtain the protection orders.

Wright and Johnson (2012) noted that civil protection orders offer positive psychological benefits, such as an increased sense of empowerment for victims. The empowerment is gained through the victims' ability to control what is important to them

regarding their safety by requesting provisions to meet their specific safety needs. Abuse victims know their abusers and are usually knowledgeable about which civil protection orders will keep them the safest.

Problem Statement

The occurrence of domestic violence has reached an alarming rate in the United States, with the effectiveness of domestic violence policies and prevention programs such as civil protection orders deemed questionable in combating the phenomenon (Metz, Calmet, & Thevenot, 2019). The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (2015) reported that approximately 10 million people experience some form of domestic violence every year. A gap is evident in the existing research of the criminal justice system, specifically on the effectiveness regarding civil protection orders among rural female victims of domestic violence.

Wasileski and Poteyeva (2019) noted that the phenomenon of domestic violence in rural contexts had gained significant interest among scholars, policymakers, the criminal justice system, and ordinary citizens over the last two decades. Edwards (2015) observed that finding assistance can be significantly more difficult for rural domestic violence victims than for urban victims because of geographic location, education level, and social isolation. Troshynski et al. (2015) noted that although there has been a vast amount of research conducted on domestic violence, most studies neglected to examine civil protection orders.

Cattaneo and Goodman (2015) maintained that although civil protection is the primary criminal justice tool for combating domestic violence, evidence regarding the effectiveness of the protection orders is limited. Logan, Shannon, and Walker (2005)

suggested that concerns over the ineffectiveness of civil protection orders have discouraged both rural and urban domestic violence victims from seeking assistance through the courts.

Policymakers, along with advocacy groups, often showcase civil protection orders as having a positive impact in deterring subsequent abuse incidents. The criminal justice system must now conclusively prove that such orders are effective in curtailing abuse by examining the subjective perceptions of rural female victims of abuse who sought and obtained court-ordered injunctive relief.

In this study, I examined the problem with a sample of female victims of domestic violence located in rural communities. The study used a phenomenological approach to explore perceptions and opinions regarding the research study participants' experiences. Based on information and data drawn from participants in Northwest Tennessee, the findings are expected to contribute to reducing the gap in the existing literature concerning such orders and their perceived effectiveness.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of rural female victims of domestic violence regarding the effectiveness of civil protection orders. Marshall and Rossman (2016) noted that qualitative phenomenological studies are often used when a researcher is seeking to explore participants' lived experiences and perceptions of a phenomenon. The research sample population was limited to female domestic abuse victims with civil protection orders residing in rural Northwest Tennessee. For this research study, rural areas, regions, or communities were those outside the city limits of incorporated towns and cities in Northwest Tennessee.

Participant access was gained through collaboration with a domestic violence advocacy organization that provides domestic violence-related resources throughout Northwest Tennessee counties and through solicitation via newspapers. All face-to-face interactions with the sample population took place in the domestic violence advocacy organization's offices and in private rooms in libraries across Northwest Tennessee.

Theoretical Framework

For this theoretical study's framework, I used the advocacy coalition framework, commonly referred to as *ACF*. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999) developed *ACF* to address perceived limitations on the policy process. The *ACF* framework confronts complicated and contentious policy issues involving substantial conflicts, with many actors from various levels of government (Weible & Sabatier, 2006). *ACF* builds on the assumption that modern policymaking has become so complicated, both legally and substantively, that participants must specialize in improving their chances of expanding their realm of influence over the policy under evaluation or debate. *ACF* is commonly used in research studies and remains one of the most prominent applied approaches to explain public policies. *ACF* has proven itself as highly beneficial in assisting with policy changes through teamwork and collaboratively developed efforts. *ACF* is an appropriate theoretical framework for this study regarding civil domestic violence protection orders because any policy changes require the participation of multiple actors from various levels to promote change.

Research Question

The research question guiding this research study is the following:

RQ1: What are the perceptions and opinions of rural female victims of domestic violence in Northwest Tennessee regarding the effectiveness of civil protection orders?

Nature of the Study

For this qualitative research study, I used phenomenological interviews to examine rural female victims of domestic violence regarding their perceptions of civil protection order effectiveness. The number of participants was 10; Creswell (2013) recommends that phenomenological studies require a minimum of 10 participants to make assertions regarding the phenomenon under study. A phenomenology approach focuses on capturing personal experiences through individuals' own words (van Manen, 2017). Giorgi (2009) pointed out that the phenomenological approach is especially useful in exploring the subjective perspective of participants' lived experiences regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Phenomenology is rooted in philosophical, human science, and humanities traditions (Adams & van Manen, 2017), thus making it especially useful in studies involving human research study participants.

Phenomenology was determined to be the most appropriate qualitative approach for this research because the perception of the participants regarding their experiences concerning civil protection orders is a primary source of knowledge. The descriptions provided by participants regarding their perceptions of civil protection orders were revealed by analyzing their experiences using qualitative data software to uncover shared meaning among participants. In turn, the essence and meanings drawn from the sample deepened current understandings of the effectiveness of civil protection orders in rural areas.

Definitions

Civil protection order: Court-mandated relief that includes provisions that prohibit further abuse and contact with the protected person (Bennett, 2019).

Domestic violence: Various controlling forms of behavior by a current or former intimate partner. Such behavior can be physical, sexual, or emotional (Carroll, 2017).

Effectiveness: The perceived degree to which something is successful in producing the desired results (English Oxford Living Dictionary, 2018).

Injunction: A court order prohibiting specific actions from being carried out (American Bar Association, 2014).

Petitioners: Complainants who are alleging the abuse regarding the petition for civil protection (Messing et al., 2017).

Respondent: The individual alleged to have committed abuse regarding the civil protection order petition (Messing et al., 2017)

Rural area: Open countryside with fewer than 2,500 residents (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2018).

Assumptions

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) stated that assumptions are the foundation of any proposed research study and generally reflect what the researcher takes to be assumed. Assumptions can be explained as assertions that are accepted by the researcher as being true without corresponding proof. In this research study, certain assumptions applied:

1. Participants voluntarily participated in the interview process.
2. Participants identified as female domestic violence victims.
3. Participants applied and received civil protection orders within the last 5 years.

4. Participants resided in a rural area or community through Northwest Tennessee.
5. Participants provided honest and accurate responses to the interview questions.
6. ACF is an appropriate theoretical framework for this study.
7. The instrumentation used open-ended questions to allow for expanded responses.
8. Data collection methods and analysis procedures accurately captured the data of the research study.

Scope and Delimitations

Thomas, Nelson, and Silverman (2005) stated that the delimitations of a study are the characteristics that assist in limiting the study scope to narrow it to a manageable size and to guide further research. The study was limited to 10 participants residing in nine rural counties throughout Northwest Tennessee. I did not consider the participants' ethnicity, age, ability, and length of abuse. Additionally, I did not consider the participants' current relationship status. The findings from this research study were based on a small sample group located in rural Northwest Tennessee and thus may not be transferable to other rural regions in middle and east Tennessee.

Limitations

This study focused on the research participants' perceptions regarding civil protection orders and their perceived effectiveness. The following limitations have been identified:

1. Participants may have different perceptions regarding their experiences.

2. Participants may have failed to respond to the questions candidly because of embarrassment or fear. Participants were reminded that all responses will be kept confidential.
3. The interviews were limited to 45–50 minutes.
4. This study was limited to participants in nine counties, and the findings cannot be generalized and applied to other regions and populations.

Significance of the Study

This study fills an existing literature gap with regard to understanding the effectiveness of civil protection orders. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of rural female victims of domestic violence regarding the effectiveness of civil protection orders in rural areas and communities throughout Northwest Tennessee. This research is unique because it addresses the effectiveness of civil protection orders issued in a rural community context, which is in the realm of limited research. Logan and Walker (2010) postulated that civil protection orders improved the quality of life for victims of abuse and served as a deterrent for future abuse incidents. This research study may provide valuable information for policymakers developing, implementing, and evaluating civil protection order policies and programs. Results from this study may provide policymakers with more ideas about enhancing the safety of those who suffer domestic violence in rural regions.

Summary and Transition

This study focused on the research study participants' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of civil protection orders. I used a phenomenological approach in the study to explore participants' perceptions of civil protection orders and their perceived

effectiveness. The research study comprised rural female participants who had obtained civil protection orders throughout nine counties in Northwest Tennessee. Through open-ended questions, I explored and identified emergent and common themes among the participants, which allowed for a better understanding of their perceptions of effectiveness. This research has implications for social change in both practice and policy. In regard to practice, rural female victims of domestic violence will have informed knowledge about civil protection orders and the behaviors they are intended to curtail. Regarding policy, criminal justice policymakers may find the information collected in the research useful when considering revisions to current civil protection orders, laws, and regulations in terms of improving safety for rural female victims of domestic violence.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

There is an evident literature gap in existing research related to the effectiveness of civil protection orders among rural female victims of domestic violence. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of rural female victims of domestic violence regarding the effectiveness of civil protection orders. This chapter provides an overview of domestic violence and civil protection orders, including domestic violence factors, related research studies, development and use of civil protection orders, and related studies. Other issues addressed include (a) literature search strategy, (b) ACF, (c) policy brokers, (d) historical overview of domestic violence, (e) protection order process as a legal remedy, (f) rural and urban realities of domestic violence, (g) women's experiences with protection orders, and (h) conclusion.

Statistics compiled by the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) present a sobering picture of the state of domestic violence. NISVS data revealed that 37.3% of women nationwide admitted to experiencing domestic violence, physical violence, or stalking (Smith et al., 2017). For the vast majority of women who experienced sexual violence or stalking, the perpetrators were male, and for all three types of domestic violence, women reported a greater victimization rate than men.

Furthermore, according to 2015 homicide data, the overwhelming majority of women murdered by men (93%) knew their killer, and in close to two-thirds of those cases (64%), the perpetrator was a spouse or intimate acquaintance (Violence Policy Center, 2017). For women in abusive relationships, separating from the abuser heightens the risk of lethal violence (Johnson, 2015; McFarlane, Nava, Gilroy, & Maddoux, 2015).

Gun control in the United States is a highly charged topic, which complicates the reality that firearms are the predominant weapons used in domestic violence homicides (Wintemute et al., 2015). Tennessee, the site of this study, ranks fourth in the nation for female homicide victimization (Violence Policy Center, 2017). Rural residents are at a higher risk for murder by an intimate partner than urban residents (Anderson, Renner, & Bloom, 2014; Lanier & Maume, 2009).

The passage of VAWA in 1994 signified the federal government's formal recognition of the severity of domestic and sexual violence in U.S. society and the rights of victims to safety, justice, and independence (Messing, Ward-Lasher, Thaller, & Bagwell-Gray, 2015; Office on Violence Against Women, 2016). From a more cynical perspective, VAWA also acknowledged that state laws had failed in providing adequate legal recourse for victims (Weissman, 2013). Nevertheless, VAWA marked the start of a more coordinated and systematic approach to combating gender-based violence, although the OVW recognizes there is a greater need for collaboration and coordination of services. This need is more evident in rural communities, where victims of domestic violence face unique obstacles ranging from geographic isolation, transportation barriers, and economic decline to the difficulty of ensuring confidentiality in small communities where residents all know each other and intense social and cultural pressures reinforce stereotypical gender roles (Anderson et al., 2014; Beyer, Wallis, & Hamberger, 2015; Lanier & Maume, 2009; Logan et al., 2005; OVW, 2017; Peek-Asa et al., 2011).

Since its inception, VAWA survived reauthorization by Congress by large margins in 2000, 2005, and 2013—each time expanding the scope of protection (Messing et al., 2017). The 2000 reauthorization expanded the range of domestic violence-related

crimes that could be prosecuted under the act as well as advancing protections for immigrant women (Weissman, 2013). These expansions of VAWA also apply to the OVW Rural Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking Program (Rural Program), which was established with the passage of VAWA with the overarching mission of increasing safety of rural victims of gender-based violence (OVW, 2016).

At the time of the first VAWA reauthorization, Grama (2000) described rural women as the forgotten victims of domestic violence, neglected by “states, legislatures, service organizations,” and even by “the battered women’s movement itself” (p. 173). Since the early 2000s, a small but significant line of research has evolved to explore the unique challenges endured by rural women of abuse. However, if they are no longer forgotten, rural victims of domestic violence are still largely neglected in the scholarly literature (Anderson et al., 2014; Peek-Asa et al., 2011; Beyer et al., 2015; Rennison, DeKeseredy, & Dragiewicz, 2013). Moreover, the problems facing rural women identified by Grama (2000) persist today, specifically geographic isolation, inadequate transportation, lack of anonymity, deeply entrenched social and cultural attitudes, and lack of access to programs and services.

A good deal of credit for boosting the visibility and validating the perspectives of rural domestic violence victims goes to the ongoing research of Logan, Walker, and their colleagues (Logan et al., 2003; Logan et al., 2005; Logan, Cole, Shannon, & Walker, 2007; Logan & Walker, 2011; Logan, Walker, Hoyt, & Faragher, 2009; Logan, Walker, Shannon, & Cole, 2008). Their work began with a small pilot study focusing on the domestic violence experiences of women living in Kentucky (Logan et al., 2003). All the women had obtained civil protective orders against their abusive partners. This research

served as a springboard for further studies focused on protection orders, culminating in the Kentucky Civil Protective Order Study (Logan et al., 2009). Teri Faragher, the executive director of the Domestic Violence Prevention Board in Lexington, Kentucky, considers the information provided by the report a valuable tool for preventing domestic violence (Hawkins, 2010).

Civil protection orders have a unique history in the fight against domestic violence in that they arose as “the product of an advocacy movement for battered women by activists and poverty lawyers who sought ways to address domestic violence outside both the criminal justice system and civil divorce proceedings” (MacDowell, 2016a, p. 213). Through this concerted, collaborative grassroots effort, Pennsylvania became the first state to enact civil protection order legislation (MacDowell, 2016b). The Pennsylvania Protection from Abuse Act of 1976 spurred the adoption of similar laws across the United States, specially drafted to apply to women and allowing petitioners to seek protection orders as civil relief by the courts (Kethineni & Beichner, 2009).

Since the 1990s, civil protection orders have been formally recognized as a legal remedy for domestic violence in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, all U.S. territories, and many tribal authorities (Messing et al., 2017). Furthermore, civil protection is bolstered by federal legislation mandating that the states, tribes, and territories accord Full Faith and Credit to protection orders granted in other jurisdictions (Hefner, Baboolal, Fleury-Steiner, & Miller, 2018)

Having expanded substantially in scope since their inception four decades ago, civil protection orders serve as both an alternative and an addition to criminal justice remedies (Johnsen & Robertson, 2016). Indeed, civil protection orders are the most

extensively used legal remedy for domestic violence (Stoever, 2014). However, the question of their effectiveness arises repeatedly. On the one hand, the evidence suggests that civil protection orders are useful for many who obtain them (Benitez, McNiel, & Binder, 2010; Fleury-Steiner, Fleury-Steiner, & Miller, 2011; Kothari et al., 2012; Logan et al., 2009; Logan & Walker, 2011). On the other hand, the data on stalking and separation assault, including separation homicide, attest to the serious consequences when restraining orders fail to protect the victims (Johnson, 2015; McFarlane et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2017; Stoever, 2014; Violence Policy Center, 2017).

Although there has been progress since Grama (2000) decried the absence of rural women in the literature on domestic violence, there is still a notable gap in this area. Another important gap in the literature is the relative absence of the perspectives of civil protection order petitioners (Bell, Perez, Goodman, & Dutton, 2011; Fleury-Steiner et al., 2011). According to Denman, Albright, Broidy, and Kleymann (2009), petitioners are not only articulate in describing the abuse that drove them to seek a protection order, but they can also provide fair assessments of their risks for future violence. The perspectives of the petitioners are not always aligned with those of legal and social service advocates or the criminal justice system.

Protection orders were designed to be a tool of empowerment for domestic violence victims (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015; Cattaneo et al., 2016; Fleury-Steiner et al., 2011; Johnson, 2015; Kethineni & Beichner, 2009; Logan et al., 2009; Lucken, Rosky, & Watkins, 2015; MacDowell, 2016a, 2016b). For empowerment to be more than a buzzword, the lived experiences and perspectives of domestic violence survivors must be acknowledged and the information gained from their narratives used to improve the

policies, programs, systems, and services meant to help them. In this study, I used a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore the perceived effectiveness of civil protection orders from the perspectives of rural petitioners as well as the influence of their lived experiences on those perceptions.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature presented in this review is drawn primarily from PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, PubMed, MEDLINE, and EBSCO databases such as Academic Search Premier, SAGE Journals, ProQuest, MasterFILE Premier, and Business Source Premier. The journal articles reviewed for this project span a range of disciplines including sociology, psychology, law, criminology, political science, and health. Government reports were an excellent source for the most recent statistics on domestic violence and related crimes. Keywords include *domestic violence (DV)*, *intimate partner violence (IPV)*, *protection order*, *restraining order*, *civil protection order*, *criminal protection order*, *protection order effectiveness*, *rural domestic violence*, *rural communities*, *domestic violence victims*, *domestic violence survivors*, *advocates*, *advocacy*, *empowerment*, *services*, *resources*, *social support*, *legal system*, *family law*, *VAWA*, and *ACF*. ACF was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study and will be discussed in the following section.

Advocacy Coalition Framework

ACF is a theoretical policymaking framework designed to deal with complex and often controversial public policy problems (Koebele, 2016; Weible & Sabatier, 2006). Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith created ACF to address concerns around limitations to policy process literature. An essential aspect of ACF is that it is meant to stimulate policy-

oriented learning (Abrar, Lovenduski, & Margetts, 2000; Koebele, 2016). The most extensive use of ACF lies in the area of energy and environmental policy where the framework has been applied to issues ranging from mining and water policy to climate change (Weible & Sabatier, 2006). Koebele's (2016) case elaboration focuses on the application of ACF to water governance policy processes. Most applications have been in North America and Europe, but in the three decades since ACF was developed, it has become a global framework, and its use has expanded beyond energy and environment to areas in the realm of public health, including domestic violence (Weible & Sabatier, 2006). Abrar et al. (2000) consider ACF especially suitable for application to domestic violence policy given that it involves actors at various levels of the political system who have different priorities, constraints, and traditions.

The adoption and expansion of protection order legislation in the United States arose through grassroots coalition building (MacDowell, 2016a, 2016b). A common theme in the literature on domestic violence is an urgent need for greater coordination and collaboration across systems and services (Cerulli, Edwardsen, Hall, Chan, & Conner, 2015; Denman et al., 2009; MacDowell, 2016a, 2016b; OVW, 2016; OVW, 2017). Although references to empowerment are ubiquitous, especially concerning civil protection orders, feminist scholars argue that the existing laws and policies can work to perpetuate gender inequities (Carroll, 2017; Johnson, 2015; Nichols, 2011). The shelter system in the United States is inadequate and unable to keep up with the growing housing needs of domestic violence victims (Sullivan, 2012). A focus on safety as the foremost concern is embedded in domestic violence law and policy (Denman et al., 2009; OVW, 2016, 2017). However, Johnson (2015) makes a compelling case for shifting the focus

from safety (a short-term solution) to security. Stoeber (2014) goes even further, arguing that domestic violence protection orders should have indefinite status. The statistics on stalking, separation assault, and especially separation homicide provide persuasive evidence in favor of such policy changes.

A cornerstone of ACF is the assertion that attitudes, beliefs, and actions of stakeholders are entrenched in informal networks of subsystems (Koebele, 2016; Weible & Sabatier, 2006). According to Weible and Sabatier (2006), “A policy subsystem is defined by its territorial boundary, a substantive topic, and by the hundreds of policy participants from all levels of government, multiple interest groups, the media, and research institutions” (p. 126). The power to influence public policy lies in the capacity of stakeholders in the subsystem to sustain their involvement for an extended amount of time to ensure their goals are successfully obtained. ACF is guided by several components about the nature of a policy subsystem:

- cognitions, motivations, and beliefs of stakeholders;
- an inclination of stakeholders to become involved with advocacy coalitions;
- the probability that some stakeholders remain neutral in the policy broker role;
- coalitions resource utilization; and
- venues in which coalitions have the opportunity to influence policy (Weible & Sabatier, 2006).

The Model of the Individual

ACF is built on the assumption that people are rationally motivated, but that their capacity for learning is influenced by core beliefs that may be deeply entrenched (Weible & Sabatier, 2006). The tendency of individuals to filter out or dismiss information that

disputes core beliefs in favor of information that reinforces them is well-known and well-documented. ACF assumes that people possess a three-tiered belief system. The top tier is composed of deeply held core beliefs or “normative/fundamental beliefs” spanning “multiple policy systems,” which are highly resistant to change (p. 127). Within ACF there are 11 types of policy core beliefs, including perceptions of the causes and severity of the subsystem problems, priorities related to the policy subsystem, the effectiveness of various strategies, and the appropriate distribution of authority. The final tier is composed of secondary beliefs defined as “empirical beliefs and policy preferences” associated with a component of a policy subsystem (Weible & Sabatier, 2006, p. 128). Secondary beliefs include stakeholders’ preferences for particular government devices for attaining objectives and how they view problems in specific locales. Secondary beliefs are the most likely to change in response to new information and external events.

With respect to domestic violence, beliefs about gender and gender roles may be among the most deeply embedded beliefs in our society. Katz (2015) noted that it was not until the late 20th century that domestic violence went from being a private matter that might even be tacitly accepted to a socially unacceptable behavior liable to criminal prosecution. Although the feminist movement predates the 20th century, Carroll (2017) notes that it is only recently that the term *feminist* has gone from a stigmatized label in many circles to a source of personal and collective pride. Weible and Sabatier (2006) include the media as an essential part of a policy subsystem. Drawing on Munro’s essay “Feminism: A Fourth Wave,” Carroll (2017) credits the Internet, and especially social media, with facilitating “the creation of a global community who use [it] both for discussion and activism” (Munro, as cited in Carroll, 2017, p. 1).

Carroll (2017) views family law as a “striking exception” to the increasing acceptance of feminism, arguing that, “Domestic relations law has struggled with feminism for decades, and it has never truly found a place in the family law arena” (p. 2). Although they approach the issue of domestic violence from different perspectives, Nichols (2011) and Stoeber (2014) share similar views that despite legislation against domestic violence the legal system perpetuates gender inequities through its treatment of predominantly female domestic violence survivors.

The enshrinement of traditional gender roles in cultural and religious beliefs is common in cases of rural domestic violence (Anderson et al., 2014; Grama, 2000; Hancock, Ames, & Behnke, 2014; Logan et al., 2005; OVW, 2017; Peek-Asa et al., 2011). At the same time, strong beliefs in social justice, fairness, equity, and empowerment have guided social movements for generations, leading to alliances among actors who share those beliefs though they may differ regarding second- and third-tier beliefs. According to Abrar et al. (2000), the most critical aspects of ACF with respect to domestic violence are the taxonomy of belief systems and the assumption that belief systems are the forces that drive and constrain policy change, which ultimately “arise from competition between opposing advocacy coalitions located within and around state institutions” (p. 241).

The project described by Hancock et al. (2014), wherein Latina/o immigrant pastors were engaged in a collaborative effort to deal with domestic violence, demonstrates that with specially targeted information and organizing, conservative beliefs need not be a barrier to involving religious and community leaders in antidomestic violence initiatives. The multifaceted project offered clearly defined objectives:

- invoke biblical rationale for involving the church in combating domestic violence,
- reinforce the pastors' ethical and religious obligations to protect women from abuse,
- educate pastors about the various forms of domestic violence,
- provide pastors with specific information and strategies they can integrate into church-based activities and individual counseling sessions, and
- provide a list of local and national domestic violence resources to pastors which they could distribute among couples having issues.

Hancock et al. (2014) described the project as a “limited but novel approach to reach an often-inaccessible population” (p. 331).

The project team included three university faculty members (two in social work and one in human development) who secured needed funding, three community representatives who served as project assistants and/or translators, a clerical worker, and a Latina clinical social worker with strong ties to a network of Latino pastors, who served as a project consultant. In the broader context of the movement for combating violence against women, this project reflects the type of grassroots organizing that culminated in national acceptance of protection orders as a legal remedy for domestic violence (MacDowell, 2016a; MacDowell, 2016b).

The OVW (2016) emphasizes the vital importance of involving culturally-specific organizations in discourse and decision making on the topic of domestic violence, “not only to better equip communities to serve victims on the margins, but to prevent mainstream systems from causing further harm to people who may distrust those systems” (p. 4). Notably, many of the Latina/o immigrant pastors as well as their

congregants were undocumented (Hancock et al., 2014). A culturally sensitive, community-based initiative would provide access to legal system resources such as protection orders while also empowering individuals to seek help from domestic and sexual violence in ways that do not have harmful repercussions.

Advocacy Coalitions

According to Weible and Sabatier (2006), for policy stakeholder participants to be successful they must be able to transform policy beliefs into actual policies. Forming advocacy coalitions of allies who share similar core policy beliefs and who are willing to work collaboratively will substantially boost the probability of successfully attaining policy goals and objectives.

The focus of Abrar et al. (2000) was on changes in domestic violence policy in the United Kingdom from the 1970s into the 1990s, paralleling the time frame between the rise of second-wave feminism and the passage of the first civil protection order laws in the 1970s to the enactment of VAWA in 1994 in the United States (MacDowell, 2016a, 2016b). Abrar et al. (2000) observed that actors in the movement to end domestic violence fell into two major advocacy coalitions: feminists and traditionalists. The feminist advocacy coalition comprised municipal feminists, radical feminists, and feminist segments of the women's movement, scholars and experts, and individual feminists working for relevant agencies such as political parties, local councils, Parliament, the civil service, and central government. While claiming "it is possible to conceptualize it as a national coalition," Abrar et al. acknowledged that "its strength and effectiveness varied significantly by locality" (p. 243).

Under a federal system of government with each state having its own set of laws and competing variations of cultural values across different geographical regions of the United States, it is virtually impossible to envision a national coalition. Nevertheless, one reason that Abrar et al. (2000) chose ACF is that as originally conceived it was meant to cover changes that can take a decade or more to unfold. Weible and Sabatier (2006) noted that change is often a gradual process. By the 1990s, civil protection laws extended to all U.S. states and territories and most tribal jurisdictions with Full Faith and Credit awarded by the passage of VAWA by the federal government (Messing et al., 2017). The expansion in focus of the United Kingdom feminist advocacy coalition from the 1970s to the 1990s broadly parallels its growth in the United States. By the 1990s, actors in both countries within the feminist advocacy coalition were directly involved in efforts to influence various domestic violence policies and public opinion. The Internet enables the feminist advocacy coalition to influence public opinion to an unprecedented degree (Carroll, 2017).

As described by Abrar et al. (2000), the specific nature of the feminist advocacy coalition gave rise to the traditionalist coalition, defined primarily by its resistance to prioritizing domestic violence issues and in some cases by overall opposition to the feminist coalition. The core belief system of the traditionalists centers on patriarchal values. By the 1970s, few individuals would publicly condone wife beating, which had come to be known as battering; instead, the argument of the traditionalists, conceptualized as the core policy belief, was that domestic violence was a “private matter” that should be handled differently than “stranger assault” (Abrar et al., 2000, p. 244).

Policy Brokers

Policy brokers are actors who attempt to mediate policy conflicts that arise between advocacy coalitions (Weible & Sabatier, 2006). Policy brokers strive to find common ground between competing coalitions. Typically both parties in a policy conflict trust policy brokers and see them as having a degree of decision-making authority. The role of policy broker is often assumed by legislators, high-level civil servants, and judges; however, there is no specific attribute of a policy broker other than that the person is trusted and recognized as an authority by both sides.

Resources and Venues

An underlying assumption of ACF is that people draw upon a variety of resources that allow policy brokers to devise strategies crafted at influencing policy via various venues (Weible & Sabatier, 2006). According to Weible and Sabatier (2006), these resources include (a) formal legal authority for decision making, (b) public opinion, (c) information, (d) mobilization of individuals and groups, (e) financial resources, and (f) adept leadership. Stakeholders are expected to strategically deploy their resources in a manner that achieves their goal of influencing policy in various venues, defined as “potential areas within which stakeholders have the opportunity to influence beliefs or policy” (Weible & Sabatier, 2006, p. 129). The feminist advocacy coalition, to use the broad term adopted by Abrar et al. (2000), strategically deploys resources in the United States to address domestic violence, including state legislatures, state and federal courts, law enforcement, social service departments, and the media (Carroll, 2017; Denman et al., 2009; Johnsen & Robertson, 2016; Johnson, 2015; MacDowell, 2016a, 2016b; Nichols, 2011; Stoeber, 2014).

External Events

An array of external events can exert marked effects on a policy subsystem (Weible & Sabatier, 2006). Such events include changes in (a) socioeconomic conditions, (b) public opinion, (c) governing coalition, and (d) policy decisions and impacts from other subsystems (Weible & Sabatier, 2006). Weissman (2015) elaborated on the powerful impact of the economic recession often associated with domestic violence, arguing that domestic violence scholars and advocates have paid little attention to economic factors as a potential contributing link to domestic violence. However, Weissman (2015) also acknowledged that they have long been aware of the economic consequences of domestic violence on women's workplace participation, which in turn perpetuates the type of economic dependence that often keeps women trapped in abusive relationships. Indeed, increasing support for women's workforce participation since the 1970s represents a change in public opinion that has both direct and indirect influences on family law. However, family law is one area of the legal system that has not kept up with societal changes supporting women's autonomy (Carroll, 2017).

For the most part, public opinion regarding domestic violence has changed tremendously since the 1970s and especially within the last two decades. The use of the term *intimate partner violence* and the broadening of the definition to include sexual violence and nonmarital or cohabiting partners and, most recently, gay and lesbian partners, highlight dramatic changes in public opinion (Smith et al., 2017; Straus et al., 2009). Nevertheless, while the first two reauthorizations of VAWA went smoothly and were essentially uncontested, the 2013 reauthorization was met with resistance by Republicans who oppose protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and

questioning or queer domestic violence survivors and tribal court jurisdictions, as well as increases in the number of visas available for immigrant women who have been harmed by domestic violence (Messing et al., 2015). Ultimately, the bill passed despite this opposition. However, the resistance generated by the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning individuals affected by violence underscores the difficulty of altering deeply entrenched core beliefs about gender. Additionally, the heavily partisan nature of the fight over VAWA demonstrates the impact of changes in governing coalitions on public policy processes (Weible & Sabatier, 2006).

VAWA is designed to address violence against women through a multifaceted approach that validates the civil rights of gender-based violence victims and encompasses the enactment of protection laws, funding resources and services, and providing resources, education, and training for the criminal justice system and other stakeholders (Messing et al., 2015). ACF is uniquely suited to cover the various stakeholder groups and multiple levels at which policy changes occur.

Application to Domestic Violence Policy

Abrar et al. (2000) presented the cases of two locales in England where policy changes took place between 1975 and 1995. During that time frame, substantial policy changes unfolded in both locales, driven by the feminist advocacy coalition. What is especially interesting is that while the traditionalists maintained their deep core beliefs (family is a private matter, families are important, home and family are safe), consistent with the principles of policy-oriented learning, they significantly changed their policy core beliefs. From framing professionals as experts, they came to recognize that feminists were also experts. From the beliefs that (a) men protect families from violence,

(b) women should stay home to be safe, and (c) domestic assaults were often warranted, the traditionalists came to acknowledge that domestic violence is a crime that required public policy and that women are needed to develop domestic violence policy.

Furthermore, from initially claiming that women should stay in abusive relationships to preserve the sanctity of marriage and the family, they acknowledged that women should decide when to leave abusive partners. These changes in policy core beliefs led to the development of the types of policies and programs governed by VAWA in the United States (Messing et al., 2015). The fact that these changes took place at the local level despite deeply embedded core beliefs on the part of the traditionalists suggests that similar strategies can be effectively used to address domestic violence in rural American locales.

Historical Overview of Domestic Violence

Writing in the early 17th century, the English poet Taylor was both paraphrasing a proverb cited by the 15th-century Italian scholar Abstemious (“Nut tree, donkey, and woman are bound by a similar law; these three things do nothing right if you stop beating them”) and reflecting contemporary attitudes that wives were viewed as property and that a man had the right to chastise his wife as needed to maintain control over his household (Fox, 2002, p. 19). As far back as the ancient and classical eras, the patriarchal underpinnings of religious ideas, philosophy, and common law played a direct role in how Western society viewed and treated women (Fox, 2002). Much of the documentation of early attitudes regarding what is now referred to as domestic violence comes from legal sources or cultural texts that reference prevailing laws and behaviors (Pleck, 2004). Documentation of concerted efforts to combat domestic violence does not

appear until the modern era (Pleck, 2004). The religious and cultural attitudes regarding domestic violence have transformed significantly over the centuries and around the world.

This section offers a historical overview of these perceptions and the events and phenomena that have influenced changes in attitudes toward and responses to domestic violence across different eras and cultures. This overview begins with the ancient and classical period, subsequently addressing common law, and then turns the focus to the United States beginning with colonial America and proceeding through the 21st century.

Ancient and Classical Period

What little information that is known concerning the role and structure of the family paradigm in ancient times tends to indicate that men were in charge of the household and maintained a high degree of authority over their property and its denizens, women, children, animals, and slaves/servants, including the right to correct them with physical discipline (Pleck, 2004). The ancient Code of Hammurabi enforced the patriarchal family, offering women paternalistic protection and subjecting them to the authority of their fathers and husbands (Wells, 2010). Fox (2002) traced the evolution of male dominance and patriarchal privilege to between the third and second millennia BCE, exploring both the Old Testament creation of Eve from Adam's rib, effectively making her a literal, subservient part of him, and the New Testament's view of women as a "weak vessel" (p. 20). However, Fox found little actual reference to physical discipline against women until classical times.

During the period of classical antiquity, Aristophanes's comedy *The Wasps*, first performed in 422 BCE, hinted at domestic violence: "from wine come broken doors,

beatings, [and] throwing stones,” (as cited in Llewellyn-Jones, 2011, p. 232). The play insinuated a clear connection between alcohol and violence, particularly spousal violence; a phenomenon that is found throughout history and is especially notable during such periods of reform as the late 19th-century U.S. temperance movement. In another canonical text, Homer’s *The Iliad*, Zeus threatens his wife with physical violence: “Obey my orders, for fear the gods... are powerless to protect you when I come to throttle you with my irresistible hands” (as cited in Llewellyn-Jones, 2011, p. 243). Reflecting an attitude that has persisted through time, Hera’s son urges her to placate and soothe her violent husband. Llewellyn-Jones cited further examples in the *Iliad* of Zeus’s physical threats and punishments of Hera. In Aristophanes’s *Lysistrata*, the well-known play in which the women of Athens rise up to protest male warmongering by denying their husbands’ conjugal rights, a magistrate remonstrates Lysistrata and an old woman, “If you hadn’t have shut up you’d have got a beating”; Lysistrata acknowledges this demonstration as the reason for her silence at the time (as cited in Llewellyn-Jones, 2011, p. 248). The physical authority of the husband over his wife in ancient Greece appears to have been accepted as status quo, as is represented in these classical texts.

In ancient Rome, a man’s authority over his household as *paterfamilias* (the oldest living male in the home) was absolute (Severy, 2003). The legal doctrine of *patria potestas* (Latin: power of a father) gave Roman men absolute control over their children, including the right to administer capital punishment; its corollary, *manus*, gave men similar authority over their wives. For those marriages that were contracted without *manus*, the woman, though married, remained subject to the authority of her father.

Actual instances of capital punishment of wives appear to have been limited to the very early days of the Roman Empire. One such scenario asserted that during Romulus's time,

Egnatius Metellus...took a cudgel and beat his wife to death because she had drunk some wine. Not only did no one charge him with a crime, but no one even blamed him. Everyone considered this an excellent example of one who had justly paid the penalty for violating the laws of sobriety. (as cited in Breiner, 2013, p. 106)

Roman law later curtailed the absolute power of the husband over the wife (Stedman, 1917), precluding capital punishment without presumably exempting women from physical chastisement at their husbands' hands.

The Common Law

According to Pleck (2004), little is known about the concept of the family and relations between husband and wives during the period spanning from the classical era to the 16th century. Indeed, until the late 19th century, there are few records of the presence of domestic violence aside from laws and cultural references due to the absence of institutions to support victims, other than the secular and church courts (Pleck, 2004).

The cited Abstemious proverb about nut trees, donkeys, and women, nevertheless, suggests a longstanding tolerance for and acceptance of wife beating. Moving to 1600s England, an exposition of the common law governing spousal abuse is found in the *Commentaries on the Laws of England* by the 18th-century English jurist William Blackstone (1765), which offered a compendium of the history and contemporary application of the English Common Law. Blackstone began by stating that "by marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of

the woman is suspended during the marriage” (Blackstone, 1765, p. 442). This law gave the husband absolute control over the wife, as well as legal responsibility for her actions, akin to his responsibility for the actions of his children, animals, and servants. This legislation echoed the rule of law from the Code of Hammurabi centuries earlier. In light of the husband’s responsibility, Blackstone (1765) explained that

The husband also (by the old law) might give his wife moderate correction. For, as he is to answer for her misbehavior, the law thought it reasonable to entrust him with this power of restraining her, by domestic chastisement, in the same moderation that a man is allowed to correct his servants or children. (pp. 442–445)

Blackstone described this moderation as a prohibition against the use of violence “other than lawfully and reasonably pertains to the husband for the rule and correction of his wife” (pp. 442–445). According to Blackstone, the civil law (Roman law inspired continental European law) bestowed the husband with the same control over his wife. Without clarifying the amount of violence a husband is “lawfully and reasonably” entitled to use in correcting his wife, Blackstone suggested that by the middle of the 17th century during the reign of Charles II, a man’s ability to correct his wife through physical abuse was called into question, although the lower classes continued to cite the old common law to justify their actions in this regard. This perception of domestic violence as a phenomenon of the lower classes resurfaced in the reform movements of the later 19th century.

Colonial America

Writing in the 1760s, Blackstone may have been unaware of legal developments in the soon-to-be-independent colonies. Yet the first instance of Western legislative attention to domestic violence dates back to the 1640s, with the adoption by the New England Puritans of laws aimed at enforcing their rigorous religious precepts and arising from their notion that society was entitled to intervene in private family matters to ensure the stability of the social order (Dutton, 2011; Pleck, 2004). The Massachusetts Body of Liberties, adopted in 1641, contained a section on the “Liberties of Women”:

Everie marryed woeman shall be free from bodilie correction or stripes by her husband, unlesse it be in his owne defence upon her assault. If there be any just cause of correction complaint shall be made to Authoritie assembled in some Court, from which onely she shall receive it. (*Massachusetts Body of Liberties*, sec. 80)

Even more remarkable than the prohibition against spousal physical correction is the provision that a wife who may be deserving of correction can be turned over to the authorities for punishment, reinforcing the Puritan view that the public societal sphere was more important than the private familial one (Dutton, 2011). While both Pleck (2004) and Bloch (2007) noted that actual enforcement of this “liberty” might have been limited, penalties included fines and whipping. Furthermore, the existence of the precept may have helped reinforce the Puritans’ strong system of social and religious control (Bloch, 2007).

From 1680 to 1874 little attention was paid to the problem of domestic abuse (Pleck, 2004), which increased the secularization and retrenchment in the view of family

life as belonging to a private sphere in which the state should refrain from interfering. Secularization, enlightenment, and revolution did, however, prompt changes in the public perspective of the rights of wives and the relationship between spouses, as seen in Abigail Adams's oft-cited exhortation to her husband, John:

I long to hear that you have declared an independency. And, by the way, in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.
(Adams, 1776)

Court decisions from this period tend to cite a common-law rule (not referred to by Blackstone) that allowed a man to hit his wife with a switch as long as it was smaller than the base of his thumb (Stedman, 1917). Although such court rulings repudiated said common law, they did recognize a limited right of husbands to chastise their wives in appropriate circumstances, often expressly stating the court's reluctance to impose itself on the private familial sphere. In *Bradley v. State* (1824), the court ruled that while a man could be convicted for physically abusing his wife (and thus that the two were no longer a single legal entity as in Blackstone's view), he still retained a right of moderate chastisement. The rationale given by the court was that (a) "family broils and dissensions cannot be investigated before the tribunals of the country" and (b) "to screen from public reproach those who may be thus unhappily situated" (*Bradley v. State*, 1824).

Antebellum Period

In 1864, the North Carolina Supreme Court held that the only conditions under which a man could be sentenced for battery against his wife were (a) if he employed extreme cruelty or violence reflective of malice or (b) if he permanently injured her (*State v. Black*, 1864):

A husband is responsible for the acts of his wife, and he is required to govern his household, and for that purpose the law permits him to use towards his wife such a degree of force as is necessary to control an unruly temper and make her behave herself; and unless some permanent injury be inflicted, or there be an excess of violence, or such a degree of cruelty as shows that it is inflicted to gratify his own bad passions, the law will not invade the domestic forum or go behind the curtain. It prefers to leave the parties to themselves, as the best mode of inducing them to make the matter up and live together as man and wife should.

Again, the court noted the impermeability of the family ideal in support of its ruling. Unless the injuries were permanent or inflicted out of malice, “the law will not invade the domestic forum or go behind the curtain. It prefers to leave the parties to themselves, as the best mode of inducing them to make the matter up and live together as man and wife” (*State v. Black*, 1864). The North Carolina Supreme Court ruled that same decade in 1868 regarding a man whipping his wife, that “we will not interfere with the family government in trifling cases.... We will not inflict upon society the greater evil of raising the curtain upon domestic privacy, to punish the lesser evil of trifling violence” (*State v. Rhodes*, 1868). These judicial views reflect the prevailing societal attitude that government intervention should be limited in domestic matters (Epstein,

1999); this perspective is apparent in the dearth of legislative and social documents addressing the issue of domestic violence during this period (Pleck, 2004).

Late 19th-Century Reforms

A new period of reform can be identified between 1874 and 1890. By the antebellum period, most courts had repudiated the common-law right of chastisement, but this did not immediately afford victims remedy or redress because reluctance to interfere with the family ideal persisted (Epstein, 1999; Siegel, 1996). The burgeoning feminist, suffragist, and temperance movements of the late 19th century are credited with focusing attention on the issue of domestic violence (Epstein, 1999; Pleck, 2004). Indeed, as early as 1848, the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, ratified in Seneca Falls, New York, during the first U.S. women's rights convention, expressly objected to the husband's power "to administer chastisement" (Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, Seneca Falls, New York, 1848, p. 1). In the 1870s, feminist Lucy Stone campaigned to compel the Massachusetts legislature to pass a bill that would presage by a century the practice of protection orders. Said bill stipulated that, if a man was charged with aggravated assault, his wife could appeal to the court to prohibit him from visiting her unless she granted permission, and to gain custody of any of her children who were minors. The bill also instructed court officers "to collect from the husband and pay to her a reasonable weekly allowance for support of the family" (Siegel, 1996, p. 53). While the bill was never enacted, Massachusetts did adopt, in 1879, legislation that enabled the courts to order a man charged with assaulting his wife to "keep the peace, under a bond with penalties" (Siegel, 1996, p. 55). As women gained more of a public voice thanks to

the movements of the late 19th century, the public concern surrounding spousal abuse appeared to increase.

Another penalty for wife beating that gained currency, but limited adoption, during this period was a return to the whipping post (Dutton, 2011). This punishment was proposed first on the grounds that pecuniary penalties of fines and imprisonment served only to penalize the affected family further, and second, in a kind of eye-for-an-eye retaliation. Only three states adopted such statutes, and the men punished by flogging were disproportionately Black and working-class immigrants (Dutton, 2011; Pleck, 1983). During this era of social uncertainty about perceived increases in all forms of violent crime, spousal abuse began to be viewed as a problem of the (supposedly) criminally inclined, predominantly urban working class (Pleck, 1979). This may explain the increased attention on and efforts to combat the problem in urban areas compared to rural areas.

The predominantly women-led temperance movement near the end of the 19th century also increased awareness regarding family violence involving inebriated husbands (Siegel, 1996). Interestingly, it was violence against children, rather than women, that first attracted public attention and reform against family violence, sparking the creation in 1874 of the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the first child protective agency in the world (Myers, 2008). Subsequently the Chicago Protective Agency for Women and Children was established in 1885, representing the most comprehensive effort by an organization to provide direct assistance to women who were victims of violence during this era. The agency comprised delegates from 15 different women's associations. Predating the creation of modern women's shelters by

nearly 100 years, the protective agency provided legal aid and personal assistance to assault victims (Pleck, 2004).

20th-Century Reforms

The 20th century brought enormous societal changes in perceptions of the family and the rights of women and children. However, there was another period of relative inattention to domestic violence between 1890 and 1960. By the 1960s, the combined effects on society of the two world wars, the Great Depression, and the civil rights movement had created a new culture in which the problem could be viewed—and dealt with—in radically new ways (Dutton, 2011). The New Deal programs aimed at economic recovery may have contributed to making government intervention more acceptable in areas previously considered off-limits, including the family.

As had occurred in the late 19th century, attention first focused on battered children. This issue exploded in the 1960s due to the efforts of physicians and the seminal article titled “The Battered Child Syndrome” (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, & Silver, 1962). This phenomenon gained increased media attention, which illuminated the problem throughout the 1960s and prompted Congressional action. In the banner year of 1962, Congress passed legislation mandating that child protective organizations be included as part of public child welfare and requiring states to pledge to make child welfare services available statewide (Myers, 2008). The United States Children’s Bureau convened two meetings that year and laid the foundation for mandatory reporting laws focused on child abuse, which were enacted in all 50 states by 1967 (Myers, 2008).

As the feminist and suffragist actions of the mid to late 1800s had done, the 1970s women's liberation movement spotlighted the many issues facing women, including that of violence in intimate relationships (Epstein, 1999). In 1973, the United States saw the establishment of the first domestic violence shelter in St. Paul, Minnesota; by the 1990s, there were well over 1,000 shelters across the country (Pleck, 2004). It was also during this period that the term *domestic violence* began to come into use, gaining in popularity between 1980 and 2000 (Erez, 2002). This term reflected a broadened definition that included violence against children, violence by either partner (including homosexual couples), and expansion of abuse beyond the physical (Pleck, 2004).

A famous cover of *Ms.* (magazine) in 1976 featured a close-up of a woman with a black eye and the headline "Battered Wives." The accompanying article (Gingold, 1976) exposed the prevalence of domestic violence across all socioeconomic strata and regions, putting to rest—along with subsequent research—the myth of the predominantly African American or urban immigrant wife beater (Pleck, 2004). This was the beginning of a shift in the dominant public perception of domestic violence. The article indicated that domestic violence occurred in not only urban areas but also rural ones (Gingold, 1976). The article also focused on the traditional hands-off attitude of law enforcement that treated domestic violence as a "disturbance" and avoided arresting abusers (Gingold, 1976, p. 51). Subsequent decades saw legislation requiring police action and better enforcement of protection orders, a mechanism that began to be made more widely available starting in the 1970s.

Federal Intervention

While protection orders were touted as giving battered women increased agency in the later decades of the 20th century, there was evidence that they did not function effectively in preventing further abuse (Hattery & Smith, 2017). Domestic relations law was traditionally the purview of the states, but there was an increasing demand for action at the federal level. This was controversial, not only because vestiges of the family ideal still called into question the role of government in private domestic matters (Patterson, 2008) but also because Congress needed a constitutional basis for enacting legislation in this area. Congressional hearings were held from 1990 to 1994, leading to research and testimony that vastly improved insight into domestic violence as one of the leading causes of injury and death to women, and a significant cost factor in healthcare and criminal justice (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). This resulted in the 1994 adoption of VAWA, the first federal legislation to deal specifically with violence against women. VAWA provides that “all persons within the United States shall have the right to be free from crimes of violence motivated by gender” (Violence Against Women Act, 1994).

A central focus of the 1994 VAWA was improving how both the courts and law enforcement responded to domestic violence with resources, training, and policies (Office on Violence Against Women, 2016). These efforts have been administered since 1995 by the OVW, which was established as part of the Department of Justice with the purpose of overseeing VAWA-authorized federal grants. The OVW has distributed more than \$7 billion since its inception, financing women’s shelters, improving and expanding cooperation between the public and law enforcement, offering training for judges, and creating a National Domestic Violence Hotline (Office on Violence Against Women,

2016). One previously neglected area that OVW has focused on is the unique situation of rural women through the establishment of the Rural Program.

21st-Century Attitudes

Despite the progress that has been made legally, socially, and culturally, influencing attitudes toward domestic violence in the United States and many other regions of the world, the belief that spousal abuse is acceptable continues to persist domestically and abroad at surprising levels. A large-scale, ongoing study conducted in nearly 100 countries by a global network of researchers based in Vienna, Austria, known as the World Values Survey, found that 33% or more men in 29 different countries still believe that spousal abuse is acceptable, with 33% or more women in 19 total countries also in agreement (as cited in Aizenman, 2015). This finding reveals that domestic violence is still culturally acceptable in many countries around the world. In these cultures, women are typically viewed as housekeepers, and many wives cannot leave their homes without asking permission from their husbands. When a man hits or beats his wife for failing to obey his rules, it is regarded as normal in these communities (Aizenman, 2015). In Rwanda, for example, the World Values Survey found that 96% of women believed that spousal abuse is justifiable (as cited in Aizenman, 2015). Domestic violence is still legal in at least 45 countries, particularly in the regions of Africa and the Middle East (World Atlas, 2017b). The Democratic Republic of the Congo enforces a family code that places women under their husband's guardianship and does not even allow them to sign legal documents of their own accord (World Atlas, 2017a). Such legislation harkens back to the mentality embodied in the centuries-old English Common Law described by Blackstone (1765).

Although the levels of acceptance of domestic violence among women may be lower in countries that legally punish domestic violence, the rates are still notable. In the United States, 10% of women stated that spousal abuse was acceptable, while 20% of women in Germany reported believing the same. Widespread societal or community values appear to be a major influence over these persistent beliefs (Aizenman, 2015). A joint report by the Clinton Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation identified social norms as “an equally important influence on gender equality [that] is hard to change” (Clinton Foundation, 2015, p.1). Religious beliefs are also highly influential in certain communities and are often linked to the lack of legislation against spousal abuse (World Atlas, 2017b). Although the legal resources in place in the United States offer superior protection compared to many other areas of the world, many victims continue to fall through the cracks in America’s rural regions.

The Protection Order Process as a Legal Remedy

The legal system allows both civil and criminal protection orders as safety measures against future domestic abuse (Kethineni & Beichner, 2009; Sullivan, Weiss, Price, & Pugh, 2017). Civil protection orders are widely preferred by petitioners (Stoever, 2014). However, both types of protection orders have advantages and drawbacks. From the standpoint of preserving the dignity and autonomy of the petitioner, civil protection orders have a major advantage in that they endow the petitioner with a substantial degree of control over the legal process and are widely regarded as an instrument of empowerment (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015; Cattaneo et al., 2016; Johnson, 2015; Kethineni & Beichner, 2009; Lucken et al., 2015; Logan et al., 2009; MacDowell, 2016a, 2016b). Obtaining a civil protection order has been framed as

a form of therapeutic jurisprudence for victims of domestic violence (Bell et al., 2011; Johnsen & Robertson, 2016; Wright & Johnson, 2012).

Petitioners for civil protection orders can go to court at any point they deem appropriate (Sullivan et al., 2017). Unlike criminal proceedings that are often subject to lengthy delays, civil proceedings are scheduled as quickly as possible given the potential danger of leaving the abuser (Fleury-Steiner et al., 2011; Logan et al., 2009). Most states do not require the presence of an attorney, and petitioners can request the type of order they believe will offer them the best degree of protection (Sullivan et al., 2017). Women who obtain help from domestic violence services or shelter programs are often referred to the courts by advocates who guide them through the process and may accompany them to court proceedings (MacDowell, 2016a; MacDowell, 2016b).

Examining countywide data on women who filed for civil or criminal protection orders, Kethineni and Beichner (2009) found the two groups to be remarkably similar with one exception: women who filed for criminal protection orders documented physical violence as the leading cause for seeking the order while women who filed for civil protection orders often cited emotional abuse, which is not liable to criminal prosecution. Both groups, however, had histories of physical violence. Petitioners typically base their assessment for future violence on verbal, symbolic, or physical threats from the abusive partner (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 2010). Providing the courts with specific information relevant to the case allows the petitioner to maintain control over the civil court proceedings and influence the outcome (Sullivan et al., 2017).

Although most protection orders tend to be no-contact, there are varying degrees of the stipulation, which affords the petitioner more control over the process. A complete

prohibition on contact encompasses all communication, including telephone and electronic communication (Fleury-Steiner et al., 2011). Other protection orders are designed to prevent threatening or abusive contact but do not bar contact completely. This remedy is sought most often when the partners have children together. Civil protection orders can also stipulate who maintains control of the house or property, who has access to joint bank accounts, who gets child custody and visitation, and what the limits are on the respondent's access to the petitioner's residence or place of employment.

In contrast to the nature of civil proceedings, domestic violence victims typically have minimal control over the criminal protection order process (Sullivan et al., 2017). Typically, prosecutors or judges initiate court proceedings after an arrest has taken place. Although women are nominally free to request a specific level of restriction, a common complaint from women who have gone through the criminal courts is that the judge issues an order with a higher degree of restriction than they thought necessary. This practice is especially prevalent in states that had adopted mandatory policies regarding domestic violence, which do not necessarily increase the victim's safety (Johnson, 2015).

According to the taxonomy of warrantless arrest laws regarding domestic violence, there are three levels of decision making: (a) full discretion, (b) discretion with the state signifying a preference for arrest when the primary aggressor can be determined, and (c) mandatory laws, which award police little or no discretion (Zeoli, Norris, & Brenner, 2011). In analyzing state laws to determine their respective impacts on intimate partner homicide, Zeoli et al. found too many discrepancies for any clear indication. Mandatory arrest laws may work to the disadvantage of the abused partner (Johnson, 2015; Messing et al., 2015). Many women choose civil proceedings because they do not

want their partner to be criminally prosecuted (Fleury-Steiner et al., 2011; Johnson, 2015). In particular, women who are financially dependent upon their partners or have dependent children risk losing the support of a partner who is incarcerated or unable to find work because of a criminal conviction. Seeking a protection order of any kind involves a calculated decision. Most women view civil protection orders as their best option.

Despite the potential benefits, civil protection orders have one distinct disadvantage: they have the same practical impact as criminal prosecution. Thus, the effectiveness of civil protection orders is a topic of ongoing debate (Fleury-Steiner et al., 2011; Kothari et al., 2012; Logan et al., 2009; Logan & Walker, 2011). Hawkins (2010) credits Logan and colleagues with calling attention to stalking as a severe risk for women who obtain civil protection orders. Their abusers stalked roughly half the women in the Kentucky study. The terms separation assault and separation homicide have become part of the lexicon on domestic violence, and there are disturbing incidents of courthouse assault. According to Stoeber (2014), a domestic violence court is a dangerous place given the fact that the court hearing provides an abuser with precise information on where, when, and how to locate the victim. Domestic violence petitioners have been killed in the courtroom.

In most cases, extensions are granted on civil protection orders at the petitioner's request (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 2010). However, Stoeber (2014) argues that having to attend judicial hearings to extend the order repeatedly places the petitioner in danger. Given the repetitive nature of domestic violence, Stoeber endorses the practice of granting petitioners long-term or indefinite

orders of protection. In Tennessee, the duration of a typical civil protection order is one year. However, if the order is violated an extension may be granted for 5 years after the first violation and 10 years after the second (Waller, 2015). A few states such as Delaware, Washington, and Montana offer permanent protection orders, each with specific stipulations that must be met; however, they do not entirely alleviate the danger of separation assault or homicide.

Stoever (2014) acknowledges that the overall evidence supports the effectiveness of civil protection orders. Numerous sources concur (Fleury-Steiner et al., 2011; Kothari et al., 2012; Logan et al., 2009; Logan & Walker, 2011); and there is universal agreement that the existing laws, policies, and programs enacted to combat domestic violence require ongoing evaluation and improvement.

The Rural and Urban Realities of Domestic Violence

According to the OVW (2017), the Rural Program “recognizes the richness of diversity in rural communities and areas across the country” that is essential for developing programs and services to meet the unique needs of constituents (p. 1). Indeed, Rennison et al. (2013) decry the “myth of rural homogeneity” (p. 1324) as a major barrier to research on rural crime. Diversity was considered a property of urban areas while rural communities were assumed to be homogenous, and, unlike the urban communities that have long been the focus of criminological and sociological research, rural communities were “presumed to be relatively crime free” (p. 1324).

Grama (2000) made a similar point with regard to domestic violence. According to Grama, because of popular stereotypes about rural living, even the simple suggestion that domestic violence was happening in rural homes would often provoke resistance,

skepticism, and ridicule. At the time, there were few statistics documenting the incidence of rural domestic violence. However, Grama cited a large Ohio study reporting that domestic violence disputes were most prevalent in the state's least populated areas. Moreover, the more significant presence of guns and other weapons in rural households made these disputes more dangerous. Abusers commonly use guns and other weapons to threaten and intimidate their victims. Logan et al. (2003) found that rural domestic violence victims were subject to death threats more than their urban counterparts. Geographic isolation intensifies the psychological impact.

Recent studies dispel any assumption that domestic violence is mainly an urban problem. In fact, studies show that domestic violence occurs more often in rural areas with a higher risk for serious physical injury or death (Anderson et al., 2014; Lanier & Maume, 2009; Logan et al., 2005; Peek-Asa et al., 2011). For example, Peek-Asa et al. (2011) investigated the prevalence, frequency, and severity of domestic violence among women attending a large reproductive health clinic to determine if differences existed according to the geographic locality. The sample consisted of 1,478 women (72.7% urban or suburban, 9.9% from rural towns, and 6.6% from isolated, remote areas) who completed a modified version of the Abuse Assessment Screen covering physical and sexual violence and the Women's Experience with Battering scale to assess psychological abuse.

Notably, domestic violence was more prevalent among women living in rural and sparsely populated areas, who were also subject to more frequent and more severe physical and sexual abuse (Peek-Asa et al., 2011). There were no differences in psychological abuse by location. Among the NISVS respondents, psychological

aggression was the only form of abuse experienced by roughly equal proportions of women and men (> 47%; Smith et al., 2017). Psychological aggression—explicitly controlling and intimidating behavior—is often the reason protection order petitioners remain in abusive relationships (Denman et al., 2009). In many cases, petitioners file and reconcile multiple times before they finally terminate the relationship. To Denman et al., this phenomenon highlights the importance of recognizing that leaving an abusive relationship is a process that requires ample support.

Virtually all sources cite geographic isolation as a risk factor for domestic violence and a barrier to obtaining services. Peek-Asa et al. (2011) and Grama (2000) brought up the question of whether the higher prevalence of domestic violence in rural and remote areas might be due in some part to self-selection. It is well known that abusers frequently try to isolate the victim socially. Some abusers may deliberately reside in or relocate to remote areas where violence can be easier to hide and domestic violence resources challenging to access. According to Peek-Asa et al. (2011), the problem of having to travel long distances to reach services is complicated not only by the lack of public transportation in rural areas but also by the behavior of abusers who keep car keys from partners and in some cases systematically monitor their actions so they know exactly when they leave the house and where they go. It is clear from the existing literature that the problems identified by Grama (2000) as obstacles to help-seeking by rural victims of domestic violence are far from being alleviated.

Risk Factors and Prevalence

National data on the prevalence and risk factors for domestic violence and violence in general show that rural areas have many characteristics associated with

violent behavior. Using data drawn from several health and law enforcement surveillance systems, Sumner et al. (2015) broadly examined violence across the United States, using the World Health Organization definition of interpersonal violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against another person or against a group or community that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation” (Sumner et al., 2015, p. 479). The aggregate data revealed that over 16,000 homicides could be directly contributed to domestic violence, along with over 1.6 million nonfatal assault injuries that required emergency department treatment for the years 2013 (homicide) and 2012 (assault). While the highest homicide rates were reported in metropolitan areas, the analysis disclosed some risk factors for violence that is common in rural areas. Specifically, violence was more prevalent in communities with high concentrations of poor and unemployed residents, limited economic opportunities, limited access to public mental health and social services, and a smaller presence of civic and voluntary organizations.

Similar risk factors to those reported by Sumner et al. (2015) were also identified in a systematic review of risk factors by Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, and Kim (2012). Capaldi et al. presented a comprehensive analysis of domestic violence of 228 articles involving 170 adult and 58 adolescents. Among sociodemographic factors, education had some relationship to domestic violence, with lower levels of education associated with a higher risk of being a victim or perpetrator of domestic violence. In the final analysis, however, education was a less significant risk factor for domestic violence than

unemployment and low income. Low income was also associated with more severe domestic violence.

Weissman (2013) directly links domestic violence with the political economy, arguing that research provides compelling evidence of “the relationship between economic adversity and gender-based violence” (p. 233). According to the analyses conducted by Capaldi et al. (2012), domestic violence is relatively gender neutral. Nevertheless, women were more likely to be victims of severe, injury-producing violence, similar to the NISVS findings (Smith et al., 2017). According to Weissman (2013), ethnographic studies have found domestic violence to be a consequence of job loss due to factory closings. Weissman also cites objective evidence of this phenomenon. In the wake of the 2008 recession, the National Domestic Violence Hotline reported a significant increase in calls as a result of decreased family income and financial distress. New York State experienced an 18% increase in domestic violence cases, primarily attributed to family financial crises. Other areas reported spikes in domestic homicides and in the number of victims turning to shelters, with most citing “financial strain as the cause of the violence” (Weissman, p. 235).

The research cited by Weissman (2013) to make her case also includes studies of families whose lives were disrupted by “economic uncertainty and hardship” (p. 235). In particular, the stress caused by chronic unemployment increases the risk of family violence. A major reason for this occurrence is that unemployment challenges traditional gender roles for men who see themselves as the family breadwinner (Lanier & Maume, 2009; Weissman, 2013). According to Weissman (2013), “Economic crisis and the loss

of work must be understood as a crucial point that reveals the ways that gender roles are embedded in all social relationships and work and wage-related circumstances” (p. 235).

Social and cultural norms that support a strict adherence to traditional gender roles are routinely cited as barriers to domestic violence prevention in rural communities (Beyer et al., 2015). This can be especially true for religious and immigrant women who are subject to patriarchal teachings that often blame women for domestic violence and whose religious or community leaders may try to persuade female victims to placate the abuser rather than leaving them (Grama, 2000; Hancock et al., 2014). According to Hancock et al. (2014), rural Latina immigrant women who are victimized by domestic violence may turn to churches as the only source they believe can help them. However, while church leaders may provide comfort to victims, they may not be capable of or willing to provide practical assistance such as helping them access community resources.

Hancock et al. (2014) described a pilot project designed to encourage and empower mostly conservative evangelical Latino church leaders in rural communities to constructively address domestic violence among their congregants. The researchers found overwhelming support from the pastors who attended their workshops. However, they noted that this was a self-selected group of pastors, the vast majority of whom were women. The overarching lesson gained from the project was the critical importance of employing a culturally sensitive approach to addressing domestic violence in this population group. The OVW (2016; 2017) consistently stresses the need for culturally sensitive interventions and services.

Studies investigating the effects of the neighborhood environment on domestic violence have proliferated since their inception in the mid 1990s (Beyer et al., 2015).

Drawing on sociology, criminology, and epidemiology, this channel of research initially started in the United States, which is still the site of the overwhelming majority of studies. Despite this, Beyer et al. could find no studies that specifically focused on rural areas. Of 11 subnational studies, nine were focused on major metropolitan areas such as New York and Chicago, and neither of the remaining two studies covered rural communities. Ironically, the only studies disclosed by a comprehensive review of research that examined rural domestic violence (in the context of rurality versus urbanity) were conducted in developing countries, inadvertently supporting the description of rural women of domestic violence as the forgotten victims (Grama, 2000).

Nevertheless, the findings from the neighborhood studies presented by Beyer et al. (2015) added to the body of evidence identifying low socioeconomic status and unemployment as key predictors of interpersonal violence in general and domestic violence specifically (Capaldi et al., 2012; Sumner et al., 2015; Weissman, 2013). As Weissman (2013) observed, the probability of family violence “increases in structurally disadvantaged households and communities” (p. 235). Also, Sumner et al. (2015) found education to be less significant for the broad incidence of interpersonal violence; however, low education appears to be more strongly related to domestic violence (Beyer et al., 2015). This may be because of greater acceptance of traditional gender norms by less educated individuals beyond the relationship of educational attainment to employment and income.

One particular ecological factor may exert a dramatically different impact in urban and rural communities. Collective efficacy is frequently cited as a protective factor against neighborhood violence (Beyer et al., 2015; Sumner et al., 2015). According to

Sumner et al. (2015), some studies have found that community-level collective efficacy or connectedness can work to counteract many of the adverse effects of economic disadvantage and protect against various forms of interpersonal violence including youth violence, child maltreatment, and domestic violence. However, this protective effect may be reversed in rural areas where geographic isolation combines with social embeddedness to heighten the risk of family violence and impede the ability of victims to obtain help (Beyer et al., 2015; Grama, 2000). Lack of anonymity and confidentiality, social stigma, and negative attitudes on the part of law enforcement officials and community and religious leaders all present barriers to help-seeking by rural victims of domestic violence (Anderson et al., 2014; Grama, 2000; OVW, 2017). Although traditional gender stereotypes are typically invoked as an obstacle to preventing domestic violence, fear of transgressing masculine social norms poses a formidable barrier to help-seeking by male victims of domestic violence.

A theme that consistently runs through the literature on rural domestic violence is the importance of recognizing the powerful impact of environmental factors. Economic disadvantage and lack of employment opportunities are overarching predictors of domestic violence (Beyer et al., 2015; Weissman, 2013). Beyond these factors, neighborhood factors that may be especially pertinent to rural communities include lower education levels, alcohol or drug abuse, rigid gender stereotypes, low status of women, geographic and social isolation, and limited access to resources.

Rural and Urban Women's Experiences

Qualitative research often serves as a precursor to the more extensive study of a topic that has gotten scant research attention. Logan et al. (2003) began their ongoing

research with a small pilot study involving 15 urban women and eight rural women who had obtained protective orders. Both groups had a mean age of 33 years but diverged on other characteristics. The area from which the rural area was drawn was 98% White; thus, the rural group was exclusively Caucasian while the urban group included African American women (30%). Marked differences arose regarding education and employment: 87% of the urban women completed high school compared to 25% of the rural women, and 80% of the urban women worked full-time or part-time versus 13% of the rural women. At least a partial consequence of these differences is that 80% of the rural women described themselves as being homeless compared to 20% of the urban women. Also, the OVW (2016) has identified housing as a significant obstacle to helping domestic violence victims.

Loneliness and lack of social support were pervasive among the rural women who were far more predisposed than urban women to maladaptive coping and feelings of hopelessness and despair (Logan et al., 2003). In contrast, urban women maintained a more positive outlook and were more inclined to engage in active coping strategies such as undergoing counseling, seeking out relevant information, and engaging in self-talk. Logan et al. observed stark differences in coping between the two groups.

Although both groups of women had relationships lasting an average of 2 years and all had endured both physical and emotional abuse from the partner against whom they filed the protection order, details of the relationships revealed some dramatic differences between the rural and urban women. The rural women became involved with their abusers at a much younger age, on average 20 years old, compared to an average of 29 years old for the urban women (Logan et al., 2003). Also, the abuse often occurred

much earlier in the relationship for the rural women. In fact, half the rural women reported being abused 1 month after the relationship started, much earlier than any of the urban women. By 6 months after the relationship started, 88% of the rural participants and 40% of the urban participants had been abused. An even more striking distinction was that nearly two-thirds (63%) of the rural participants had experienced abusive behavior even before they lived with their partner, compared to 23% of urban participants. Also, rural participants were far more likely to have experienced severe physical violence, including the use of a weapon, death threats, and destruction of personal property. None of the rural participants filed for a protection order after the first incident of abuse, but 27% of the urban participants sought a protection order after a single incident of abuse. However, both groups of participants had turned to four or five types of services for help, including shelters, crisis hotlines, and religious counselors.

An ecological approach to understanding violence encompasses individual, family, community, and societal level factors (Beyer et al., 2015; Capaldi et al., 2012; Sumner et al., 2015). Childhood experiences of abuse heighten the future risk of being a victim or a perpetrator. The rural women surveyed by Logan et al. (2003) were far more likely than their urban counterparts to have experienced sexual abuse as children (75% versus 27%); and one-quarter of the rural women had been threatened with a weapon by a parent or caregiver, an experience none of the urban women shared. Perhaps most illustrative of the cycle of violence, 90% of the rural women had witnessed their mothers being abused. Less than one-third of the urban women shared that experience, but even that number is high. Logan et al. (2003) were alarmed that several women in both groups became involved with a new partner shortly after leaving the partner against whom they

had obtained the protective order. Perhaps because of their greater exposure to childhood victimization, rural women were more likely to enter into multiple abusive relationships; however, the difference between the two groups was small.

Postmus, Severson, Berry, and Yoo (2009) observed high levels of victimization in childhood and adulthood among 423 women from three urban communities, one rural community, and a women's correctional facility. They reported that an alarming 37% of the women had experienced all four types of victimization examined: physical childhood abuse, sexual child abuse, physical domestic violence, and rape. Caucasian women were the most likely to have experienced domestic violence, followed by African American women. Latinas reported the lowest incidence of domestic violence. Childhood sexual abuse, physical domestic violence, and rape were most common among women who were receiving welfare benefits. Unsurprisingly, women recruited from domestic violence agencies reported a higher frequency of abuse.

Similar to the women interviewed by Logan et al. (2003), the women surveyed by Postmus et al. (2009) sought help from a variety of services. An interesting finding was that out of a long list of services, the women ranked legal services for divorce and civil protective orders near the bottom—22nd out of 24 potential services, rated higher than only online support services and child protective services (Postmus et al., 2009). At the same time, nearly half the women (46%) made use of those legal channels. Postmus et al. noted that these civil remedies are the ones most commonly recommended by advocates and other professionals to domestic violence survivors. In fact, overall there was a marked disparity in the preferences for help expressed by the women and the

typical recommendations of professionals, thus highlighting the importance of soliciting the perspectives of individuals who experience domestic violence.

Consequences of Domestic Violence

The physical and mental health consequences of exposure to violence are amply documented (Duterte et al., 2008; Straus et al., 2009; Sumner et al., 2015). Physical injuries are the most common consequences of domestic violence (Sumner et al., 2015). Sexual assault, especially prevalent among the rural women (Logan et al., 2003), raises the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection (Sumner et al., 2015). Exposure to physical, sexual, and psychological violence is associated with a plethora of mental and behavioral health problems, including depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sleep disturbances, eating disorders, substance abuse, and suicide and suicide attempts. Exposure to violence has also been linked to several major diseases, notably cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and alcoholism.

The rural women interviewed by Logan et al. (2003) reported significantly poorer physical and mental health than urban women. The overwhelming majority of rural women (88%) directly linked feelings of stress and depression to the experience of abuse, compared to 47% of the urban women. With regard to physical health, only 13% of the urban women attributed health problems to abuse, while 63% of the rural women attributed their health problems to their abuse experience, citing a range of health issues including scars, stroke, poor eyesight (to the point of legal blindness), and stomach problems. Both rural and urban women experienced the mental health consequences of violence reported by Sumner et al. (2015), along with a diminished sense of self-esteem (Logan et al., 2003). Also consistent with the behavioral effects of violence reported by

Sumner et al. (2015), a number of the domestic violence survivors reported turning to alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes to cope with their abuse (Logan et al., 2003).

Although both the rural and urban women reported that the abuse they endured adversely affected their self-esteem, the qualitative accounts revealed important differences to the advantage of the urban women (Logan et al., 2003). Most of the urban women were employed, and their work was a source of personal pride. The urban women also took pride in activities that were helping them gain independence, such as looking for or moving to a new place to live. Notably, for the rural women following through with the protection order emerged as a major source of pride. Denman et al. (2009) characterize the act of following through with getting a protection order as a great accomplishment for women who are often fearful (justifiably) of their abuser and have reservations about leaving the relationship out of concern they could be seriously hurt or killed. The especially damaging impact of domestic violence on the rural women's psychological well-being was evident when the participants were asked to list some qualities about themselves (Logan et al., 2003). Half the rural women listed nothing or even declared that they did not like themselves.

A typical common positive response among both urban and rural women was that they were good mothers who took good care of their children (Logan et al., 2003). Concern for the children's well-being is often the crucial factor in a woman's decision to leave or to remain in a relationship with her abuser (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 2010). Perpetrators often use children to control and threaten the victim; thus, the safety of both the abuse survivor and her children should be a high priority in the issuance of a protection order.

Help-Seeking and Self-Help Behavior

Other studies have documented the physical and mental consequences of domestic violence (Duterte et al., 2008; Straus et al., 2009). Duterte et al. (2008) investigated the connections between women's domestic violence experiences (physical, sexual, and psychological) and the use of legal and medical services in a sample of 1,509 women randomly selected from a large health plan. Notably, legal help took the form of seeking a civil protection order. Participants reported physical abuse as the most common form of violence, with 69% reported being physically assaulted, followed by sexual abuse (30%). Some participants had experienced multiple types of abuse, and 22% of women reported psychological abuse without physical or sexual abuse.

Duterte et al. (2008) observed that the experience of domestic violence drove 36% of the women to seek medical care, 19% to seek legal services, and 10% to seek both types of services. Not surprisingly, women who had experienced the most severe abuse for more prolonged periods were the most likely to seek both medical care and civil protection orders. This was not necessarily the case for the urban women interviewed by Logan et al. (2003), some of whom filed for protection orders after the first incident of abuse. More often, however, domestic violence victims filed for protection orders as a last resort (Duterte et al., 2008; Kothari et al., 2012). The strongest relationship between domestic violence and medical services was for victims of sexual violence, who were most likely to seek medical care (Duterte et al., 2008). Physical abuse was only marginally linked with medical help, and Duterte et al. found no association between even severe psychological abuse and medical service use.

Using data drawn from an urban emergency department, Straus et al. (2009) presented one of the few studies that included male victims of domestic violence. Among patients visiting the emergency department, 548 (20%) screened positive for domestic violence and 216 (40%) returned for a follow-up assessment the next week. These individuals were primarily African American (91%), female (63%), and single (70%), with a mean age of 35 years. That age is similar to the mean age of the women in Logan et al.'s study (2003). The participants completed an array of assessments including the George Washington University Violence Prevention Screening protocol, the Short Form 12 Health Survey, the Conflict Tactics Scale, and the Revised Danger Assessment.

The test results demonstrated the detrimental impact of domestic violence on physical and mental health (Straus et al., 2009), finding that the impact of psychological violence outweighed the physical abuse itself, especially among women. A particularly striking finding was that perceptions of danger were strongly linked with diminished mental and physical health functioning; specifically, the more the participants felt they were in danger, the lower their physical and mental health status. This pattern could be a result of the stress caused by chronic exposure to violence (Sumner et al., 2015). In examining the relationship between domestic violence and self-advocacy behaviors (such as changing locks, creating a safety plan, seeking social support), Straus et al. (2009) found a distinct relationship between severe abuse, diminished mental functioning, and the frequent use of self-advocacy behaviors. Protection orders were not explicitly mentioned. However, the overall pattern is consistent with the idea that protection orders

are often the last resort for abuse survivors who have tried other channels of help (Duterte et al., 2008; Kothari et al., 2012).

According to Straus et al. (2009), a key advantage of their methodology, using a sample of emergency department patients, is that it illustrates the “heterogeneity of perpetrator status” (p. 629). However, the NISVS data show that women are more likely to experience severe violence than are men (Smith et al., 2017). Indeed, Straus et al. (2009) acknowledged that even in cases where women act violently toward their partners, higher proportions of men use intimidation, cause injury to their partners, and perpetrate sexual violence. Straus et al. raise the issue of dual violence in domestic disputes, noting that the question of “who uses violence and in what circumstances” (p. 629) is especially significant given mandatory arrest laws resulting in the arrest of both partners on account of “absent exploration of who the primary aggressors are” (p. 629). Mandatory arrest policies have been heavily criticized, partly because of increases in dual arrests in cases of domestic violence without identifying the primary aggressor (Messing et al., 2015).

This practice may be especially disadvantageous for rural victims of domestic violence. Noting that there was scant research into people’s attitudes toward domestic violence perpetrated by men or women, particularly in rural communities, Schwab-Reese and Renner (2017) explored the issue using data from the Wave 2 of the Keokuk Country Rural Health Study, part of a prospective cohort study of a rural Iowa county. The responses were based on a sample of 1,266 men and women who were queried on acceptance of domestic violence and whose own experiences were assessed with the Conflict Tactics Scale.

In general, acceptance of physical violence for any reason was extremely low with one glaring exception: many participants felt “it was acceptable to hit a partner if the partner hit first” (Schwab-Reese & Renner, 2017, p. 119). Participants who had experienced domestic violence as either perpetrators or victims were significantly more inclined to accept retaliatory physical aggression. While female perpetrators expressed acceptance of retaliatory aggression only by women, male perpetrators tended to accept retaliatory aggression by both genders. Given that past research has indicated that domestic violence tends to be more prevalent and severe in rural communities (Anderson et al., 2014; Lanier & Maume, 2009; Logan et al., 2005; Peek-Asa et al., 2011), understanding retaliatory aggression and its consequences is an important topic.

Anderson et al. (2014) focused specifically on the strategies employed by rural women in response to domestic violence. The participants were 37 women who had left abusive relationships. Ranging in age from 22 to 64, the women were primarily White, most had children, more than half were employed (58%), and all but one was heterosexual. Their education levels varied. The participants completed the short form Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory, items from the Violence Against Women Survey, and the Intimate Partner Violence Strategies Index, a 38-item scale designed to capture a range of tactics women use to deal with domestic violence.

For 15 of the women, domestic violence victimization began before age 20, lasting an average of 11 years within a relationship duration average of 12 years (Anderson et al., 2014). Logan et al. (2003) found that rural women experienced domestic violence early on in their relationships. All the women in the sample had endured psychological abuse, 36 experienced at least one form of physical abuse, and 33

reported at least one form of sexual abuse (Anderson et al., 2014). Multiple forms of each type of abuse were prevalent in the small sample. On average, the women made use of 21 (58%) of the strategies listed on the Intimate Partner Violence Strategies Index. Two strategies, resistance and placating, were used by all women. Safety planning was widely adopted, especially by the women who experienced the most physical abuse. Safety planning is universally recommended for victims of physical domestic violence (Cattaneo et al., 2016; Johnson, 2015; Messing et al., 2015). Women who experienced frequent psychological abuse also used safety planning extensively (Anderson et al., 2014).

Anderson et al. (2014) noted that on the one hand, the most commonly used tactics were private strategies, notably safety planning and resistance (ending or attempting to end the relationship). On the other hand, seeking help from the legal system was the least used common strategy. Anderson et al. proposed that these preferences might reflect an emphasis on self-sufficiency in rural communities, combined with a lack of access to formal services. While lack of access to services is consistently cited as a barrier to help-seeking for rural domestic violence victims, the strategies used by the rural women are similar to the preferences of the urban women surveyed by Postmus et al. (2009). The majority of those women (82%) wanted to take care of the problem or believed the problem would resolve itself without help (70%). According to Postmus et al., their attitudes could be ascribed to a sense of stigma attached to victimization or fear of being victimized. Those attitudes may be even more prevalent in rural communities (Grama, 2000). However, nearly half the women surveyed by Postmus et al. (2009) did seek legal remedies, specifically civil protection orders, but did

not rate them as being especially helpful. What the women sought most was access to practical resources such as food, housing, and financial assistance. The women also favored religious or spiritual counseling, which can be detrimental if it reinforces traditional gender role stereotypes (Grama, 2000; Hancock et al., 2014). The most striking finding was that the strategies typically prioritized by professionals—specifically emotional, psychological, and legal support—were ranked as areas of least importance by domestic violence survivors themselves.

Anderson et al. (2014) also found that while the women used more than half the strategies listed (54%), they did not view them as helpful. The least beneficial approach was seeking formal help for the abuser's violence or substance use problem. Domestic violence programs, shelters, and hotlines were rated highly but not widely used, likely because of the lack of formal programs and shelters in rural areas (OVW, 2016; OVW, 2017). Overall, there is a tremendous disparity between the need for domestic violence shelters and their availability throughout the U.S. and Canada (Sullivan, 2012). In response to pressure for evidence-based practice, the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence conducted a review of the empirical evidence on domestic violence shelters combined with an exploration of innovative and promising practices. In reviewing 17 North American studies, Sullivan concluded that shelters provide a supportive environment for women victimized by domestic violence and serve as an effective resource.

According to Sullivan (2012), the most compelling evidence in support of shelters comes from the narratives of the women themselves. In three studies, the women were asked what other options would they have had if shelters had not been available, and their

responses were disturbing. Many women said they would have been homeless, which was the case for most of the rural women interviewed by Logan et al. (2003). Other women reported that they would have stayed with the abuser or engaged in prostitution to support themselves and their children (Sullivan, 2012). Some women claimed they would have killed themselves or their abuser. These responses highlight the urgent need for funding to improve and expand the nation's domestic violence shelter system and the need to solicit and appreciate the perspectives of domestic violence survivors.

Six of the women surveyed by Anderson et al. (2014) commented that they wanted access to domestic violence shelters, but none were available in their locality. Anderson et al. (2014) noted that rural shelters are typically filled and their resources strained so that even the women who receive shelter do not have access to other resources and support services. In the absence of formal services, most of the women turned to informal networks for help (friends or family), especially those whose abuse continued for long durations. Other tactics considered helpful included safety planning strategies such as hiding essential papers from the abuser, keeping extra supplies of necessities, and creating codes to alert others when the woman was in danger. Such strategies are widely recommended, but fewer than half the women employed them. The reliance on informal supports is not surprising for women living in close-knit communities with limited access to formal resources. However, the findings underscore the dire need for programs and services for rural victims of domestic violence.

Social Isolation

Lanier and Maume (2009) explored rural domestic violence from the perspective of social isolation, using data from Waves 1 and 2 of the National Survey of Families and

Households and 1990 census figures. Lanier and Maume (2009) maintain that although social isolation is recognized as a factor in rural domestic violence, the focus is usually on the tangible and objectively measured factor of geographic isolation whereas social isolation is vague and variously defined. Wilson defined social isolation as “the lack of contact or of sustained interaction with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society” (Wilson, as cited in Lanier & Maume, 2009, p. 1313). Although Wilson proposed this definition in the context of the urban underclass, the absence of social capital is also a feature of economically depressed rural areas with limited access to formal resources. Indeed, Lanier and Maume (2009) argue that social isolation, specifically sociocultural isolation, is a factor in domestic violence in both rural and urban settings.

Analysis at the bivariate level produced no significant mean differences between rural and urban counties; for example, the frequencies of violence experienced by women in each group were almost identical (Lanier & Maume, 2009). However, significant distinctions emerged at the multivariate level. Among rural women, informal help and support significantly decreased the incidence of domestic violence. Specifically, rural women who received assistance in areas such as transportation, childcare, and housework had a lower probability of domestic violence. These informal supports had no impact on the incidence of domestic violence among urban women nor did any other measures of social support. Measures of economic disadvantage also had no effects on domestic violence among urban residents. Among rural residents, however, male unemployment emerged as an important risk factor for domestic violence. This finding coincides with Weissman’s (2015) economic perspective on domestic violence and male job loss.

Lanier and Maume (2009) and Weissman (2013) both frame this phenomenon in terms of patriarchal values and rigid gender roles that are more deeply embedded in rural communities than in urban communities.

Certain commonalities surfaced in the risk and protective factors for domestic violence in rural and urban communities (Lanier & Maume, 2009). In both settings, heavy drinking by men heightened the probability of domestic violence, and in both settings, Black women reported higher victimization rates. This finding contrasts with NISVS data reporting that slightly more White women than Black women have experienced domestic violence (38.9% versus 35.5%; Smith et al., 2017). The highest rates of domestic violence victimization in the national sample were reported by multiracial women (49.5%) and Native American women (45.6%). According to both the National Survey of Families and Households (Lanier & Maume, 2009) and the NISVS (Smith et al., 2017), younger women have the highest risk for experiencing domestic violence. The findings of Lanier and Maume (2009) add to the small body of research documenting contextual differences when examining domestic violence in rural settings.

Women's Experiences with Protection Orders

From the onset of their research, Logan et al. (2003) focused on women who had obtained civil protection orders. In subsequent research, they explored (a) the protective order process, including barriers and outcomes (Logan et al., 2005) and (b) the relationship characteristics of women who obtained protective orders (Logan et al., 2007). Durfee and Messing (2012) examined the characteristics of women who obtained

protection orders, and Rennison et al. (2013) investigated relationship status regarding domestic violence among rural, urban, and suburban women.

Characteristics of Women Who Obtain Protection Orders

The small qualitative study of Logan et al. (2003) served as a precursor study to the broader investigation of relationship characteristics, which involved 728 women (Caucasian and African American) residing in rural and urban areas who had obtained protective orders (Logan et al., 2007). Psychological and physical abuse was assessed with the Conflict Tactics Scale, the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory, and items derived from the qualitative accounts of the women in the pilot study (Logan et al., 2003). As in the earlier study, fewer rural women were high school graduates, and more were unemployed than urban women, resulting in lower incomes than urban women (Logan et al., 2007). High proportions of the women experienced all types of mental abuse as well as moderate or severe physical violence. On the whole, the women's experiences supported the earlier findings that rural women were subject to more prolonged and more severe domestic violence, were more economically disadvantaged, had endured more threats, and felt less safe than their urban counterparts.

Because of the greater sense of danger or the predisposition of rural courts, rural women were more likely to have obtained no-contact protective orders as opposed to no-violent-contact orders, which allow the respondent to contact the petitioner (Logan et al., 2007). In almost all the cases (95.6%), the rural women secured no-contact orders that stipulated footage restrictions for the abusive partner compared to fewer than 30% of the urban Caucasian or African American women who secured no-contact orders that stipulated footage restrictions. Rural women with minor children also more often

obtained stipulations related to child custody and support (60%) compared to urban Caucasian (25.4%) or African American (17.9%) women. Additionally, more rural women than urban women reported that their partners were mandated to attend counseling or that they were ordered to participate in counseling. The effectiveness of counseling may be questionable. The rural women surveyed by Anderson et al. (2014) ranked counseling for the abusive partner as the least useful strategy against domestic violence, and the women studied by Postmus et al. (2009) also gave reasonably low ratings to professional counseling.

Roughly one-quarter of the women reported that their partner violated the protective order, and 59% reported that the partner had been in jail at some point (Logan et al., 2007). On average, about 20% of the partners had been jailed within the last 30 days, but this figure rose to nearly 26% for the partners of rural women. Close to 70% of the women felt that protective orders were effective, but the remaining women were either skeptical or uncertain of their effectiveness. Important differences arose concerning whether the women felt safe from the abusive partner. About one-quarter (25.9%) of the rural women thought they were in danger compared to 17.4% of the urban Caucasian women and 8.7% of the urban African American women. Although a majority of women from all groups reported feeling moderately or extremely safe, the proportion was still lower for the rural women (55%) than the urban Caucasian (60.9%) or African American women (62.1%).

As in the pilot study (Logan et al., 2003), rural women had endured longer and more severe abuse than urban women (Logan et al., 2007). A smaller proportion of African American women had been married to the abusive partner or in long-term

relationships than either group of Caucasian women, which to some degree might account for their greater sense of safety and personal freedom from the abuser. Rennison et al. (2013) examined the relationship status of rural, urban, and suburban women who obtained protective orders, using data from the National Crime Victimization Survey. As the researchers anticipated, domestic violence victimization was more prevalent among rural women. Rural women were most likely to be assaulted by an intimate partner, whereas urban and suburban women were most likely to be victimized by a boyfriend or girlfriend, followed by a spouse or an ex-spouse. In one respect, this corresponds to the findings of Logan et al. (2003; 2007), who observed that for abused rural women the violence often began in the dating stage of the relationship.

A striking and unexpected finding was the high rate of domestic violence reported by rural women who were divorced or separated. This occurrence was significantly higher for rural women than for urban or suburban women. In addition to the implication that rural women are at high risk for separation assault, Logan et al. (2003) found it troubling that many of the domestic abuse survivors entered into another potentially violent relationship soon after separating from the abusive partner.

Durfee and Messing (2012) examined the characteristics of domestic violence survivors who sought civil protection orders. All the women in the study had been in the shelter system between the years 2004 and 2008 and had completed an intake form. The final sample consisted of 3,433 domestic violence survivors, including 565 who had a protection order at the time they entered the shelter and 542 who reported having a protection order previously. Demographically, the women had an average age of about 35 years, most had a high school diploma or higher, and 42% had no annual income. The

women were ethnically diverse (45% Caucasian), and 41% entered the shelter with children. The majority of the women were not married to the abusive partner. The vast majority of the women had been physically (90%) and verbally (94%) abused. More than half the women (55%) reported economic abuse, and 44% had experienced sexual abuse.

Durfee and Messing (2012) found it surprising if not alarming that only one-third (32%) of the women had ever obtained a protection order and that half of those women did not have a current order. Women who obtained protection orders tended to be more educated and have higher incomes than women who did not. The association between education and income caused Durfee and Messing to propose that the protection order process is harder for less-educated women, and many are left with calling the police as their only option. Ironically, civil protection orders were designed with the goal of helping poor women (Johnson, 2015; MacDowell, 2016a; MacDowell, 2016b). Furthermore, proponents of civil protection orders emphasize that the orders can be reasonably straightforward to obtain (Fleury-Steiner et al., 2011). Lack of education was not a barrier for the rural women, many of whom had either a high school diploma or GED (Logan et al., 2007). Women who brought children to the shelter were most likely to have protection orders (Durfee & Messing, 2012). That finding is consistent with the assertion that concern for children is often the driving force in seeking a protection order (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 2010). The main predictor that someone will obtain a civil protection order is previous contact with the police and healthcare system. Cerulli et al. (2015) call for greater coordination between the police, the medical community, and the legal system to protect domestic violence victims and

hold perpetrators accountable. The OVW (2016; 2017) consistently emphasized the need for coordination across programs and systems.

Obtaining a Protection Order

Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, Logan et al. (2005) presented the pioneer study of the protection order process from the perspectives of rural and urban women. The objective data came from Emergency Protective Order estimates and Domestic Violence Order estimates provided by the Kentucky State police for the fiscal year 2002. A sample of 250 urban women and 200 rural women who had protective orders completed surveys; qualitative data were obtained through focus groups with petitioners and personal interviews with key informants (circuit court clerks and a court supervisor, representatives from domestic violence shelters and programs, domestic violence advocates, and a legal advocate from a domestic violence shelter).

Most of the informants cited safety and ending the violence as the main reason they believed women filed for protective orders (Logan et al., 2005). The most common reason, fear, was cited by twice the proportion of rural informants, reflecting the pervasive sense of fear expressed by the rural women themselves (Logan et al., 2003, 2007). Close to 20% of the rural and urban informants thought women sought protective orders for divorce, custody, and property reasons as well as for “retaliation, punishment, and revenge” (Logan et al., 2005, p. 887). As a group, the informants were skeptical of the effectiveness of protective orders, with many viewing them as just a piece of paper. Reasons cited for their skepticism included lack of enforcement by the criminal justice system, petitioners not reporting violations, and problems with serving the order. More

rural than urban informants cited serving the order as an obstacle to its being an effective remedy.

Interestingly, among the informants who worked with domestic violence victims in the community, a higher proportion of urban (50%) than rural (44%) viewed lack of resources as a barrier to obtaining a protection order, although the high proportion in both groups illustrates the need for improving access to domestic violence resources (Logan et al., 2005). Rural domestic violence victims were more likely than their urban counterparts to have a negative perception of the criminal justice system and to view it as a barrier to enforcing protection orders. According to Grama (2000), rural judges might hold unfavorable opinions of domestic violence victims.

The main barriers to obtaining protective orders cited by the focus group of petitioners included lack of awareness and understanding of protection orders by domestic violence victims and problems with the system bureaucracy (Logan et al., 2005). Similar to the key informants, the women expressed skepticism that the judicial or criminal justice systems could help them. While some key informants complained that women did not report violations, the domestic violence survivors provided an important reason: they did not believe it would hold the perpetrator accountable. The comments of the focus group participants supported Grama's (2000) claims that lack of resources, fear of the perpetrator, sense of stigma, lack of confidentiality, social and political connections (or lack thereof), "ol' boy networks," and stereotypical gender roles posed particularly formidable barriers for rural domestic violence victims (Logan et al., 2005). With the exception of lack of access to resources (mentioned only by the rural women),

their problems were not unique to the rural petitioners, but features of the rural environment magnified them.

Regarding outcomes, Logan et al. (2005) observed tremendous differences between rural and urban petitioners. Specifically, rates of nonservice were much higher in rural areas than in urban areas:

- rural petitioners were more likely to be charged for the process orders;
- fewer rural cases were adjudicated during the study period, possibly implying that rural women had to return to court more often;
- more rural cases were classified as pre-adjudication; and
- rural women had to travel long distances and put more effort into obtaining a protection order.

The findings from this study served as the impetus for further research into the protection order process in Kentucky.

A common problem, according to Logan et al. (2005), was that women were not granted protection orders because they did not meet the legal statute. However, they raised the question of how fairly and accurately petitioners are judged to meet the statutory requirements. Lucken et al. (2015) presented an analysis of judicial reasoning in civil protection order proceedings. The dataset came from the County Clerk's Office in an urban south Florida county where 17,142 civil protection orders were filed between April 2008 and September 2011. The results indicated that judicial decisions were influenced by what the researchers broadly describe as the "mitigating behaviors" of the predominately male respondents (Lucken et al., 2015, p. 2058). Four factors were consistently linked with the probability that the protection order would be denied: the

respondent was employed, the respondent objected to the protection order, the respondent had previously sought a protection order against the petitioner, and the respondent had an attorney present.

Statistically, future violence is less likely if the respondent is employed (Lucken et al., 2015). However, considering the respondent's objection to the protection order as a reason for denial is questionable. Moreover, it is not unusual for abusers to file a retaliatory protection order against the victim (Johnson, 2015; Stoever, 2014). Having an attorney present appears to enhance the respondent's credibility in the eyes of the court (Lucken et al., 2015). According to Lucken et al. (2015), growing numbers of judges express the opinion that both parties are using protection orders as a mechanism for gaining leverage in family disputes. Many informants interviewed by Logan et al. (2005) expressed the same view. However, studies consistently find that most women who seek civil protection orders have been victims of multiple forms of severe ongoing abuse (Logan et al., 2003; Logan et al., 2007; Logan et al., 2009; Logan & Walker, 2011; McFarlane et al., 2015; Stoever, 2014).

Factors that made judges more predisposed to grant protection orders centered on how high the respondent's risk is for future violence (Lucken et al., 2015); having threatened to use a weapon against the petitioner, having threatened to kill the petitioner, and a history of mental illness all increased the probability that the judge would grant a protection order. Gun ownership was consistently linked with granting a protection order. However, although judges in most states have the authority, or are mandated to, disarm abusers when a protection order is granted, the evidence suggests that this authority is poorly enforced (Webster et al., 2010). Not only are firearms the

predominant weapon used in separation homicide, but they are also used to threaten and assault the victim (Wintemute, Frattaroli, Claire, Vittes, & Webster, 2014).

A California initiative designed to recover weapons from respondents of protection orders has shown some success, but there are few similar programs. The most troubling finding in the judicial decisions is that the mitigating factors outweighed the respondents' risk for future violence (Lucken et al., 2015).

Outcomes of Protection Orders

Bell et al. (2011) explored the perceptions and experiences of 290 women who were part of an extensive longitudinal study of women who had sought legal and shelter services for domestic violence. The women were primarily African American (81%) and had low incomes even though most worked full- or part-time. Most of the women had favorable opinions of their court experiences; more than half reported that they attained most of what they sought, and most believed that they were treated fairly. Two major sources of dissatisfaction were (a) mandated incarceration of the abuser without being offered alternatives and (b) dispositions that provided minimal or no consequences for the abuser. A related complaint was that dispositions were not enforced, conveying the message to the abuser that the order could be ignored and leaving the victim without protection. In other words, the women were frustrated by outcomes that were either too harsh or too lenient. The women expressed satisfaction with dispositions that were enforced and felt it particularly helpful when the judges provided specific instructions and court personnel were diligent in carrying them out.

Regarding the women's perceptions of court processes, how court personnel treated them was the critical factor for most of the women (Bell et al., 2011). Feeling

they were in a supportive environment helped them feel less alone and helpless, and they valued having their opinions solicited and feeling they were respected. MacDowell (2016a, 2016b) created a typology of behavior displayed by judges and court personnel with seven classifications:

- good-natured/supportive,
- token supportive,
- bureaucratic,
- apathetic,
- firm or formal,
- harsh, and
- patronizing/condescending.

The most frightening scenario for petitioners is an environment where people are apathetic or hostile (Bell et al., 2011). Good-natured/supportive judges acknowledge the petitioner's concerns, display empathy and concern for their safety, and ensure that the petitioners are aware of all their legal options, civil and criminal (MacDowell, 2016a). By implication, judges with a friendly/supportive demeanor are most likely to produce the type of positive outcomes described by the women (Bell et al., 2011).

A similar typology exists to capture the demeanor of advocates (MacDowell, 2016a; MacDowell, 2016b). By definition, advocates are meant to support victims of domestic violence; however, MacDowell argues that as the field has become more professional, the behavior of advocates may be less supportive and more impersonal. According to Goodman, Fauci, Sullivan, DiGiovanni, and Wilson (2016), even though

domestic violence programs typically emphasize the importance of a good relationship between domestic violence survivors and advocates, research into the advocate-survivor alliance is scarce.

In their study of 370 domestic violence survivors, Goodman et al. (2016) observed that a strong alliance with their advocates indirectly reduced survivors' symptoms of depression and PTSD via the mechanism of safety-related empowerment, to the degree to which the survivor (a) created a set of safety-related goals and (b) believed in her ability to accomplish them. In a survey of 106 domestic violence survivors who had sought help from shelter services, Wright and Johnson (2012) found that obtaining a civil protection order seemed to decrease PTSD symptoms over a period of 6 months, possibly because the act of obtaining the order served as a form of therapeutic jurisprudence. Cattaneo and Goodman (2015) developed the empowerment process model, which they used to assess the goals of domestic violence survivors (Cattaneo et al., 2016). Sullivan (2018) created a similar model, the social and emotional well-being framework. Both models were designed to be used for shaping policy as well as improving services and programs for domestic violence survivors. By implication, these frameworks for guiding domestic violence research reflect Johnson's (2015) vision of changing the focus from short-term safety to long-term security.

Logan and colleagues addressed the issues of safety and security in the Kentucky Civil Protective Order Study (Logan et al., 2009). Their earlier study focused explicitly on protective order violations (Logan et al., 2008). The results showed that half the women who separated from the abuser reported a violation, but that figure rose to 70% among women who continued the abusive relationship. While noting that although it

seems logical that staying with the abuser would increase the risk for protection order violations, Logan et al. (2008) emphasized that there are other factors also involved. In particular, they discovered that stalking played a pivotal role in the separation process and order violations, regardless of whether the relationship had ended or not. Before the Logan et al. research, stalking had received scant attention in studies of domestic violence (Hawkins, 2010). Logan et al. (2008, 2009) found that women who had long relationships with their abusers and who had been stalked by them were more likely to end their relationship. Both severe violence and stalking after the issuance of the protection order increased the probability that a woman would separate from her abuser.

The Kentucky Civil Protective Order Study synthesized the findings of the earlier research, with emphasis on the unique context of rural domestic violence (Logan et al., 2008; Logan & Walker, 2011). Since the first few studies, the prevalence of drug use in rural areas has increased. As a result, drug-related crimes were given precedence by the judicial system over domestic violence cases and appeared to affect judicial responses to domestic violence. Grama (2000) identified “good ol’ boys” networks and political connections as barriers to combating domestic violence, noting the influence on judicial priorities and decisions (Logan et al., 2009). No similar networks were observed in urban areas.

Addressing the economic costs of domestic violence, Logan et al. (2009) confirmed the severe economic toll that domestic violence can have on the life of a victim even within a short period. The costs before and after the protective order were issued did not differ significantly for the rural and urban women. However, urban women who obtained protective orders reported greater enhancement of their quality of

life than their rural counterparts. Also, police and criminal justice costs were lower in the rural areas, which Logan et al. (2009) attributed to a low amount of effort invested in protection order enforcement. The only cases that incurred significant costs were those that involved stalking, providing further evidence of the detrimental impacts of stalking. When the quality of life was considered in the cost analysis, Logan et al. (2009) concluded that there were substantial savings or reduced costs for the state. The overarching conclusion was that protection orders are cost-effective regarding both economic and human costs. Nevertheless, significant barriers to obtaining protective orders remain, and they are intensified in the cases of rural women.

Conclusion

More than 20 years after the passage of VAWA, domestic violence continues to be a severe problem in American society. The majority of studies have been conducted in urban communities. In fact, research on rural domestic violence was hindered by the mythical belief that this was an urban problem (Lanier & Maume, 2009). Paradoxically, while the body of research on rural domestic violence is small by comparison, those studies consistently find that domestic violence is more prevalent and severe in rural areas, and moreover, that rural victims have limited access to resources and programs (Anderson et al., 2014; Lanier & Maume, 2009; Logan et al., 2003; Logan et al., 2005; Logan et al., 2007; Logan et al., 2009; Logan & Walker, 2011; OVW, 2017; Peek-Asa et al., 2011). Rural women who seek protective orders have more barriers to overcome than urban women, and negative attitudes toward women continue to influence service providers and judicial decisions (Logan et al., 2009).

On the whole, studies find protective orders to be effective for the majority of women who obtain them (Benitez et al., 2010; Fleury-Steiner et al., 2011; Kothari et al., 2012; Logan et al., 2009; Logan & Walker, 2011). However, separation assault and homicide remain serious problems (Stoeber, 2014). Logan et al. (2008) were the first researchers to identify stalking as an important issue in addressing domestic violence. Stalking takes a severe psychological and economic toll. Women typically feel safer after obtaining a protection order (Logan et al., 2009; Wright & Johnson, 2012). However, substantial improvements to the domestic violence service system and the judicial system are required to ensure that protection orders are enforced, especially for women living in rural areas, and to ensure that domestic violence victims have access to protection orders and other essential services that will allow them to leave an abusive relationship and prevent future harm.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Although several research studies examining civil protection orders have been conducted, few, if any, have examined civil protection orders in rural regions in Northwest Tennessee. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of rural female victims of domestic violence regarding the effectiveness of civil protection orders. This research study should offer some unique insight regarding the perceived needs of rural female abuse victims concerning civil protection orders that are designed to enhance their safety when seeking to leave an abusive relationship (Sullivan et al., 2017). This study addressed the literature gaps in the realm of civil protection order research by examining the subjective perceptions of rural female victims of domestic violence concerning their views about the effectiveness of such orders in preventing subsequent harm. Research study participants were recruited from rural communities in nine Northwest Tennessee counties. The research study was conducted using open-ended interview questions to allow participants to expand their responses as needed and to ensure them that I was not looking for a specific answer.

This chapter includes an overview of the procedures for data collection and data analysis methods. The current chapter describes (a) the selection of research methodology design and rationale, (b) the role of the researcher, (c) the selection of participants, (d) the instrument used in the study, (e) recruitment, participation, (f) the data collection and analysis procedures, and (g) issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Research Methods and Rationale

The primary goal of this research study was to answer the following question:

RQ1: What are the perceptions and opinions of rural female victims of domestic violence in Northwest Tennessee regarding the effectiveness of civil protection orders?

The chosen design for this study was a qualitative method. Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017) noted that qualitative research is a valued paradigm of inquiry. Zamawe (2015) stated that qualitative research is fundamental to broadening and deepening our understanding of social society. The design incorporates a phenomenology approach, which enables the examination of research study participants' perceptions about civil protection orders. The rationale for the selection of this qualitative method was to reveal participants' subjective perceptions of civil protection orders and their perceived effectiveness. Their perceptions of civil protection orders were gained from prior domestic violence and civil protection order experiences.

The discipline of phenomenology assists in the investigation of people's individual experiences to uncover what is concealed underneath (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015). Phenomenology is unique because it focuses on addressing "things themselves" and how they came to be in our society (Belousov, 2016, p. 21). CohenMiller (2018) stated that the phenomenological approach historically relies on textual and structural analysis to help uncover the depth of human experience.

Phenomenology was the most appropriate method for this study because participants' perceptions of civil protection orders are what was sought and are a primary source of knowledge. The motivation for this research study was to promote a better

understanding of participants' past civil protection order experiences and assist in improving such protective orders.

The phenomenological approach selected for this study was interpretive phenomenology, commonly known as *hermeneutics*, which seeks to describe, understand, and interpret participants' experiences (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013). Interpretive phenomenology provides a glimpse of the phenomenon under study through human experience. This methodology process allows access to rich contextual data (Crowther, Ironside, Spence, & Smythe, 2017). Horrigan-Kelly, Millar, and Dowling (2016) also noted that interpretive phenomenology is critical in helping researchers identify shared meaning among everyday human existence concerning a phenomenon of interest. I asked participants to discuss their experiences and describe them in detail. Surveying the participants and using their exact words was the method of data collection (Ivey, 2013). Eberle (2015) stated that interpretive phenomenology incorporates the use of narrative interviews to collect and organize experiences. The interpretive approach was valuable to this study because it allowed for insight into civil protection order experiences, which many people have little or no understanding of.

Role of the Researcher

Sutton and Austin (2015) noted that the role of the researcher conducting qualitative research is to access the thoughts and feelings of the study participants. I sought to uncover the thoughts and feelings of participants through qualitative interviews, incorporating a phenomenology approach to explore the meaning that participants put on their experience. I performed all data collection and analysis associated with the research study. Participants were all rural female victims of abuse who had obtained a civil

protection order in the previously listed nine counties located in Northwest Tennessee. Karagiozis (2018) noted that researchers should be aware of their culturally formed consciousness when conducting studies involving human behavior to keep from projecting their values and beliefs onto the participants of the study. To ensure neutrality and prevent bias or the perception of bias, I had no professional or personal relationship with the research study participants. I asked only open-ended questions to reduce any assumption that I was looking for particular responses, allowing participants the opportunity to explain or clarify any responses regarding the questions.

Methodology

Participant Selection

Participant selection started after approval was granted from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Approval Number 02-21-19-0582250). Because of the dangerous and volatile nature of the domestic violence phenomenon, selected participants were of legal age, which is 18 or older in Tennessee. Eligible participants for interviews met inclusion criteria:

1. They were female victims of abuse.
2. They had obtained a protection order against their abuser within the last 5 years.
3. They resided in one of the nine identified counties when the order was issued.
4. They currently resided in one of the nine designated counties.

All potential participants were asked before interviews if they met all criteria for inclusion listed on the recruitment flyer before being formally invited to participate.

Population

The research study population was limited to female victims of domestic violence with civil protection orders residing in rural areas throughout Northwest Tennessee counties. According to the Northwest Tennessee Regional Economic Development Group (2013), nine counties geographically make up Northwest Tennessee. For this research study, rural regions were defined as being open countryside places with fewer than 2,500 people (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2018).

Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used in the process of selecting participants. Purposeful sampling is widely accepted and commonly used by qualitative researchers (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling has been proved useful in the selection of data-rich cases for this study (Patton, 2015).

Selecting an adequate sample size is fundamental in qualitative research because there must be enough data to obtain a credible data analysis (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Creswell (2013) suggested that to make an accurate assertion regarding phenomenological research, a minimum of 10 participants is needed to achieve data saturation. Data saturation is described by Harsh (2011) as the stage when further data will provide little or no additional themes, insights, perspectives, or information in qualitative research synthesis.

Instrumentation

I used 10 interview questions (Appendix A) to help in identifying and understanding the effectiveness of civil protection orders through the lived experiences of rural female victims of abuse. I developed all the questions based on my professional law

enforcement background and experience in dealing with civil protection orders.

Participants were made aware that their participation was voluntary and that they could cease their involvement in the study at any time without repercussion. Participants were allowed time to address any issues or concerns before starting the interview. Participants were given the same open-ended interview questions, which allowed them to expand on their responses as appropriate.

I developed all interview questions in a manner that addressed the lived experiences of the participants. The research protocol ensured that no researcher bias was introduced into the study. To ensure data accuracy and prevent loss of data, all interviews were recorded using two digital voice recorders.

Recruitment and Participation

Participant recruitment and data collection began after approval from the Walden University IRB (Approval Number 02-21-19-0582250). Recruitment was conducted through two methods. The first method was through assistance from a domestic violence advocacy organization, which provided domestic violence-related resources throughout Northwest Tennessee. With the permission of the domestic violence advocacy organization, I solicited research participation with flyers posted in common areas at their central office and satellite offices located throughout Northwest Tennessee. The second method I used in the recruitment process was soliciting research participants through printed and electronic news publications throughout Northwest Tennessee. The announcement was maintained for two consecutive weeks, and potential participants were given an email address and phone number to contact for additional information.

Upon initial contact with potential participants from both recruitment methods, I asked them to confirm that they read the recruitment flyer and that they met inclusion criteria. After selecting participants who met the inclusion criteria, I set up interview appointments with them.

Data Collection

According to Cypress (2018), data collection and analysis is a crucial and essential part of conducting qualitative research studies, and when properly implemented, it dramatically increases the rigor of naturalistic inquiries. The data collection method for this research study was face-to-face interviews conducted over a time frame of 4 week. All interviews were held at the domestic violence advocacy organization facilities or public libraries with private meeting rooms. Participants were advised that interviews were voluntary and that they may exit the research study at any time for any reason. Participants reviewed and signed the required informed consent forms as acknowledgment that their participation was voluntary. I also directly asked each participant for their permission to record the interview sessions to ensure that participants knew recording devices were being used. The process of explaining the required documents and collecting the required signature took an average of 10–15 minutes. The interviews took approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. Participants were debriefed upon conclusion of the interview and provided with my email address in case they needed to contact me. I also verified the participants' contact information to notify them when their data were ready to be reviewed by them. I examined all recordings for quality assurance and accuracy purposes.

Data Analysis Plan

Moustakas (1994) noted that data analysis in phenomenology research occurs through the identification of shared meanings and analyzing those meanings both structurally and textually. I carefully transcribed each interview and reviewed for accuracy. I then sent each participant their transcribed interview session in an electronic password-protected format to allow them the opportunity to review the transcriptions for accuracy and to allow them to address information they did not feel was an accurate reflection of their experience. The verbatim transcriptions of interview recordings were analyzed using NVivo qualitative data software, which assisted in the breakdown and organization of data into applicable codes as they related to participants' opinions and perceptions. I then generated a summary of the interpretation of findings for each individual participant based on the information from their individualized transcription.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is essential in supporting qualitative research findings (Amankwaa, 2016). Attride-Stirling (2001) noted that as qualitative research has become more increasingly accepted and valued, it is essential that qualitative studies are conducted rigorously and methodically, so they yield meaningful and useful results. Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) maintained that trustworthiness is a central pillar in high-quality qualitative research and that the lack of trustworthiness could invalidate findings, thus making them useless. Korstjens and Moser (2017) noted four essential quality criteria in qualitative research for ensuring trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Dependability

Dependability is often referred to as reliability and is essential in qualitative research. Dependability is the process of showing that if the same body of work were repeated within the same context, same method, and same participants, the findings would be similar (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). To maintain dependability, all decisions made regarding the study were concise and transparent, to ensure that another independent researcher could arrive at a similar finding (Noble & Smith, 2015). To increase research study dependability, I maintained an audit trail documenting all procedures, methods, and decisions used in the study.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research concerns internal validity (Shenton, 2004). Credibility was achieved in this study by following strict adherence to the interview protocol. I reviewed each transcript multiple times to ensure accuracy. Purposeful sampling was used to assist in negating any implication of bias in the selection of study participants. I used iterative questioning as needed to help detect deliberate untruthfulness. Due to my experience as a law enforcement officer, it was essential to evaluate my own opinions concerning civil protection orders and any potential bias that could alter an interpretation of the data findings. This task was accomplished through the use of reflexive journaling. Dodgson (2019) noted that reflexivity is a process that permeates a research study by addressing steps taken throughout the research study process.

Transferability

Transferability focuses on the generalizability of research findings (Morrow, 2005). Transferability involves the process of taking study findings and reviewing them to determine if their applicability is suitable for other studies (Amankwaa, 2016).

Transferability was achieved in this research study through the use of a thick description of findings—of participants, location, methods, and roles related to the study. This technique allows readers to make their own independent, informed opinion about the suitability regarding the transference of findings to another situation they are investigating.

Confirmability

Confirmability seeks to assure that research findings (a) not reflect the theories and biases of the researcher and (b) measure the level of neutrality (Amankwaa, 2016). Confirmability throughout this research study was maintained through strict adherence to established interview protocol. I assisted in maintaining confirmability by reviewing each recorded interview after each interview session to ensure adherence to the interview protocol and to guard against researcher bias.

Ethical Procedures

Qualitative research involving victims of abuse requires additional planning and consideration to protect participants. Buchanan and Wendt (2018) stated that qualitative research regarding emotionally sensitive topics presents some unique challenges for researchers tasked with conducting such studies. Kyriakakis, Waller, Kagotho, and Edmond (2015) noted that while social science research using vulnerable populations is necessary to address social problems, such research may present risks to study

participants. Furthermore, it is imperative that researchers undertake precautionary measures to protect domestic violence victims and any research team members (World Health Organization, 2016)

Recruitment commenced after approval was granted by Walden's IRB. After I received permission from the IRB, I obtained a letter of cooperation from the clinical manager for the domestic violence advocacy organization. No confidentiality agreements were needed for this research study project because I conducted all transcriptions and data analyses myself, and the data were not transmitted to any outside sources.

Downes, Kelly, and Westmarland (2014) noted that researchers dealing with abuse topics often encounter complex ethical dilemmas and difficulties regarding women and children that are not adequately addressed in ethical policies and guidelines when conducting research studies concerning abuse. The participants were recruited through a letter of agreement with the domestic violence advocacy organization and through newspaper solicitation of participants. I recruited women who identified as being victims of domestic violence and who resided in rural regions in Northwest Tennessee. Participants were requested to provide a copy of their civil protection order or other supporting documentation. To protect participants, I advised them the study is entirely voluntary and reassured them they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (Shivayogi, 2013). I allowed them a 5-minute break alone to make their decision without me being in the room to ensure they were not exposed to any pressure or influence when making their decision. All interviews were held at the domestic violence advocacy organization facilities or at other approved designated locations—private rooms in public libraries in nine counties across Northwest Tennessee.

I addressed participation refusal through the use of an eligibility questionnaire to ensure that all potential participants met eligibility requirements. I addressed possible early withdrawal from the study using the consent form, which participants read and signed before being interviewed. Participants were provided a copy of their consent form for their records, which they could refer back to if needed.

I used a consent form that encompassed simple terminology to ensure that each participant fully understood the study and their voluntary participation. The consent form let the participants know they could cease involvement for any reason at any time. The consent form informed participants that their refusal to participate or their decision to exit the study early would not be held against them in any manner and that the domestic violence advocacy organization will still provide them the same level of care and services as they received before the study. Ethical concerns related to personally identifying information was addressed through redacting or masking such information and assigning each participant a study number. This method is often referred to as a clean dataset, which hides personal identifying information such as a respondent's address, name, or job title (Kaiser, 2009). All confidential data collected will not be shared with anyone other than my committee members when requested as part of the analysis and finding process.

All data related to the research study, such as audiotapes, transcripts, and forms, will remain confidential and be released only within applicable federal and state laws. The data may be shared with committee members when requested within Walden University guidelines. I guarded against directly or indirectly disclosing participants' identities through the use of de-identification throughout the study.

All data were kept in a biometric safe that only I can access. Any personal identifying information was redacted or masked to provide additional protection for participants. The information was stored in a larger safe at my residence that was dedicated strictly to protecting all data collected during the study. Only I have access to the safe, and no other material or documents were stored in it. After 5 years, all data will be destroyed through incineration.

A nominal inducement of a \$25 Visa gift card was given to encourage rural women of domestic violence to come forward and share their individual stories related to their civil protection order experiences. The crucial ethical question when considering offering payments to research subjects is whether such payments could be viewed as excessive. This insight is essential to minimize coercion or the perception of coercion during the consent process (Gelinas et al., 2018). The federal regulations on payments related to research subjects mandate that such payments cannot be offered as a benefit for participation, but rather compensation for time and inconvenience, or as a recruitment incentive (Office for Human Research Protections, 2016). The monetary offer for this study was intended to help offset travel costs because some subjects traveled a significant distance to participate in the research study. The payment was not intended to influence participants in any manner.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology used to conduct the research study. This section also included procedures for selection of participants, recruitment, data collection process, data analysis process, role of the researcher, and instrumentation. It also presented strategies for ensuring dependability, transferability,

credibility, and confirmability. Ethical considerations were reviewed and adequately addressed.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine subjective perceptions and opinions of the effectiveness of civil protection orders among rural female victims of domestic violence in Northwest Tennessee. As described by Messing et al. (2017), a civil protection order is an injunctive relief order issued by a court that orders an alleged abuser (respondent) to stay away from the person they have allegedly abused (petitioner). If the respondent violates the civil protection order, they can be civilly or criminally punished by the courts for each incident that the court determines is a violation. The distinctions between civil protection orders and restraining orders, which are sometimes mistaken for actual civil protection orders among victims of abuse, are presented in Appendix F.

As noted in the literature review, examining the implications of domestic violence and civil protection orders in a rural setting is crucial because there is often more tolerance for men who abuse women in rural areas than in urban areas (Edwards, Mattingly, Dixon, & Banyard, 2014). Houses in rural areas also tend to be more spread out than in urban settings, thus allowing an abuser to carry out acts of abuse in secrecy and improving the probability that neighbors will not hear a disturbance.

Few, if any, studies have examined the effectiveness of civil protection orders in rural regions of Northwest Tennessee. Therefore, it is important to examine civil protection order effectiveness in a rural context because, as noted in the literature review, women in rural communities have been found to experience higher frequency and severity of violence than women in urban areas. For this study, participants were women who lived in rural Northwest Tennessee who had previously secured a civil protection

order against men they had an intimate relationship with. The aim of the research was to uncover common themes to better understand the women's lived experiences, gauge the effectiveness of civil protection orders, and garner insight into improving such orders for women in rural areas and communities in Northwest Tennessee. The qualitative approach I used was phenomenology to determine common experiences among persons who have experienced the same phenomenon. The method of data collection was face-to-face individual interviews with each participant, which allowed them to tell their story in their own words.

This chapter is divided into seven sections. The first five sections describe the research setting, demographics, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and evidence of trustworthiness. The sixth section presents the study results. The seventh and final section ends with a chapter summary.

Research Setting

The research setting is the physical, social, and/or cultural location where a researcher conducts a study (Given, 2008). The setting for this study was the location where private face-to-face interviews were conducted. There were two secure locations: domestic violence advocacy organization offices and private rooms in public libraries. Both settings were community-based study sites that minimized the risks potentially borne by study participants, research staff, and others during the data collection process, and they were chosen because they incorporate the features of research settings that characterize good social science studies (Smoyer, Rosenberg, & Blankenship, 2014). To ensure participant anonymity, guarantee interview privacy, and maintain the integrity of the data collection process, the interview rooms were secured against intrusion during

interviews; the only two people allowed to enter and use the room while interviews were in progress were the researcher and the participant.

The domestic violence advocacy organization offices were ideal because access to the building was strictly controlled, there was law enforcement presence during all hours of operations, and there were personnel available on site specifically trained to deal with unforeseen events. I was given access to a small meeting room with a table and two chairs in the advocacy offices of a community partner. However, to offer anonymity to participants who did not want anyone other than me knowing about their history with domestic violence and status as a civil protection order petitioner, public libraries throughout Northwest Tennessee served as secondary interview sites. Library locations were particularly suitable for participants who had not sought assistance from the domestic violence advocacy organization and who wished to conduct their interview in a more neutral location. The libraries offered private rooms with lockable doors and closeable blinds, along with a table and chairs, for me to use. Moreover, the library staff was not informed about the nature of the study to protect the participants' privacy.

Demographics

The term *demographics* refers to particular characteristics of a population or a sample of it (Salkind, 2010), such as age, gender, social class, ethnicity, and so on (Webber, 2018). Participants in this study had to meet inclusion criteria:

1. They were female victims of abuse.
2. They had obtained protection order(s) against their abuser within the last 5 years.
3. They resided in one of the nine identified counties in Northwest Tennessee when

the order was issued.

4. They currently resided in one of the nine identified counties.

Ten women volunteered and completed interviews. Each of the 10 participants had applied for and received a full civil protection order by the courts, thus becoming a civil protection order petitioner.

This section shows that the model participant was a Caucasian woman aged 18–29 years old who had obtained one civil protection order that was good for 12 months. The participants ranged in age from 23 to 57 years old, and age groups were formed to mask exact ages for their protection. Figure 1 shows that four of the women were under 30 years old (40%), and the remaining six participants were over 30 years old (60%).

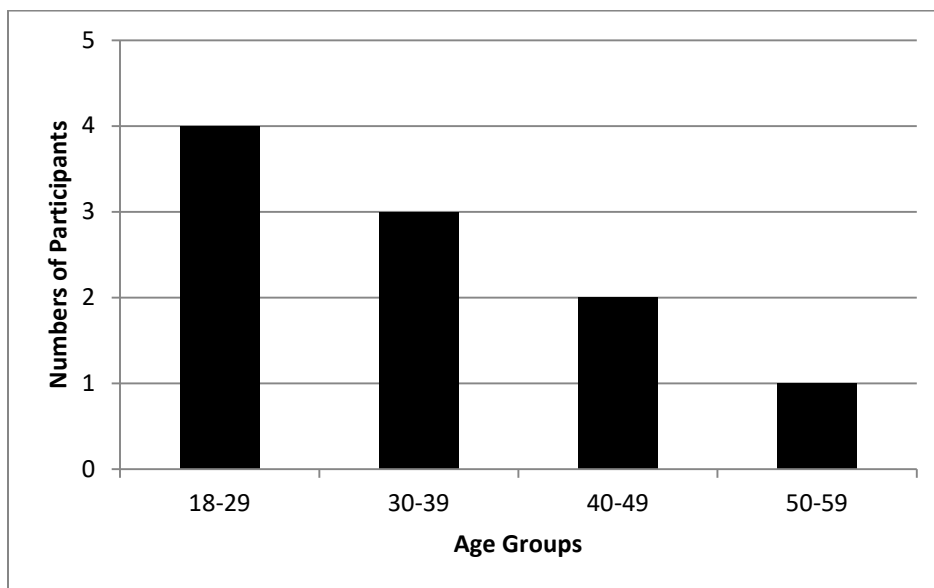


Figure 1. Participant distribution by age group.

The women varied by ethnicity. Figure 2 shows that seven were Caucasian, two were African American; and one was Latina.

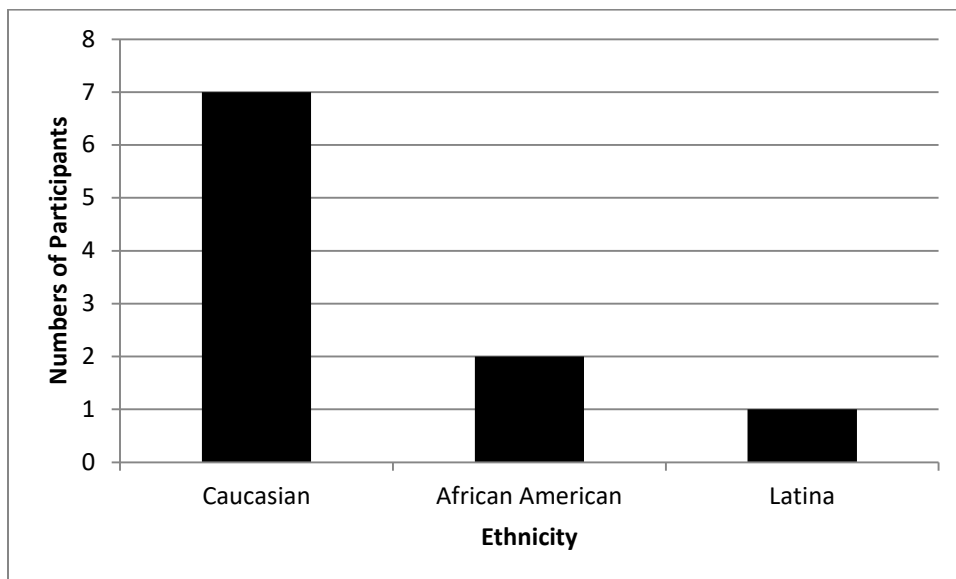


Figure 2. Participant distribution by ethnicity.

Figure 3 illustrates the frequency distribution of numbers of civil protection orders obtained per participant. Seven of the women had sought and received only one civil protection order (70%). Of the three participants who received more than one civil protection order, two participants received two civil protection orders, and one participant received three civil protection orders.

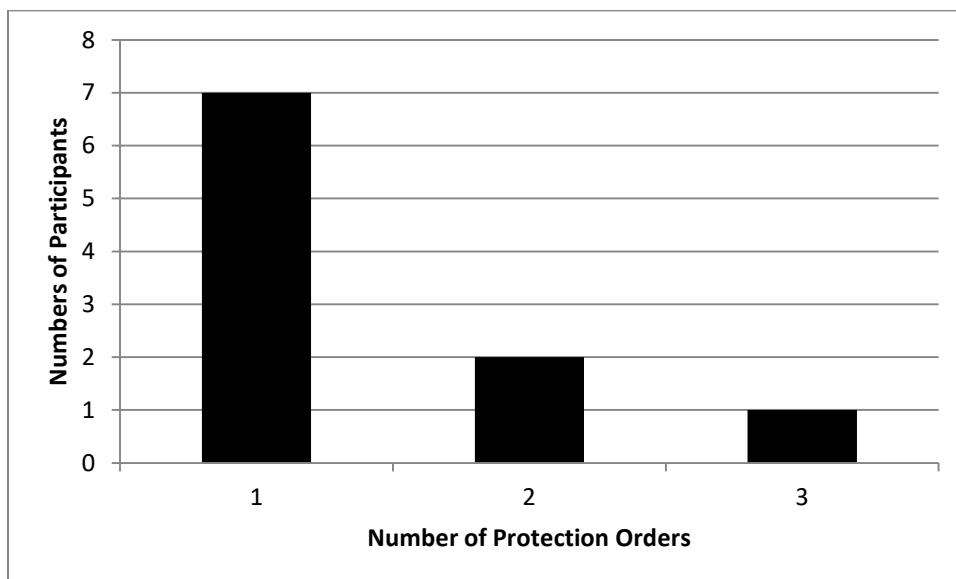


Figure 3. Distribution of participants by number of civil protection orders obtained.

The civil protection orders obtained by the participants in this study typically restricted the man's access to the woman for up to 1 year, but the active time frame of the orders varied. Figure 4 shows that six participants obtained a civil protection order that was good for up to 1 year (60%), and the remaining four participants obtained civil protection orders that were good for 6–10 months.

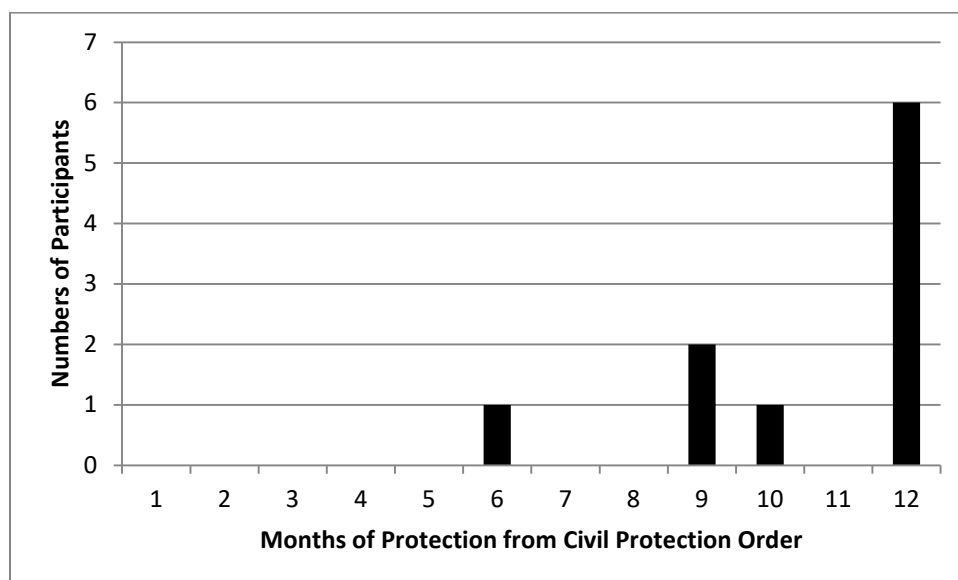


Figure 4. Frequency distribution of duration of the civil protection order in months.

Data Collection

Narrative data were collected from the women during individual face-to-face interviews. Seven interviews were conducted in May 2019, and three were conducted in June 2019, as per participants' availability. Each participant was labeled as "P" and a case number (i.e., pseudonyms were P1, P2, etc.). Interviews began with a standard introduction. Each participant was thanked for her valuable help with this research. I emphasized that her well-being during the interview was paramount, and I encouraged her to take a break at any point if needed. She was reminded that she could, without

penalty, refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time if she felt uncomfortable. She was also reminded that her interview would be recorded and that she would be sent a copy of the transcript to change if and how she chose. She was asked if she had any questions. Then she was asked to sign the informed consent form, after which the interview began.

To be consistent in the delivery, content, and inflection of the interview questions across interviews, I read each interview question to each woman. The participants were allowed to answer each question without interruption. Interviews were recorded using two digitally encrypted recording devices. I strictly adhered to the data collection protocols explained in Chapter 3, and no deviation occurred.

Interviews lasted about 20 minutes. Before the interview phase of this research began, I elected to use a nonprobing interview technique, rarely using prompts during the interviews. In a sense, my prompts included giving encouraging ad lib comments or asking questions to solicit additional commentary from the interviewee. The nonprobing policy served to acknowledge and respect the emotional sensitivity of the circumstances associated with needing a civil protection order, as well as to let each woman express herself naturally. Personal expressions were examined during analysis as another reflection (in addition to the words and phrasing that each woman chose to use) of her perceptions of her experiences. As illustrated by the direct quotes presented as thematic evidence further in this chapter, the women were generally reticent, but there were a few exceptions. They tended to answer interview questions with only a few sentences, often delivered between pauses and longer silences. Their bare-bones descriptions left most of their perceptions unspoken. They used terse and frequently dispassionate language,

which emerged as one of the lived experiences the women shared. Although I rarely used prompts, I made liberal use of paraphrasing comments to ensure that I had a clear idea of the meaning of a participant's comments.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process commenced with me reviewing each interview recording for clarity. I then carefully transcribed each interview into a Microsoft Word document. While transcribing interviews, I began to scrutinize the contents of them for evidence of similar experiences, perceptions, and attitudes that could constitute codes or emergent themes. The interviews were coded in several iterative steps.

To ensure that every aspect of the lived experiences of domestic abuse and protection from it was identified, coded, and associated with a theme (i.e., the data were saturated), analysis combined manual coding and subsequent searches with NVivo qualitative analysis software. After transcribing the interviews, I examined them repeatedly for significant phrases and statements, labeling them with open codes until saturation. Examples of open codes included order violation, direct threats, types of aggression sustained, unpredictability, stalking, lurking, prowling, social support, compliance, etc. The iterative process of axial coding was overlain with open coding wherein I made connections between open codes to create clusters of similar codes. For example, verbs such as *stalking*, *lurking*, and *prowling* created a cluster that provided evidence of multifaceted harassment. I also used axial coding to connect clusters into larger connections that created broader units of information called meaning units or themes. For example, evidence emerged that all three of the main players in domestic abuse episodes—the abused woman, the abusive man, and the police called in to restore

order—vacillated in their respective roles, which led to the theme of comply, deny, or defy.

I examined and summarized descriptions of what the women experienced as textual descriptions of domestic abuse; whether the quotes were abridged or verbatim corresponded to the length of the original comment or poignancy of the point it made. For example, textual descriptions coalesced into Theme 2, the straw that broke the camel's back. I also wrote descriptions of how the women experienced domestic abuse—that is, their perceptions as structural descriptions. For example, structural descriptions merged into Theme 1, kept her off-balance with unpredictability. In the final step, which is presented in Chapter 5, I presented a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both textual and structural material. I sought to identify and describe the meaning and essence of the experiences of domestic abuse and its repercussions via the civil protection order: the fusion of the lived experience of civil protection orders among women in rural Tennessee.

I imported saturated transcripts into the NVivo qualitative data software to easily locate all the passages with the same code. This augmented the selective coding stage so that I could easily review and compare passages to identify those that provided the clearest evidence of a theme.

Bracketing

Phenomenological analysis is based on *epoché*. *Epoché* is the suspension of judgment, which has a long history from early philosophers and the practice of skepticism (Zahavi, 2018). According to Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, qualitative analysts should practice *epoché* during data analysis by

disengaging their beliefs to focus on the literal appearance of the material under review, neither believing nor disbelieving it. This non-involved stance was an essential part of the qualitative analysis because it allowed me to investigate the perceptions of the women without constricting or coloring my understanding of their perspectives by my prior knowledge of domestic violence, law enforcement, civil protection orders, etc. Through suspending natural attitudes toward reality, *epoché* helped me avoid presupposing the validity of realism (Zahavi, 2018) and grasp the phenomenological meaning of the phenomenon under investigation (van Manen, 2017), which in this study was the women's perspectives of the effectiveness of civil protection orders.

Epoché starts with the qualitative process called bracketing. Tufford and Newman (2010) described it as the process used to reduce the potentially harmful effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process. Bracketing was crucial for this study's quality because my past professional career included work as a deputy sheriff. Some of the primary duties of a deputy sheriff include responding to domestic violence incidents, serving civil protection orders issued by the courts, documenting civil protection order violations, and enforcing civil protection orders through arrest if needed.

Because of my experiences as a deputy sheriff, it was critical that I suspend all prejudgments to neutralize any element of personal bias and show sensitivity toward the women's experiences in order not to influence the study's findings. For example, I implemented an additional step during the data analysis process, member checking, in which each woman reviewed the transcript of her interview and an individualized summary of my interpretation of findings from her interview session. This measure allowed them to correct or address any inadequate data and ensured that my own biases

did not influence my interpretations. Other steps for reducing personal bias included allowing the participants to tell their stories during the interview in their own way and expand on the essence of their experiences only if they chose to do so. I also routinely paraphrased or summarized their interview comments to ensure that I understood their perspective correctly and minimized any bias of mine that might have colored my understanding of the meaning of their experiences to them. It was also critical to the comfort, candor, and sincerity of the women that they were unaware of my previous work as a deputy. I simply introduced myself as a graduate student.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Creditability

I maintained creditability by purposeful sampling, choosing an interview strategy to guard against bias (i.e., non-probing, using open-ended questions), adhering to the interview strategy, employing member checking, and bracketing. Purposeful sampling allowed me to guard against bias. Adhering to the interview strategy allowed me to solicit information from each woman under as similar circumstances as possible. Member checking ensured accuracy of the narrative data. Bracketing allowed me to document my learning experiences throughout the study to identify any presence of bias when reviewing the narrative data.

Transferability

To achieve transferability, I wrote rich, detailed contextual descriptions of the women's experiences and corresponding views of the effectiveness of civil protection orders. Rich, detailed contextual descriptions will enhance other researchers' efforts to apply my findings to other settings.

Dependability

I maintained dependability through crafting 10 interview questions that related to the core focus of the topic under investigation. I also maintained an audit trail throughout the study to assist others in attempting to conduct the study within the same context using the same or similar criteria. I sought to strengthen dependability through the process of peer examination, by discussing this study's designs and processes with another doctoral student to elicit honest feedback regarding the appropriateness of its methodology.

Confirmability

Confirmability was maintained throughout the study by building a detailed audit trail that documented my methodological and analytic decisions. The audit trail provided evidence that, from start to finish, I did not set out to find what I wanted or expected to see. Instead, the findings were based on the careful collection and analysis of data. I also maintained a reflexive journal that detailed events that occurred during the study and my own personal reflections throughout the process in order to add transparency.

Study Results

The research question was what are the perceptions and opinions of rural female victims of domestic violence in Northwest Tennessee regarding the effectiveness of civil protection orders. Five themes emerged from the findings.

Theme 1: Kept Her Off-Balance With Unpredictability

Theme 1 sets the stage. It acquaints the reader with the women's demoralizing reality before each pursued her civil protection order. This is a lived experience that they all shared. It is presented first to put the women's views about the effectiveness of civil protection orders into proper perspective.

This section presents evidence that each of the 10 women shared the same unnerving lived experience before obtaining her order: She was kept off-balance by her former male partner's merciless unpredictability. He trailed her when she was driving. He prowled past her house in his car. He parked down the street from her house and sat watching from his car for hours. He lurked on her property. He pounded on her doors or broke into her home at all hours, wreaking havoc. He badgered her with calls from different phone numbers. He goaded her with phone texts. He made indirect and direct threats. He made predictable life impossible. P10 pointed out that because a stalker "would come and go as he wanted, a stalked woman can't even live a normal life from looking over our shoulders and wondering if that person is going to come back at any time." The former male partner riddled each woman's life with the unknown. He taunted her. She felt hunted.

The women's perspectives of this period reflected the unremitting wariness and fear of prey. P7's life was

an everyday struggle. I didn't know what type of mood he was going to be in. I was always afraid to say anything, do certain things because I didn't want to trigger whatever it was that made him upset. Every day was unpredictable. I was always tense.

P9 "was always scared and I had to watch my back" because her former male partner made her life "crazy, hectic." P8 said, "I lived constantly in fear, always looking behind, under the car, always locking up behind me, leaving lights on at night. Trying to look around me. Just be aware. I was very nervous and very—it was very tiring."

Similarly, P10 described her unpredictable life as “very stressful. I was always worried that something was going to happen.” P6 described her unpredictability:

...brutal, physically and emotionally. Not knowing what to expect from one minute to the next. What’s going to happen. Just scary, I guess. Yeah, I mean you didn’t know at what point he was going to show up at your house, or what he was going to do, or anything that was going to happen. {He might} just show up every hour of the night, to do things and contact you.

P4 “lived in fear the whole time that he would come and hurt me again.” Before she obtained her civil protection order, P1’s former male partner hounded her with a steady stream of menacing events. “He would stalk me and constantly drive by my house and constantly give me threats.”

Three women used the word *terror*. P5 reported that, “My son saw him hiding in the woods outside of the house. His hiding and stalking was terrorizing me.” P2 described her life before she obtained her civil protection order:

Terrifying. Driving home, I’d go home and he’d be in my carport hiding out where he had crawled through thorn thickets to get to my house. Tried to break into my house. He would sit down the road to watch me. I was just completely terrified to be alone or be home. Couldn’t sleep. He would threaten me via phone, text message; numerous, numerous text messages. Come to my house, beat on my door, threaten me. Outside my house standing on my porch. He had physically assaulted me like four times and I ended up in the hospital once. It had been going on over a two-year span.

P3 also used the word *terror* to describe her life before obtaining her order:

Terror. I guess that's the best way to put it. I was helpless. I felt like I couldn't do anything to protect myself. Because he was such a good manipulator, he could talk me into just about anything up until the point where he tried to kill me while I was pregnant.

Speaking of death threats, maltreatment did not even stop at terror. Six of the women felt that their own death was a real possibility at the hands of their abusive former male partner. P8 said, "He'd come and tell me he's going to kill me." Had she not obtained the civil protection order, P5 predicted that, "I'd still be in hell or dead. Probably dead." P4 reported, "He would have probably killed me." P2 articulated, "He probably would have killed me, absolutely." P1 said, "He could have come to my home and killed me, killed our son." P3 said her former male partner tried to kill her when she was pregnant; his attempt on her life was unsuccessful but it sent her into premature labor. The looming threat of death eclipses even the most unnerving premeditated taunting and stalking.

The question arises as to why the women endured such treatment for long periods rather than petitioning for a civil protection order early in the abuse or leaving him altogether. One answer is that an abused woman endures a struggle between her mind and her heart before admitting that she is being abused and has reached the point that she needs legal protection from the man who says he loves her. P2 provided the barest glimpse of this struggle when she said her challenge was "just coming up with the nerve to go get [my order against him]... realizing that it actually was a stalking issue that needed to be addressed by law enforcement to keep him away from me." P7 knew that she could get a protection order after the abuse became physical rather than just verbal.

“But I was still scared to, or it felt like I wasn’t going to be able to, simply because he was from the area. I wasn’t from the area.” P1 admitted that she was aware that civil protection orders existed but equivocated because “I felt that my situation wasn’t taken as serious as what it should have been.”

The women found out about civil protection orders primarily from policemen. Table 1 shows that eight out of the 10 women learned about civil protection orders from police officers who answered their 911 calls. As an example, P3 learned about civil protection through the officers who responded to her 911 call to take her to the hospital for premature labor brought on by her husband’s attack:

Before that incident, I didn’t even have an idea that they issued such orders.

When the officers were getting me into the ambulance, interviewing me on what happened, and asking me to show them what happened, they took pictures of my face because I did have marks all over. And they told me that if I didn’t want him around that they could help me because the state could take over the case and they could issue an order of protection based on the evidence, because of the facial markings.

P10 said that the 911 operator gave her the option of “letting it go or putting in an order for protection if she felt threatened,” and the police who followed up on her call told her specifically about civil protection orders. P2 also knew about civil protection orders because she had worked in law enforcement and had obtained an order on a previous male partner. The other two women learned about civil protection from friends or family (see Table 1). When P7 called 911 against her former male partner, she described how the police answered the call:

[they] didn't inform me about it. They basically said just to break up with him, don't go round him, which was kind of difficult. But a friend told me to get the protection order. That was when [my former male partner] attempted to hit me with his car.

P8's mother told her about civil protection orders.

Table 1

Source of Initial Information About Civil Protection Orders

Participant	Police	Family/Friends
P1	X	
P2	X	
P3	X	
P4	X	
P5	X	
P6	X	
P7		X
P8		X
P9	X	
P10	X	

Theme 2: Straw that Broke the Camel's Back

Theme 2 describes the events that prompted each woman to obtain the civil protection order against a man who was one of her former male partners. This shared lived experience was the hair-raising last straw that finally persuaded the women to petition for legal protection against their abusers.

Former male partners eventually did more than keep the abused woman off-balance with menacing unpredictability and threats of greater harm. All the women obtained their civil protection orders when their former male partners became directly violent. The evidence in this section shows that the women's shared lived experience was a quintessentially violent act or unendurable series of acts that served as the straw that broke the camel's back and culminated in her petition for an order. A few of the women were more forthcoming in describing these incidents than they were during the rest of their interview. Triggering events, highlighted in this section, tended to be of two types. One was a particularly violent exchange that was the culmination of an alarming series of menacing events. The other was an unnerving series of menacing events to be endured no longer.

Three of the women said that alcohol or drugs were involved. P3 was embroiled in a particularly violent domestic dispute while watching TV with her ex-husband, to whom she had been married less than a year. He accused her of trying to cheat on him. He had been drinking. She had not been drinking because she was seven months pregnant:

I was sitting on the couch. I had a really big round stomach. Yelling and screaming, he climbed on top of me in a straddling position with his knees pressing down on my knees. He was eating the drum part of a chicken bone and grizzle. He ended up sticking the bone into my mouth, and closing my mouth and pinching my nose and pressing me back on the back of the couch and trying to get me to swallow the bone. I'm not able to move, not able to scream, and all I can do was scratch at him and try to wiggle away from him, which I couldn't. When

he realized what he had done after about 30 to 40 seconds of him doing that, he jumped up and ran out the door. He stole my car keys and he stole the car. Little did I know when I got up from the couch, I was leaking amniotic fluid and I had to call 911, and they had to take me to the hospital and stop my labor because I went into premature labor.

P1's triggering event was also a particularly violent exchange that involved substance abuse. "My son's father was very abusive." When he was drunk and/or high, he held a shotgun against her head, against her son's head, or hit her. He hit her one too many times and she broke up with him. Enraged, he attacked her as follows, which led to her petition for a civil protection order. Parked in a laundromat, she had just put her son in the car seat and gotten into the car herself. As she started to back out of the parking space, her former male partner raced up behind her in his car, blocked her car with his car, dashed over to her open car window, and slashed her face:

And then he got back in his car and drove off. And of course, during that time there was me hollering and screaming, our son was in the background crying at the time. And I immediately called 911. Next to the laundromat where I was at, there was two officers that walked over. And I explained to them what happened. And of course my face was bleeding. And they just told me that if I wanted to have anything done, I needed to go and file an order protection against him. So that's what I did.

Drugs and alcohol were also involved in former male partner violence for P6. Her phrase "it got to the point" insinuated a series of menacing events despite her unemotional explanation:

My ex was really violent when he was drinking, and he had done pills one time so he got really violent one time. And so it got to the point I felt that my son and I were at harm. So I got the police involved and got an order of protection.”

P9 described how she obtained her first civil protection order after a particularly violent exchange while driving, all the more harrowing because her year-old daughter was in the car with her:

Her father was chasing us down the road and ended up following me to my house, cussing me out, flattened my tire, put me in a harmful way with my daughter in the car so that led me to put a restraining order against him.

P9 obtained her second civil protection order against her abuser one Mother’s Day. “He was calling the neighbor’s houses saying he was holding me hostage so I thought it would be best for me to do another protection order.”

Even the tersest explanations of menacing events that the women endured at the hands of former male partners were unnervingly lurid. P4: “He was putting his hands on me before, and it just kept getting worse and worse and worse. And he was going to wind up eventually killing me if I didn’t do something about it.” P2: “Ex-husband who was physically and verbally violent and was stalking me. So I went and got a protection order.” P8: “My first husband was abusive. There were sneak attacks. He would break in, attack me in public places, like bars and stuff, but...yeah, I needed protection.” P5 described her pattern of persecution:

My son’s father was breaking in my house multiple times, and was very mean to me, all of it, physical, psychological. Also he would hide out, bleach my clothes,

bleach my kids' clothes, broke in my car, pulled wires out, pissed in the car. So that's why I did it.

P8 felt that her former male partner "didn't want me with anybody else." P7 was similarly trapped by overpowering and ongoing possessiveness. This clearly intimidated her, as intended:

My former experience with domestic violence dealt with just being scared because I wasn't able to go anywhere. Wasn't able to speak to anyone. I was picked up, thrown out of the house. I was hit a couple of times. And so when I tried to get away, it seemed like he didn't want me to go anywhere or try to be with anyone else, so I felt trapped.

P10 was the most forthcoming. She described events preceding two civil protection orders, each against a different man. She obtained the first order because "my husband was threatening to kill me in front of my kids, so my friend called 911 and they came and put a restraining order on him." P10 took a second order out on a different man, her ex-fiancé. Her description hinted at the frequency of violence in their home and correspondingly frequent visits from the police:

The next order that I had to receive was my ex-fiancé. He broke in the house a couple of times and I didn't get an order at first, you know, but whenever the police came, they tried to, I guess, scare him a little bit or something. I don't know really what they were doing, but they gave him a couple of warnings, told him not to be back on the property, not to come around me, not to call, not to text, or if he did it again they were going to have to either pick him up, put an order on him or something. Of course, you know, he'd been in trouble all the time, he's

been in prison. I really don't know what his problem was but he just kept on and on and on. Finally, I had to get an order. I didn't know that he didn't care. He was arrested because he busted the door down and come in about five o'clock in the morning. My kids were asleep. He started beating me. Well, the kids heard it and got up and came running and I called the cops again. They like came in and he had gone by that point. It took them like several weeks to find him. He kept running.

Theme 3: Civil Protection Order is Just a Piece of Paper

The abused women were deeply intimidated before securing their civil protection order, and they obtained it believing it would procure safety and some semblance of predictability for them and any children involved. Yet, the evidence presented in this section on Theme 3 shows that civil protection orders were sometimes effective but more often ineffective, despite the fact that their aim is to procure legal protection with penal sanctions for violations.

Seven of the 10 women had strikingly similar perspectives. Based on their experiences with a civil protection order, they claimed directly or in so many words that the civil protection order *is* just a piece of paper without inherent power on its own. P3 offered a literal explanation:

The weakness [of the civil protection order is] it's just a piece of paper. If he had been more adamant about hurting me, he could have done that, and that piece of paper wouldn't have done anything but been used as evidence against him in my murder trial, basically.

P3 retains to this day a copy of the civil protection order she obtained in 2014 that protects her against a particular man:

It's a sense of protection in my mind. But at the same time, it scares me to have *just* a piece of paper because they can do whatever they want, and that piece of paper is not going to save you. But my gun will.

Warning that some men defy civil protection orders, P3 asserted that women need to arm themselves literally and proactively:

Get educated, and get your permit to carry, to protect yourself. Because a lot of women say, 'Well, he's not going to hurt me, I have an order of protection.'

Well, the order of protection is signed by a judge on a piece of paper. It's not going to save you when the time comes. It's always important to do what you have to protect yourself, and to remember that piece of paper is just a piece of paper.

The women agreed that this major weakness of civil protection orders partially lies in the abusive man's perceptions of the civil protection order, specifically whether and how much he fears trouble with the law. P2 went into graphic detail about consequences from the man named on her civil protection order who did not fear trouble with the law:

The weaknesses is some people, it doesn't scare off. They don't care. It's just a piece of paper. They can still come back and kill you, assault you, stalk you down the street, anything. It's just a piece of paper to some people. Well, he came back after he got arrested the first time, and cut video cameras when he found out I had video cameras [installed]. Then, as soon as we found that out,

they caught him again. He was actually on my front porch when they picked him up the second time.

P6 maintained that whether a man believes that law enforcement will prosecute him for violating the order is pertinent information:

We all know it's just a piece of paper. It's just how much [the abusive former male partner] believes that the courts are going to follow through on what's going to happen. It's really just a piece of paper protecting you. I don't know what else they could do to make it better than that. But we all know that it's a piece of paper.

P9 and P5 also both used the term, only "a piece of paper." The evidence proffered for Theme 3 gave valuable insight into the challenges of achieving consistent effectiveness,

Theme 4: Comply, Deny, or Defy

Theme 4 was supported by three subthemes. Each subtheme refers to a set of responses to the order (comply, deny, or defy) by a specific set of involved persons. Subtheme 1 was based on evidence that abusive former male partners had two responses to the civil protection order: comply with it by leaving her alone or defy it by continuing to torment her. Subtheme 2 was based on evidence that members of the criminal justice system had two responses: comply with it by responding to calls and reinforcing the order punitively or deny it through inaction. Subtheme 3 was based on evidence that the abused women also had two responses: comply with it by doing everything she could to eliminate contact or deny the reality of the situation by dismissing the order or returning to her abuser.

In the women's experience, men who feared the law are more likely to comply with the order. P4 said the strength of the order is that people who are afraid of being in trouble with the law will abide by it: "A lot of the ones that do beat the women, they're intimidated by the police. So they mostly likely won't do it [so] it does have effect on them." In contrast, men who do not fear the law are more likely to defy the order. P10 clearly described her experience with the two possibilities:

Well, I'd say if you've got somebody that's scared to death of the police, has never been in trouble, you know, they're going to be more scared. They're going to follow the law and they're not going to bother you. That's what happened in [my first] case. And then if you've got one that's a thug, you know, they don't care about making trouble or they really don't care about the law or anything that's on a piece of paper. They're going to do what they're going to do, regardless.

Compliant former male partners. The man who is served with a civil protection order has two options in terms of his response to it: comply with it or defy it. Men who comply with the order stay away from the woman, stop tormenting her, and thus she and any children can feel safe and resume life as normal. Half the abusive former male partners complied with the civil protection order in one way or another. Three men complied willingly based on respect or fear of the law. Another complied inadvertently because he was incarcerated for violating the order.

P10's first husband complied with the order. He had never been in trouble with the law before. P10 said, "and I really think the only reason" that he complied "was because he was really scared" to flout the law. P6's former male partner also complied.

She attributed his compliance to his respect for the order's rule of law. But she noted that it also provided the added benefit of time to calm down and think more clearly:

Probably the strength is you know that they can't come in contact with you, and they know that too in court. Actually, the judge tells everyone the rules up front, so you both know there is no contact. You can't contact him. He can't contact you. And if he did, he would go to jail. In my case, it serves its purpose [because] it gave him the cooling off time to stay away from me. That it made things a lot better. I think it worked in my situation.

P3 also referred to the cooling down period that the civil protection order afforded the battling couple: "The strengths of having it was the sense of protection and how it did open his eyes in a way. It helped with the cool down period. It gave him time to think and reflect; me as well." According to P3, her former male partner complied with the civil protection order only because "he didn't want to go to jail" like P10's former male partner. But even that type of compliance had its psychological benefits, according to P3:

If I hadn't got it, he probably would have felt like he could have done anything to me. But because he did get it, I think that did scare him a little bit into seeing like, 'Okay, this is serious,' not just a civil issue or domestic issue.

Further, P3 felt that civil protection opened his eyes to the fact that a man cannot legally (or morally) do whatever he wants do to:

He ended up having to go to anger management because of the charges [where] they talked to him about what it means to have that [civil protection order]. And you can't violate it or you'll go back to jail. He stayed away.

P8's former male partner also complied with the civil protection order but only inadvertently: He violated it and was incarcerated for it, which ensured that he did not have any contact with her. This gave P8 such a sense of relief that she assured me, "If he's in jail, you can keep him!"

P8 declared with finality that the strengths of the civil protection order are that "it is there and if they violate it, they are going to jail—no, ifs, ands, or buts about it. They are going to jail and that's a good thing." However, the majority of women asserted that abusive former male partners who violate the civil protection order do not necessarily go to jail.

Defiant former male partners. Men who defy the mandates continue to torment the abused woman and any children who are involved (see Appendix F for the meaning of the civil protection order). Defiance was the more typical reaction and was associated with disdain for the law. Six abusive former male partners defied the civil protection order, excluding the man who inadvertently complied while incarcerated for order violations. Ergo, half the women said the order did not protect them.

P1's former male partner defied the protection order within 3 days of receiving it, despite assuring the judge in front of everyone in the courtroom that he understood all of its mandates of non-contact. Consequently, even with the civil protection order in hand, P1 felt neither safer nor relieved:

When we was in the court that day, the judge read out what [former male partner] could do and what he could not do and asked my son's father if he understood everything that was said to him. And he shook his head that he did and said yes. But yes, he was told, and I sat and heard every bit of it as well. So it was

explained—everything that the protection order covered and what he was allowed to do and what he was not allowed to do. And they also told him if he was found actually doing the stuff he was not supposed to do, that they would arrest him and he would spend so much time in jail.

When I had got it, and we were both in court, I really thought that he would see that, if I'm going to these lengths, that I want him to leave me alone. And from that point on I thought I was going to be safe. And I thought that the order protection would scare him enough to do that. But it didn't. He still did what he did before the order protection. He still drove by my house. He still stalked me. He still threatened me. It was like I never had it.

Her former male partner's defiance was also P4's most challenging issue about the civil protection order: "Making sure that he stayed away. Well, he'd call my number from different phone numbers. Or he'd say, 'I'd be out watching you.' It was just all kinds of stuff." He was particularly defiant when he repeatedly warned her, "If I really wanted to get to you, I could." He also traveled a fair distance to the housing projects where she lived, but she called the police and he was gone by the time they arrived.

P3's former male partner's defiance led him to violate the civil protection order several times. He was eventually named in three civil protection orders. Yet, because of this, P3 says, "it became almost like a pattern and it became non-effective."

P5's former male partner defied the civil protection order multiple times, but he eventually complied—but not because of fear for the law or meek submission. Note how P5 understates the extent of her former male partner's defiance of the civil protection order:

It was eventually useful. But in the beginning, it took a few times. Well, he didn't get the point on the first order of protection. Two days later he violated it. He was hiding beside the air conditioner unit. The judge extended the order of protection. After they let him out of jail for violating that one, two days later he violated again. So, instead of just the 1-year order of protection, they gave me a 5-year order of protection. Then it got better because he got the point. *Then he moved onto picking on somebody else.* But it took him from getting tired of going to jail, I think. It didn't faze him the first few times until he served more time in jail. They need stiffer penalties in the beginning to deter it more. See what I mean. Seriously they do.

For P9, the civil protection order was ineffective. Even after obtaining hers, she said, "It was the same." P9 claimed that her abuser did what he always did. Nothing stood in his way. In fact, she noted that he reported it to others:

Honestly, it didn't really change, to be completely honest about it. Nothing else could have been done because it was already done. There were still threats going on. It never got physical. It was kind of like stalking. I'd go to Wal-Mart. He would be telling people that he's at Wal-Mart and watching me to see what I had on. There were still threats going on but nothing happened, you know? The authorities didn't do anything else, you know.

P10 observed that her former male partner was also defiant about the civil protection order:

When they found him, they put him jail and put an order on him, but this time it didn't work. They did all that, but he kept on and on and on. He kept calling. He

kept driving by the house until [ultimately] I had to move out of the house. The [unintelligible 00:02:50] made me move.

P10 acknowledged that defiance was a two-pronged problem: “You know, it’s all about the person, for one, and two it’s about—I hate to say—but it’s pretty much about how strict the law is enforced in the county.”

Some members of the criminal justice system complied with civil protection orders while other members denied them. P5 spoke for several women when she said that the man’s tendency to comply or defy is intimately related to the reaction of law enforcement:

It’s the consequences that should deter the person from doing it. Civil protection orders are useful but everybody has to back them up. They’re not going to be useful if the cops don’t enforce them or just blow it off.

P10 agreed: “A piece of paper is nothing if you haven’t got somebody to make sure that your kids and you are going to be safe.” For P5 too, enforcement plays a critical role. P5 notes that, without order enforcement, the abusive former male partners can run rampant:

But it’s also the laws too. It didn’t matter who it is. They need to keep him locked up longer. He [violated the order] two or three times and still spent less than, not enough time in jail for what he did. I’m tell[ing] you [he violated the order] *50 times or more*. He didn’t get caught. You know what he’d do, you know [street name removed]. He would go back there and park his car and put on dark clothes and walk through that gully and hide.

According to the women’s perspectives, the strictness of enforcement was highly variable. Some officers complied with it. Some officers denied it.

Police officers who complied. Compliance manifested in several ways, including the follow-through to prosecute men who violated the order and responding to 911 calls for help. Police officer compliance was frequent. It is indicated by the many recollections of compliant behavior threading through evidence presented for themes 1 and 2. A number of women also said police told them about civil protection orders initially (Table 1). The women also named police as the persons who explained the meaning of the civil protection orders to abused women most often and as the most influential people in the criminal justice system.

Police officers who denied. Denial manifested in the opposite ways: failing to follow-through with prosecution or calls for help. P1 was adamant about the police denying her domestic abuse problem by failing to respond. She reported initial and subsequent lack of action on the part of law enforcement despite numerous opportunities to enforce the civil protection order. After P1's former male partner trapped her car in the laundromat parking lot and slashed her face through the car window, "I made an incident report. He was never arrested." But she was awarded a civil protection order, although it did not make a difference because he defied it with persistent violations. Yet P1 noted that her abuser suffered no consequences:

I called [the police] several times, told them he was driving by my house. He would call me and threaten to kill me and our son. He would come to my place of work. I would see him out in the parking lot. I would get in my vehicle and go home. He would follow me. And I would be on the phone with the cops at the time saying, 'He's following me.' It's like he knew when they was going to be

there, and he would turn down a different road and take the opposite way. He was never arrested. He was never put in jail for any of that.

I believe that if it was taken seriously and he was arrested, and we did go to court, that that would give the judge her obligation to fulfill that protection order and do what is necessary for my son's father as far as to protect me and to keep him away. Actually show him, 'You are not above the law, and you cannot do this to people. When you have this against you, you have to follow these rules. And if you don't, then you go to jail.'

Nothing was done that I felt would protect me and my child. I just had to be on guard 24-7 because every time I called the police, I just felt I wasn't taken seriously. I felt that they did not think that it was a big enough issue to do anything about. They basically just thought that I was just constantly complaining for no reason, and that wasn't the case. If someone's threatening my life, my child's life, as a mother I'm supposed to do whatever I can to protect us both. And as officers of the law, that's what they're supposed to do as well. And they didn't. They failed at that.

P1 felt that the criminal justice system, and specifically the police officers, failed her. She knows that the same person at the police station did not answer her phone calls every time. "But not once did they even come to my home and ask me if I was okay. I would see them drive by, but they never stopped. So I knew then, what's the point in calling anymore?" P1 describes her experience:

When I would call multiple times, I was put on the backburner. When it's not followed through, like it was in my case, that's the main weakness. At any point

in time he could have come to my home and killed me, killed our son, and it was too late by then. And that was the one thing I used to ask. They actually told me that he would have to actually try to nearly kill me before they actually do anything.

And it should not get to that point. It should not get to the point of where he is there at my home with a gun to my head. It should be to the point of—in the very beginning. So that’s the weakness—[it] is that it’s not followed through or taken as serious as what it should be.

It took about 6 months into the order protection before her abusive former male partner finally stopped harassing her. But P1 maintained that the civil protection order did nothing and that he stopped only “because he got tired of it [and] found another victim, somebody else to punch on,” as was also true for P5.

P10 also felt strongly that civil protection orders need to be enforced, not made more restrictive. But the first problem is, “They don’t check.” P10 described her view:

They should make for certain because most of the people that are being abused or physically abused, any type of way really, should have a little more protection than others because we can’t even live a normal life from looking over our shoulders. They don’t do that around here. If the laws are enforced real good, then [the abusive man is] going to know they’re going to either get in serious trouble or something bad is going to come out of the deal if they keep on—and they’re not going to want that.

P9 agreed that the weakness of civil protection orders is that they are not enforced: “The authorities don’t really stick to it. Whatever happens, they don’t do nothing about it.” P9 summarized it:

I think that they mean well once they’ve made one, if the regulations that they say would be enforced.... So, if I say ‘place an order of protection’ and if it was placed, and the authorities as far as policemen stuck to the regulations (if they were contacted and they went and arrested the person that did the contact), I think they mean well. But unless [civil protection orders are] enforced, they don’t mean nothing.

Several women speculated about why civil protection orders were enforced so poorly. P7 suggested that the police do not appear to take domestic violence seriously because they wait until there is an undeniable threat, which excludes verbal abuse. P7 considers verbal abuse the beginning of a domestic violence episode:

I think trying to get a protection order and the protection could be stronger if verbal abuse is taken more seriously because normally that’s how everything begins. Normally in my situation, and I’m sure other situations, things don’t start immediately with physical. A lot of things start verbally, mental abuse, and then it grows from that emotional abuse. Then it goes into the physical aspect of it. I think police and other people in the legal system should look more at verbal abuse, even though nothing has been acted upon.

P1 also claimed that the police did not take domestic abuse or the enforcement of civil protection orders seriously, thereby denying the problem or their role in restoring

order. P1 based this on countless observations that the most common response was lack of enforcement:

And when I would call the police about it, they never would arrest him. They would just say they went by his home. He wasn't there. They wasn't able to question him. And pretty much basically that they wasn't going to spend any time looking for him. And they would try to go by his house again. And I would explain to them, 'He's going to lie and say he didn't.' So I just felt that it was still an unsafe situation because I don't think I was being taken seriously.

P1 did not admit until the end of her interview that she believed that her lack of protection and police enforcement was "because of my son's race and my son's father's race" but did not elaborate. She also approved of protection orders and granted that there were officers who enforced them like they're supposed to, although "in my case, that didn't happen." P5 has the same complaints but was blunt in her accusations, "The police for one need to take it serious." She offered a reason as to why they did not take her domestic abuse situation seriously, "Because I feel like there's prejudice." P5 followed this admission with an ardent plea for taking an abusive man's intent to torment more seriously than the behavior he actually displays:

I felt like there was a lot of prejudice with me being white and the guy was black. I'm going to be honest, there are a few redneck cops that they're like, 'You get what you deserve.' I'm not kidding. That's the attitude I got from them a few times when I called the cops. Like, 'You chose this. Like, you shouldn't have done it in the first place. You chose it.'

Another thing, when a woman or man, whoever has an order of protection, calls the cops, like I said, they need to take it serious and they don't. One time I called them and they're like, "Well we don't have any proof of that." My son saw him hiding and stalking in the woods outside of the house and they just brushed it off.

P3 agreed that police are not taking it seriously:

It offends me greatly when I have a situation that I feel I'm in danger, and they're seeing it as a number or a dollar sign. It's like, 'Okay, we'll fine you and put you on probation. And come back in six months.' If you're good, it's like a deferred fining kind of thing. We'll just drop the charges."

P3 did not think the judge sees the problem as seriously as does the victim "because the victim could easily be a dead person."

Finally, P10 maintains that the mandates of the civil protection order are not enforced by the police. "They don't check to make sure things are going the proper way, but I do think it's something that can be bettered with time and better law enforcement." The combination of a defiant man and adequate law enforcement fulfills civil protection as intended. The combination of a defiant man and inadequate law enforcement renders the civil protection impotent and very much, as per P9, "just a piece of paper."

Subtheme 3 was also based on evidence about whether abused women complied or denied abusive behavior, but in this case, the focus was on the women themselves. The evidence of this interpretation argues that some of the abused women complied with the civil protection order while others denied it. This evidence is the thinnest because

most of the interview contents focused on the former male partner's misbehavior rather than the women's behavior, or misbehavior, as may be the case.

Abused women who complied. Compliance is doing everything she can to eliminate contact with the abusive former male partner. In some respects, one could argue that all the women complied, at least initially, with the spirit of the civil protection order by the sheer act of seeking it. Six women also reported feelings of safety and security after they obtained their civil protection order (see Table 2). Otherwise, compliance can only be inferred at best by such passing comments as from P10, "he made me move" and all the women who mentioned their house, indicating they no longer resided with the abusive former male partner. However, evidence from interviews also raised doubts that all the women complied by doing everything humanly possible to make themselves patently unavailable for further harassment.

Abused women who denied. Denial was expressed in behavior that was diametrically opposed to compliance, which was doing everything she could to eliminate contact with the abusive former male partner. A glaring example of denial was when a woman remained in the abusive situation; all the women remained in their abusive situation until they secured their civil protection order. A second example of denying the true danger of her situation was to remain in the abusive situation while reporting abusive incidents repeatedly. Calling for help too often can easily weaken credibility and frustrate police because at some point, she may appear to be simply crying wolf. If she does not help herself, how can law enforcement help?

Abused women may be fairly charged with denying the danger of their domestic abuse situation by failing to report the abuse. Two women admitted that they had not

reported all the abusive incidents. Although P4 reported “at least six or seven” abusive incidents, she also admitted that there were “many, many” incidents that she failed to report to the police, which she estimated at “over 10.”

P4 continued, “Most of it does not get reported. Yes, absolutely. Out of fear.” According to P4, “Mainly the women are not going to get involved with the police because that’s the first thing that the man says is, ‘If you ever get the police involved, I will kill you.’” In the face of such a dire threat, many incidents of domestic abuse understandably remain unreported. Alternatively, the fact that abusive former male partners drew upon such a truly dire threat as murder strongly suggested that they were fully aware that the abuse they wreaked upon women was wrong, because otherwise less appalling threats would suffice.

Fear even made three women retract the protection order and return to live with the abusive man, a potent example of denial. A civil protection order cannot work if the women back-pedal on it. This seems likely to also frustrate police officers who try to help extricate her from the abusive situation. P10, P3, and P8 dismissed their civil protection orders against their abusive former male partners and returned to them. P3 says, “The order of protection itself was not the issue. It was me”:

Some officers don’t take a situation like these domestics [domestic violence] very seriously because they see them go back to the situation. I was one of those at that time. I was one of those that I defended him even though he hurt me. And the officers were very frustrated because they felt like, ‘We can help you, but if we help you and you go back to him, it’s all for nothing.’

P8’s explanation summed up such bewildering behavior:

Well, it goes both ways. It is effective to the point that it is effective. But if she goes back and drops it, she gives him that right [to harm her again].... She's scared. It is a control issue. It's control. They isolate these women. It's all they know is to go back. There's nothing good about that.

Finally, P7 proposed that the stigma of domestic violence and the fact that it is a topic of gossip deterred people from reporting abuse. Gossip is certainly less dire than death threats, but perhaps just as effective for some people because gossip circulates so easily in small communities. P7 observed that, "A lot of people in a small town or anything of that nature don't want people knowing what's going on in their lives. They don't want the questions. They don't want the gossip. So that may deter people" from reporting abuse. P7 described her point of view:

The most challenging issue was I didn't like people to blame me. I didn't want people to treat me like I was the person who was causing the problem and he was just reacting towards my negativity or anything that he had told them. Because, of course, there are two sides to every story and [in] his side of the story nothing was ever his fault.

Table 2 presents the challenges and rewards of civil protection orders with regard to compliance, defiance, and denial on the part of former male partners, law enforcement, and the abused women. Half the women reported that their biggest challenge was keeping their abuser away from them after the civil protection orders were in place. Other challenges included actually locating him so that he could be served with the order, seeing her children lacking a father, and facing him in court or running into him in locations where he was not supposed to be.

The rewards of the civil protection orders, also summarized on Table 2, were feelings of safety and security for six of the women. For example, P6 said the most rewarding aspect of her order was that he “couldn’t come around me or my son and that we were safe. I would say not being in touch and not having any more contact, that he wasn’t able to harm us anymore.” P2 and P8 felt safe only after he was sent to jail for violating the order. P9 had to obtain two civil protection orders against her former male partner, but that worked out for her because after the second one, “I got full custody” of their daughter. “He got civil rights visitation; he cannot be around our kid without supervised visits.” Supervised visits meant that P9’s daughter was awarded greater protection from her father as well.

Table 2

Challenges and Rewards of Civil Protection Orders

	Biggest Challenge	Biggest Reward
P1	Keeping him away	None. No effect of civil protection order
P2	Admitting his behavior justified a civil protection order	Feeling safe after he was jailed for violating order
P3	Keeping him away, begged her to return to him, she did	Civil protection order introduces idea of safety
P4	Keeping him away	None. No effect of civil protection order
P5	Their son lacked a father	*
P6	Facing former male partner in court	Safe from harm, relief, security
P7	Blamed for abuse by others	Safe to feel strong again
P8	Couldn’t find him to serve civil protection order	Feeling safe after he was jailed for violating civil protection order
P9	Keeping him away, civil protection order did not change anything	Obtained full custody of their daughter
P10	Keeping him away	Was offered a safe house

Note. * = Did not answer the question.

Theme 5: Recommendations for Improving the Civil Protection of Female Victims of Domestic Violence in Rural Regions

Theme 5 shows that the abused women had widely varying views on how to improve the system, but provided many valuable insights into the lived reality of civil protection orders in rural Tennessee. To summarize this section, two women thought civil protection orders were ineffective and eight women thought they would be more effective if their recommendations were addressed. The main recommendation was to take domestic abuse seriously and enforce the law behind the civil protection order. Supporting recommendations were given to reinforce the message by increasing the cost of the bail bond for the first violation, mandating jail time instead of a bail bond for the second and subsequent violations, increasing fines, increasing jail time, adding domestic abuse to the person's permanent record, providing abusers with long-term counseling and anger management programs, and providing abused women and their children with counseling.

Two women said that the criminal justice system could not improve civil protection orders for female victims of domestic violence. P4 pointed out that the justice system has “done just about everything that they can to actually protect them and the women are still getting hurt.” In her mind, a civil protection order was not useful because it is a crapshoot. P4 offers her thoughts: “If [violence against women is] going to happen, it's going to happen. And I don't think that anybody's going to be able to stop it.” Yet she conceded, “Each situation is different. It might work in some situations and in some situations it won't. It just depends.” P3 did not think civil protection orders were useful either:

I think they can be effective if the person who's being served with that order of protection sees this as a problem and that they need to get help for it. More likely than not, I just don't see them as truly effective in rural regions because you're not in an area where there's a lot of people. They could do and say anything and it's your word against theirs. If you say they were stalking you and driving by your house, and they say they weren't, then you feel like you're having to defend yourself in court.

However, most of the women recommended ways to improve the protection of rural Tennessee women. P1 gave an impassioned and reasoned discourse. P1's recommendations harken back to theme 4, subtheme 2: inaction on the part of police to take domestic abuse calls seriously:

They can actually do their job as far as when a person calls and says, 'I'm being harassed. I'm being stalked. I'm being threatened.' Come to that person's home. See that person. Actually look that person in the eyes to realize that this is an actual human being and they need your help. This isn't just a voice over the phone. That's what you were put there to do: protect and serve your community. *Do it. Actually do it.*

If I was taken seriously, and if my case was actually believed, I think the strengths would be that they would actually go through with what represents the protection order, and the officers would follow it as it needs to be followed and to make sure that that person that has that order protection is safe. And if that is followed through the way it is supposed to be followed through, then that would be a great asset. Protection order is supposed to be, 'Do not come within so many

feet of that person. Do not have any contact with that person. You can't do anything around that person.' If you're not going to do everything that it says, then don't have it in that protection order.

And when that law is broken, they need to be punished for that. I understand you have to have proof of it, but if a person's calling you constantly all the time, they've just got to take it more seriously and realize they can save more lives by doing that.

P6 also had several good suggestions for improving protection for Tennessee women. She thought that when the civil protection order is issued initially, the men should have to do some kind of counseling program such as anger management as a provision of the order. Later, if they violate any part of it, they should get more jail time.

P6 described her thoughts:

I think there should be more consequences instead of just going to court and you have to stay away from this person. *Stay away from that person!* I think they should implement some type of program for that person. I think they should do initially maybe some type of anger management and some follow-up questions. But not just like a 3-hour class, [earn] the certificate, I'm healed. That doesn't work. I think it should be a long-term thing.

I think they should serve jail time to begin with. But I think if it happens again, then the consequences should be greater and they should serve *more* jail time.

And if it happens again, then I think the consequences should be jail time and [the abuse] should go on their record. If it's ongoing, it should be on their

record like pedophiles have an everlasting record should they do something wrong again. I think people that abuse people should have the same, something that's in their report that does the same so people know that they're that kind of person.

P7 echoed P6's sentiments that an abusive person should have a permanent record of their abuse against others: She argued that a permanent record was "very important because that will also warn other individuals that, 'Hey, maybe you need to watch out for this person. Don't get involved with this person. The same thing may happen to you.'"

P5 agreed with P1, P6, and P7 that penalties need to be stiffer:

It needs to become stalking or it needs to become something more serious. If they keep offending, there's not stiff enough penalties. He was terrorizing me. Why didn't that turn into a more serious charge? That needs to be changed!"

P2 also thought that the criminal justice system could improve civil protection orders for female victims of domestic violence in rural regions by stiffening the penalties. In her view, the problem is that abusive men may be arrested but "they can keep getting out on bond." Her recommendation was, "They need to just be locked up." Her recommendation was to give an abusive man a chance to get out on bond the first time he was arrested for domestic violence, but not the second time. P2 supports enforcing stricter penalties:

It just needs to be a lot more strict as far as when they do come [under] arrest. Because the protection order, when they serve the order and they violate it, they get arrested, but they can still get out on bond and then come right back and do it again as well, as what mine did. Then they arrest him again, and then he's going

to set a new bond. And the judge turned around and revoked that bond and just kept him in jail because of my safety, because my life is at risk if he got back out. They need to make the bond higher as well.

More than half the women called for better enforcement; however, there remains an unanswered question, because the women's recommendations do not particularly illuminate it: "What does better enforcement look like?" Abusive men employed numerous ways to keep the abused women off balance and in fear for herself and her children. Police may theoretically be able to intervene when a man drives by her house too often or stalks her when she leaves the house (at great taxpayer expense). But police cannot intervene if he hounds her from different phone numbers or sends antagonizing text messages.

The estimate from this study of the percentage of women who secure but later dismiss a civil protection order against a former male partner is 30% (or 3 out of 10). Along these lines, P6 recommended incorporating legal constraints that eliminate second thoughts: "A lot of women get scared and they're afraid of the repercussions." Should a couple end up in court over an arrest for assault but "she ends up not pressing charges, I think that the courts or the law takes it in their hands and they don't let her retract from that." The rule of law and the courts "should follow it all the way through and make sure the woman doesn't back out." This worked for P7, who said the protection order gave her courage and a voice:

That was all everyone was saying to me when I was going through the process, 'Make sure you don't change your mind. Make sure you show up,' because if

you don't, then that's just allowing him to feel like he's won, and he can just continue whatever he wants to do to you.

P9 argued for strict adherence to instructions on the protection order and reciprocal no-contact orders:

They should make it strict and stick to it. I think, honestly, they should stick with what it says, no matter what: no communication, Facebook, Internet, anything. They should keep that. If they do communicate or if they do harass you, they should go to jail like it says in the order protection because they've violated a court order[ed] piece of paper. I also think even if a female tries to contact the male [named on the order protection], she should get in trouble because she shouldn't have contacted. It should go both ways.

This point of view about reciprocal no-contact orders was an unusual perspective in that only one other woman mentioned it. P7 said the court clerk explained the civil protection order to her as if she was the person named on it and restricted from contacting her former male partner:

I wasn't allowed to drop by his house, knock at his door. I wasn't allowed to make a phone call to him. So, it kind of works both ways. Even though I was the one trying to get the protection order, I also couldn't come into contact with him, making it happen like if he got upset and hit me. But after several times, if I was the one that came on to his property, then I wasn't supposed to be there so I would be in violation.

The suggestion of anger management or other self-help counseling programs raised the question of whether the abused woman herself would benefit from counseling,

instead of or in addition to the abuser. For example, P7 celebrated her civil protection orders as psychologically useful because they set her free: “The most rewarding aspect was I gained my freedom back. I was finally able to get back to being the strong individual that I’ve always been instead of being that weak individual and letting someone control me.” Without the civil protection order, “my life would be miserable,” P7 said, because she would be “basically locked away in a box screaming to get out.” Her comments assure readers that there is plenty of leftover pain—a residue of the abuse. P8 argued that one way to improve civil protection for abused Tennessee women was to provide counseling to help them sort out the trauma they had endured at the hands of the abusive former male partner. P8 made her point that the victim of domestic abuse needs not only counseling to process her experience, because the abuse has also isolated her from friends and family:

There are still emotional scars that are going to hurt that person, and I think the law.... You know, when they murder people, they have those people in counseling and stuff. They need to do that for the abused woman. There needs to be counseling and places where they can go for help because you’re still all alone. When you’re in that situation, that man has already driven away all your friends, your family. You feel like you have nobody. You don’t know what to do, so they need to do something about that too [because] the victim needs help. You know, it’s great they can get great counseling for your murder victims. But your women that are victimized, [as in] the situation with me, they had driven away friends and family. That’s why a lot of these women do go back [to the abuser] and even drop the court order to take the man back because it feels like they have nobody.

They're all alone. They're just scared and don't know what to do. There needs to be something the court has to do with that, you know? It's a problem and that's what I see is why a lot of these women, they get them once or twice and they drop them and they go back to the man, and it's a repeat process. If we could drop that—I don't know what you call it—repeating bad habits...

P3 recommended a literal safe haven:

I honestly feel that, with the order of protection, other resources be brought available to them for protection. Honestly, I feel like maybe a shelter of some sorts for a certain amount of time for that cool-down period because a lot of situations are fueled by a lot of anger, which passes with a certain amount of time.

The recommendations wrap up on a chilling note. This was P2's perspective on the usefulness of civil protection orders for rural Tennessee women subjected to domestic abuse:

Civil protection orders are useful to a point. It just depends on the person that you're getting the protection order against. It's kind of a give or take. It just depends on the aggressor, who the person is you're getting a protection order against. Some people it's okay, they understand, 'I'm not going near, I'm not going back to jail.' But others it's like, 'I'm going to come at you full force.' They just don't care. Or it's going to make them even more mad that you've got it. And they're going to be more aggressive, and they're going to come kill you. I still felt like I was still having to look over my shoulder all the time. I still do to this day.

Summary

The purpose of the research was to (a) explore the lived experiences of women who had civil protection orders against abusive former intimate male partners, (b) gauge the effectiveness of civil protection orders, and (c) garner insight into improving the protection of women. Participants were 10 women who lived in rural Tennessee who had obtained civil protection orders to restrict contact with their abuser. The model participant was a Caucasian woman aged 18–29 years old who had obtained one civil protection order that was good for 12 months.

The analytical approach was phenomenology, which revealed several lived experiences that several or all of the women had in common shared. One of the shared lived experiences was reticence; the women freely engaged in interviews but used terse and dispassionate language as a rule.

The research question was *what are the perceptions and opinions of rural female victims of domestic violence in Northwest Tennessee regarding the effectiveness of civil protection orders?* The answer to the research question was that perceptions and opinions fell into five themes, which also constituted shared lived experiences. Theme 1: kept her off-balance with unpredictability, illustrated the demoralizing reality of each woman's life before she pursued the civil protection order. All the women shared this intimidating lived experience. Theme 2: straw that broke the camel's back—experiences that triggered pursuit of civil protection order, described the events that prompted each woman to obtain the civil protection order to protect herself from a former male partner. All the women shared a hair-raising last straw lived experience that finally persuaded each to petition for legal protection against her abuser. Theme 3: civil protection order

was just a piece of paper presented evidence that civil protection orders vary widely between ineffective and effective. Evidence of why orders ranged from ineffective to effective emerged as Theme 4: comply, deny, or defy. Theme 4 was supported by three subthemes. Subtheme 1 was based on evidence that some abusive former male partners complied with the civil protection order while others defied it. Subtheme 2 was based on evidence that some members of the criminal justice system reacted proactively to civil protection order violations, while others did not take violation seriously and ignored complaints of violations from the victims. Subtheme 3 was based on evidence that some of the abused women were active in pursuing charges for violations of the civil protection order while some just ignored violations. Theme 5: recommendations for improving the civil protection of female victims of domestic violence in rural regions, shows that the abused women had widely varying views on how to improve the system. Two women thought civil protection orders were ineffective and eight women thought they would be more effective if their recommendations were addressed.

The main recommendation was to take domestic abuse seriously and enforce the law behind the civil protection order. Supporting recommendations were to reinforce the message by increasing the cost of the bail bond for the first violation, mandating jail time instead of a bail bond for the second and subsequent violations, increasing fines, increasing jail time, adding domestic abuse to the person's permanent record, providing abusers with court-mandated long-term counseling and anger management programs, and providing abused women and their children with counseling.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions and opinions of rural female victims of domestic violence regarding the effectiveness of civil protection orders. Using a hermeneutic phenomenology approach, I investigated how 10 rural female victims of domestic violence perceived the effectiveness of civil protection orders to reduce future incidents of abuse. Hermeneutic phenomenology assists in providing glimpses into the meanings in an individual human experience, which allows access to rich contextual data through recording people's lived experiences (Crowther et al., 2017). Moreover, van Manen (2017) explained that stories exchanged using hermeneutic phenomenology provide a powerful and provocative method of evoking shared responses. The research findings of this study are presented in the participants' words to show their perspectives regarding civil protection orders and their perceived effectiveness in curtailing future abuse.

The findings revealed that civil protection orders were viewed by participants as ineffective in discouraging future incidents of domestic violence. Participants also felt that improvements were needed regarding civil protection orders to make them more effective in curtailing domestic violence. Nevertheless, there was a perception that police do not treat civil protection orders seriously, especially when they are violated. Many of the participants felt helpless due to the years of physical and psychological abuse they had faced from their abusers, which was aimed at controlling their mental state of mind and holding them mentally hostage and cut off from family and friends who could offer

them support. The findings provide a range of important insights regarding the effectiveness of civil protection orders for women in rural settings.

This chapter presents a review and interpretation of the findings with respect to their empirical, theoretical, and practical implications for the effectiveness of civil protection orders among female victims of domestic violence in a rural setting. The first section of this chapter is focused on an interpretation of the findings in terms of how they confirm and extend previous empirical research and how they relate to ACF. The limitations of the findings are discussed in the following section of this chapter, followed by a section on recommendations for future research. The final sections of this chapter review the implications of the findings in terms of fostering positive social change for policy on civil protection orders related to women in rural areas, which is followed by concluding thoughts.

Interpretation of the Findings

Five important themes in the perceptions of interview participants regarding the effectiveness of civil protection orders were derived from the findings of this study that confirm and advance existing empirical research. The first theme, kept her off-balance with unpredictability, reflected participants' thoughts about the level of abuse in their relationships that led them to seek a civil protection order in the first place. Most participants reported that a significant part of the abuse they faced was due to the unpredictability of their male partner. Participants reported being stalked in various ways and not knowing when or where abuse from their partner would occur next. The feeling of unpredictability led to some participants feeling like stalked prey and like they had to remain ever vigilant. As a result, participants reported being in constant fear and terror

and with high feelings of helplessness and uncertainty. Alarming, six of the 10 women believed that the unpredictability of their former male partner's actions threatened their lives to such an extent that they feared their own death.

These findings are consistent with previous research on the conditions that lead abused women to seek civil protection orders. In line with research findings that sufferers of domestic violence in rural areas experience a higher risk for serious physical injury or death (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Lanier & Maume, 2009; Logan et al., 2005; Peek-Asa et al., 2011), participants reported feeling that their life was seriously threatened. As shown in previous research, separating from the abuser heightens the risk of lethal violence against women in abusive relationships (e.g., Johnson, 2015; McFarlane et al., 2015; National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 2010).

Participants also confirmed previous research findings that exposure to violence from a partner is associated with a plethora of mental and behavioral health problems, including depression, anxiety, PTSD, sleep disturbances, eating disorders, substance abuse, and suicide and suicide attempts (Duterte et al., 2008; Straus et al., 2009; Sumner et al., 2015). Logan et al. (2003) also found that rural women were far more predisposed than their urban counterparts to maladaptive coping and feelings of hopelessness and despair; the overwhelming majority of rural women (88%) in Logan et al.'s study directly linked feelings of stress and depression to the experience of abuse, compared to 47% of the urban women. Indeed, participants in the current study reported feelings of helplessness and uncertainty associated with the unpredictability of the perpetrator of domestic violence. These findings underline the assertion by Straus et al. (2009) that the impact of the psychological effects of domestic violence outweighs the physical abuse

itself, especially among women. The findings extend the previous research because they suggest that experiencing feelings of helplessness and uncertainty are central psychological processes for domestic violence victims. These feelings are driven by the unpredictability of the perpetrators and result in physical and psychological symptoms like depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Along similar lines, Logan et al. (2003; 2007) found that perceptions of danger among victims of domestic violence were strongly linked to diminished physical and mental health functioning; the more that participants felt like they were in danger, the lower their physical and mental health statuses were.

The second theme regarding the perceptions of interview participants about the effectiveness of civil protection orders reflects the lived experiences that triggered the pursuit of a civil protection order: the straw that broke the camel's back. The findings show that although participants had endured ongoing psychological abuse for some time, they obtained their civil protection orders only after their former male partner became directly violent. Consistent with previous research, these findings suggest that protection orders were often the last resort for participants who had tried other channels of help (e.g., Duterte et al., 2008; Kothari et al., 2012). In some cases, a particularly violent attack led participants to apply for a civil protection order, whereas other women applied for an order following an unnerving series of menacing events that they could no longer endure. Similarly, Logan et al. (2005) reported fear for one's safety and ending the violence as the two main reasons women filed for protective orders, with fear being cited by twice the number of rural compared to urban informants. Although violence was reported as the main breaking point for seeking protective orders, participants had generally experienced other forms of psychological abuse in the time period prior to

filing such an order, such as feeling trapped by overpowering and ongoing possessiveness from their former male partner. At the same time and consistent with previous research on intimate partner violence (e.g., Beyer et al., 2015; Weissman, 2013), three of the participants reported that alcohol or drugs were involved in violent episodes that led to civil protection orders.

Despite their ultimate decision to petition for a civil protection order after their partner had become violent, participants claimed that the order did not ensure their safety. This was reflected in the third theme derived from the qualitative analysis, civil protection orders are just a piece of paper, where participants reported their belief that orders have no inherent power on their own. This was primarily because of the belief among some participants that their former partners did not fear trouble with the law and would do anything they wanted and not curtail their abuse, essentially ignoring a civil protection order. Despite the belief that civil protection orders are a valuable protective device, participants remained unconvinced about the extent to which law enforcement and the courts would follow through when the order was violated.

Consistent with the participants' view that civil protection orders were merely a piece of paper, the question of their effectiveness arises repeatedly in the literature. Whereas the evidence has suggested that civil protection orders are effective for many who obtain them (Benitez et al., 2010; Fleury-Steiner et al., 2011; Kothari et al., 2012; Logan et al., 2009; Logan & Walker, 2011), the data on stalking and separation assault, including separation homicide, attest to the serious consequences when restraining orders fail to protect the victims (Johnson, 2015; McFarlane et al., 2015; National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 2010; Smith et al., 2017; Stoeber, 2014; Violence

Policy Center, 2017). As Logan et al. (2005) found, informants were skeptical of the effectiveness of protective orders because of (a) lack of enforcement by the criminal justice system, (b) petitioners failing to report violations, and (c) problems with serving the order. Moreover, Logan et al. (2005) observed significant differences between the rural and urban petitioners that appear to reflect systemic issues and are echoed in the findings of this study. For example, for petitioners in rural areas,

- rates of nonservice were much higher than in urban areas,
- petitioners were more likely to be charged for the process orders,
- rural women had to return to court more often than urban women,
- more rural cases were classified as pre-adjudication, and
- rural women had to travel longer distances and put more effort into obtaining a protection order than urban women.

Given these challenges and obstacles (Hawkins, 2010) and the lack of enforcement, it is not surprising that the rural women in this study viewed civil protection orders as lacking effectiveness despite the fact that they generally endorsed their utility.

The fourth themes derived from the findings—comply, deny, or defy—shows how the reaction to civil protection orders may vary between abuser, law enforcement, and victim to either support or undermine the effectiveness of orders through compliance, denial, or defiance. In terms of abusers, participants reported that those who complied with civil protection orders were more likely to respect the law or fear the consequences of violation. There was only one case where compliance by the abuser occurred because the protection order opened his eyes to his actions and allowed him to reflect on its negative effects. More often than not (in six out of the 10 cases), however, participants

reported that the abuser defied the civil protection order on several occasions because he did not fear the consequences. In contrast, Spitzberg (2002) found in a meta-analysis of 108 samples and 103 studies that civil protection orders in general were violated at a rate of 40%. Thus, the findings from this study support the assertion in the literature (e.g., Schwab-Reese & Renner, 2017) that rural victims of domestic violence appear more likely to experience continued abuse after the imposition of civil protection orders.

With respect to law enforcement, participants similarly reported varied experiences of compliance or denial/defiance of civil protection orders. Participants reported that compliance by law enforcement was frequent and shown in several ways, including the prosecution of men who violated orders and responses to emergency calls for help. Moreover, several participants reported that it was the police who initially told them about civil protection orders and were perceived as the most influential people in the criminal justice system. In contrast, participants also reported instances where the police did not support civil protection orders by failing to follow through with prosecution when civil protection orders had been violated. Several women maintained that civil protection orders were poorly enforced because the police did not appear to take domestic violence seriously and waited until there was an undeniable threat before they would intervene.

To a large degree, these findings are consistent with research that suggests that entrenched sociocultural norms associated with gender role beliefs may explain why police do not enforce civil protection orders or take them seriously (Beyer et al., 2015; Grama, 2000; Logan et al., 2005; Peek-Asa et al., 2011). Rural communities are noted for their traditional and patriarchal value systems where wives are expected to defer to

their husbands (Grama, 2000). This view is also reflected in the findings of Gingold (1976), who reported that police in rural communities tended to adopt a traditional hands-off attitude of law enforcement that treated domestic violence as a mere disturbance and avoided arresting abusers. Even further, Grama (2000) identified “good ol’ boys” networks and political connections as barriers to combating domestic violence in rural communities, also noting their influence on judicial priorities and decisions, whereas no similar networks were observed in urban areas. The participants’ perception that police do not take civil protection orders seriously appears to reflect, in part, gender-related issues. Whereas police may inherently support the belief that wives should not be subject to their husbands’ will, they may also be wary of undermining male networks that are more prevalent, cohesive, and influential in rural communities than in urban communities (Dudgeon & Evanson, 2014).

An important subtheme of comply, deny, or defy involved the responses of women to the imposition of civil protection orders. To a large degree, participants followed through with obtaining the civil protection orders, and some reported it was a challenging achievement. Indeed, Denman et al. (2009) characterized the act of following through with obtaining a protection order as a great accomplishment for women who are often fearful about leaving an abusive relationship. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Logan & Walker, 2010; Wright & Johnson, 2012), six of the participants also reported positive psychological benefits, such as feelings of safety and security and an increased sense of empowerment, after the order was in effect. Nevertheless, participants additionally reported several instances where they failed to follow through with the civil protection order.

Participants cited several reasons they denied or defied civil protection orders, including fear and social isolation. Two women admitted that they had not reported all the abusive incidents, with one participant failing to report more than 10 incidents out of fear of the consequences. Fear even made three women retract the protection order and return to live with the abusive men because going back was the only option they knew. Similarly, previous research by Denman et al. (2009) showed that petitioners file and reconcile multiple times before they finally terminate the relationship, highlighting the fact that leaving an abusive relationship is a challenging process that requires support. Nevertheless, some women claimed that calling for help too often may weaken credibility and frustrate police. Other participants failed to follow through with civil protection because of the potential for social isolation and stigma. As one participant observed, the stigma of domestic violence—being the subject of gossip and social isolation—was a deterrent to reporting abuse, with some women “even drop[ping] the court order to take the man back because it feels like they have nobody. They’re all alone. They’re just scared and don’t know what to do.” Echoing this sentiment, previous research (e.g., Lanier & Maume, 2009; Logan et al., 2003) showed that loneliness and the lack of social support were pervasive among rural women, which is a significant factor in domestic abuse and the imposition of civil protection orders.

The final, but equally important, theme derived from the analysis of the interviews was their recommendations for improving the civil protection of female victims of domestic violence in rural regions. Overall, eight of the participants thought that civil protection orders would be more effective if their recommendations were addressed. Given the experience of the participants, it is not surprising that the main

recommendation was for all actors to take domestic abuse seriously and enforce the law behind the civil protection order. Participants made several specific recommendations to strengthen the effect of civil protection orders:

- increasing the cost of the bail bond for the first violation,
- mandating jail time instead of a bail bond for the second and subsequent violations,
- increasing fines,
- increasing jail time, and
- adding domestic abuse to the offender's permanent record.

At the same time, participants also recommended health and welfare interventions to improve the system of civil protection orders by providing abusers with long-term counseling and anger management programs and providing abused women and their children with counseling.

These findings are somewhat similar with those of Postmus et al. (2009), who found that female victims of domestic violence gave higher priority to remedies such as counseling, welfare, and educational support compared to legal services to support protection orders. Moreover, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (2010) also recommended that concern for the well-being of children should be given high priority in domestic violence cases that involve civil protection orders. However, a distinct finding in the current research is the extent to which participants' recommended stronger enforcement of civil protection orders. This was primarily because participants perceive that law enforcement agents do not appear to take civil protection orders seriously because over half the participants experienced repeated violations of the orders

by their former partners. Additionally, it is noteworthy that participants recommended that enforcement should extend to women themselves and that the courts should follow through with protection orders to ensure that women do not back out of them. Finally, a distinct recommendation from one participant was about the usefulness of reciprocal or mutual no contact orders where both the offender and victim are equally restricted in their contact with each other. Whereas this may appear to provide some neutralization of blame instead of targeting the offender and may mitigate the abuser's desire to retaliate against the victim, Topliffe (1992) argued that such orders do not hold the abuser accountable and that police may not be sure how to proceed when the order is violated.

The themes derived from these participants' experiences with civil protection orders confirm and extend previous empirical research. The findings confirm that sufferers of domestic violence in rural areas experience a comparatively higher risk for serious physical injury or death and are more likely to experience violations of civil protection orders by their former partner. Participants reported that the unpredictability of their former partner was associated with feelings of helplessness, uncertainty, and various psychological and physical health issues. As in other research, the findings showed that participants had endured ongoing psychological abuse for some time, and that every participant obtained their civil protection order only after their former male partner became physically violent. As in previous research, participants were concerned that a civil protection order was just a piece of paper, given their experiences with repeated violations of the order. Thus, they felt that the offender could do whatever they wanted. Participants also reported that civil protection orders may lack effectiveness

because women may return to the abuser because of social isolation and ostracism and law enforcement officers and the courts may fail to take the orders seriously.

From the perspective of ACF, the finding that women perceive a lack of serious follow-up on civil protection orders by law enforcement would be assumed to reflect the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of stakeholders that are entrenched in informal networks of subsystems (Koebele, 2016; Weible & Sabatier, 2006). An implication of this framework is the probability that few stakeholders maintain neutrality as policy brokers. Rural communities are noted for their traditional and patriarchal value system where wives are expected to defer to their husbands (Grama, 2000). As such, the findings are consistent with the view that suggests that deep-rooted sociocultural norms associated with gender role beliefs may explain why police do not enforce civil protection orders or take them seriously (Beyer et al., 2015; Grama, 2000; Logan et al., 2005; Peek-Asa et al., 2011). Despite legislation against domestic violence, the policy system and decisions by police with respect to enforcing civil protection orders may perpetuate gender inequities through its treatment of the predominately female domestic violence survivors (Nichols, 2011; Stoever, 2014). Future research may clarify the role of gender-based attitudes, beliefs, and actions of stakeholders in failing to support civil protection orders.

Limitations of the Study

While this study has been critical in helping to bridge a significant gap in the research literature, it is not without limitations. First, it is acknowledged that this qualitative study has limitations with respect to its generalizability. The limited sample size restricted the ability to conduct a complex analysis of perceptions of civil protection orders by female victims of domestic violence. Moreover, the participants selected for

this study represented only a small sample of rural women who experienced domestic abuse in one region of the United States. Thus, this sample size may not be an accurate representation of the perceptions of a broader cross-section of female domestic violence victims and their opinions regarding the effectiveness of civil protection orders.

The second limitation involved confusion among a few participants regarding the legal term *civil protection orders*. This is because the term civil protection order is often improperly interchanged with the term *no contact order* throughout the criminal justice system in Northwest Tennessee. According to the website of Southwest Tennessee Legal Services (2011), a judge may place a no contact order on an alleged abuser as one of the conditions of release from jail. If the abuser violates this condition of release, they can be arrested for bail jumping. Southwest Tennessee Legal Services (2011) also noted that the process of determining violation of a no contact order is often more complex than those involving civil protection orders and requires the judge to hear testimony before deciding on the revocation of bail matters. While both court orders offer victims of abuse a measure of protection, civil protection orders are more stringent because they allow for immediate arrest without a warrant.

The third and final limitation relates to the time period when each participant received and maintained their civil protection orders. While the inclusion criteria required each participant to have obtained civil protection orders within the last 5 years, I did not have access to any database to verify such.

Despite the limitations identified in this qualitative study, the findings illuminate the importance of understanding the unique experiences that influence the opinions and perceptions of rural victims of domestic violence regarding the effectiveness of civil

protection orders. These opinions and perceptions are a critical component in helping bridge the existing literature gap.

Recommendations

One recommendation for future research involves replicating this study to examine the perceptions of senior female victims of domestic violence regarding the perceived effectiveness of civil protection orders. Roberto and McCann (2018) noted that limited information is available concerning the history, experiences, and needs of older women who suffer from domestic violence. Band-Winterstein (2013) explained that older women facing abuse are often forced to follow the traditional role of male dominance, are more financially dependent on their abuser, and are more likely to be dependent on their abuser for caregiver assistance. Such a study could prove helpful in determining what role, if any, being born before the third wave of the feminist movement plays in shaping elderly rural women's perceptions of abuse and how their perceptions differ from women born after this latest wave of feminism.

Another recommendation for future research centers on rural women's perceptions of the civil protection order court process in a rural context. I observed that several participants expressed frustration with the process they encountered while obtaining their orders. I even noted an alleged incident of clerks refusing to let abuse victims fill out a petition for a civil protection order without the victim first reporting the incident to a law enforcement agency, as well as cases in which victims were unable to obtain civil protection orders because no magistrate was available or the courts were closed. A qualitative study using a hermeneutic phenomenology approach could be beneficial to stakeholders in identifying deficient areas mentioned by victims of abuse

while navigating the civil protection order court process. This research could lead to increased funding for the hiring of more magistrates in rural communities and additional training for clerks and other individuals involved in the process.

A further avenue for future research centers on the finding that participants perceive a lack of serious follow-up of civil protection orders by law enforcement. From the perspective of the ACF, the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of stakeholders are entrenched in informal networks of subsystems indicates that few stakeholders maintain neutrality as policy brokers (Koebele, 2016; Weible & Sabatier, 2006). These findings suggest that deep-rooted sociocultural norms associated with gender-role beliefs may explain why police do not enforce civil protection orders or take them seriously (Beyer et al., 2015; Grama, 2000; Logan et al., 2005; Peek-Asa et al., 2011). Future research may clarify the role of gender-based attitudes, beliefs, and actions of stakeholders in failing to support civil protection orders.

Implications for Social Change and Practice

There are several positive social change implications associated with the findings of this research study. The findings indicated that the participants had viewed civil protection orders as a useful tool in addressing domestic violence. Other social change implications include the following points.

Understanding the needs of rural women could help facilitate policy change.

Policymakers can use the findings to assist in the development of civil protection order provisions that directly supplement the shortcomings identified by participants. The opportunity to hear participants' experiences in their own voices should create a rapport

that allows for the flow of information regarding civil protection orders between victims of abuse and policymakers who are charged with ensuring that they are effective.

Assist in expanding trust between victims and the criminal justice system.

This study serves as a stable foundation that allows victims of domestic violence, policymakers, domestic violence advocates, and stakeholders to cultivate increased trust with each other. The study findings can assist in the more extensive collaboration and trust that is necessary to combat domestic violence, while simultaneously monitoring domestic violence intervention tools such as civil protection orders to ensure that they are achieving their intended goal of curtailing domestic violence.

Expanding the use of civil protection order through awareness. The study can offer information and spread awareness among rural women who are enduring abuse. Many abuse victims are unaware that civil protection orders are available to them, and those who are aware often have misconceptions regarding the kind of behavior that civil protection orders are intended to address. False information such as petitioners being forced to pay upfront fees, not being able to file without an attorney, or being forced to meet the same legal standard of proof as criminal offenses often discourage victims from coming forward and seeking help. Through clearly explaining the basic facts about civil protection orders to abuse victims, it is plausible that more victims might come forward to seek assistance when attempting to escape abusive relationships.

Support other researchers and practitioners in future research and practice.

Although this study thoroughly allowed for investigating the perception among rural women of domestic violence regarding their perceived effectiveness of civil protection orders, because of time constraints the study was unable to investigate other civil

protection order issues and concerns regarding rurality. This study could potentially serve as the foundation for other researchers and practitioners to build upon additional civil protection order research. Through any further research conducted by other researchers as well as practitioners using the findings of this study as a guide, there is a high probability that this study will help lead to more significant social change in the area of civil protection orders.

Conclusions

This qualitative research study served as a snapshot into the lives of rural women who have experienced domestic violence and their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of civil protection orders to curb future incidents of violence. The information obtained from this study aligned to a large degree with existing research on the effectiveness of civil protection orders regarding the satisfaction of petitioners and also illuminated the need for further research. It is critical that the criminal justice system develops useful and effective intervention tools to help victims of domestic violence seeking assistance with escaping violent relationships. However, the lack of information regarding civil protection order effectiveness, especially within the context of rurality, must be regularly studied to determine its impact on domestic violence. Although it was reassuring to observe that most of the research study participants held the general belief that civil protection orders were needed in the fight against domestic violence, systemic barriers regarding civil protection orders may impact their experiences. There is a critical need for the continuous evaluation of the perceptions of victims of domestic violence on civil protection to elevate the discussion about their effectiveness and contribute to

reducing domestic violence incidents throughout rural areas and communities in the United States.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Please briefly describe your past domestic violence experience which led to your decision to obtain a civil protection order?
2. How did you come to learning about and obtaining your protection orders?
3. What was life like for you post-civil protection order issuance?
4. What have been the most challenging issues since obtaining your civil protection order? What was the most rewarding aspect?
5. If you were to dismiss or had you never obtained a civil protection order, how do you imagine your life would be affected?
6. What do you believe are the major strengths and weaknesses of civil protection orders?
7. What can the criminal justice system do to improve civil protection orders for female victims of domestic violence in rural regions in Northwest Tennessee?
8. Who are the most influential people within the criminal justice system to ensure that civil protection are effective in rural regions in Northwest Tennessee?

9. Was the process of enforcement of civil protection orders clearly explained upon obtainment of civil protection orders? Explain.

10. What do you think about civil protection order usefulness in rural regions in Northwest Tennessee? Please explain.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Interviewer: _____

1. Researcher introduction to participants.
2. Description to the participant of the study and overview of information being collected by the researcher.
3. Review informed consent with participants.
4. Provide participants with an overview of the interview process to include time.
5. Inform the participant and obtain permission to record all sessions digitally.
6. Inform the participant that participation is voluntary and that their participation can be revoked at any time for any reason.
7. The interview will begin with asking the participant questions, and upon completion, the researcher will allow participants time to address any concerns or provide any additional information they deemed essential to the study.
8. At the completion, the researcher will ensure that participants have correct contact information in case they want to get in touch with the researcher, and researcher will thank them for their time and participation.

Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

Name: _____ Age: _____

Number of civil protection orders obtained in last 5 years:

_____ One

_____ Two

_____ Three

Length of civil protection order obtained in last 5 years:

_____ Months

Ethnicity: (Please specify) _____

Thank you.

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer

**Volunteers Needed for Research Study**

Participants needed for a research study to better understand “Perceptions of Civil Protection Order Effectiveness Among Female Victims of Domestic Violence in Rural Tennessee”

Description of project: Researcher is interviewing rural victims of domestic violence about their experiences with civil protection orders. You will be asked to participate by answering questions in a confidential interview, which will take approximately 45–60 minutes.

Participants shall: (1) reside in rural Northwest Tennessee, (2) be female victims of domestic violence, and (3) have obtained a civil protection order within the last 5 years that was issued Northwest Tennessee.

Tell your story! Your perspective and opinion can shed valuable light on the criminal justice system that may improve the effectiveness of civil protection orders for rural female victims of domestic abuse.

Those selected for participation will receive a

\$25 Visa card as compensation.

To learn more, please contact researcher Thomas Tharpe

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Walden University Institutional Review Board and is being conducted for a Walden dissertation.

Appendix E: Newspaper Recruitment Publication

Recruiting participants for a research study entitled “Perceptions of Civil Protection Order Effectiveness Among Female Victims of Domestic Violence in Rural Tennessee.” Participants must live in rural areas within northwest Tennessee and have had a civil protection order within the last five years. Please contact principal investigator Thomas Tharpe if you are interested in joining the study. Those selected will receive a monetary compensation for their time.

Principal Investigator: Thomas Tharpe

Appendix F: Distinctions Between Civil Protection Orders and Restraining Orders in Tennessee

During this research, I encountered several pieces of literature that used the terms civil protection order and restraining order interchangeably or in combination (civil protection restraining order). Interchangeability does not apply in Tennessee (the research setting) because civil protection orders and restraining orders are distinct forms of court-ordered injunctive relief. This study focused strictly on civil protection orders. Civil protection orders are a common intervention and legal response used to protect victims of domestic violence from re-victimization (Dowling, Morgan, Hulme, Manning, & Wong, 2018). In Tennessee, Ex parte Civil Protection Orders are carried out in strict compliance under statute Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 36-3-605 (Waller, 2015).

In contrast, a court can use a restraining order to enjoin one party from physical harming, threatening, or harassing another party. The Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts (2019) describes temporary restraining orders as immediate, temporary, limited relief obtained when that person could suffer irreparable harm or loss while waiting for resolution of their case in the courts. As per the Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts, temporary restraining orders are governed under Tenn. R. Civ. P. 65.04 of the Tennessee Rules of Civil Procedure. While it is not a common occurrence for a judge to use a traditional restraining order in Tennessee versus a civil protection order as an intervention tool, it could be used in a divorce proceeding when abuse is alleged. The order frequently also incorporates other actions such as restraining one party from disposing of financial assets or moving shared children to a different state until a case resolution is rendered.

Both civil protection orders and restraining orders can be violated and both can carry similar civil and criminal sanctions in Tennessee, enforcement and prosecution of such orders is vastly different. According to the Southwest Tennessee Legal Services Website (2011), civil protection orders allow for law enforcement to make an immediate and warrantless arrest of respondents when there is enough probable cause to indicate that a violation occurred. In contrast, prosecution for restraining order violations can only be enforced through the petitioner taking the respondent back to the court that originally issued the restraining order.

Appendix G: Person(s) Who Provided Explanation of the Process of Enforcement of
Civil Protection Orders

Table G1 lists the persons who explained the process of enforcing civil protection orders to the women. P3 said the court personnel explained a lot. She was given a pamphlet and a victim’s witness advocate who accompanied her to her court date, powerful because she did not feel alone when she went to court even though “I was alone. I was in Virginia away from my family, and it helped to an extent.” Despite the explanations, pamphlet and advocate, “In that moment, your adrenalin’ is pumping so fast because you’re still in the moment of what happened, that when they’re telling you all this and you know that they told you a lot but you don’t really remember a lot of it.”

Table G1

Person(s) who Provided Explanation of the Process of Enforcement of Civil Protection Orders

	Presiding Judge	Police	Clerk	Unstated	District Attorney
P1	x				
P2				x	
P3				x	
P4	x	x			
P5	x				
P6	x	x			
P7			x		
P8			x		
P9					x
P10		x			
Total	4	3	2	2	1

Appendix H: Rank Order of the Women's Views of the Most Influential People in the Criminal Justice System

Table H1 lists the rank order of the women's views of the most influential people in the criminal justice system, where 1 is the most influential. Half the women said the police were the most influential. For example, P7 said that police officers were the most influential people in the criminal justice system when it came to domestic violence:

“They're who's going to come visit the home and see firsthand if anything has been done...survey if your furniture is out of place.” P6 agreed: “Probably the police officer because they're just a call away, they're actually on the streets, and they can come to their episodes immediately.” Half the women said the judge was the most influential. For example, P8 thought the judge was the most influential person “because he has the right to make the punishment for violations and enforce it. That makes a difference. It really does.”

P2 said that law enforcement and the judge are both influential: “Law enforcement are the ones who are going to come and help you.” But the judge is influential because “the judge is the one that's going to set those bonds or release them, or sentence them to jail time.”

Table H1

Rank Order of Most Influential People in the Criminal Justice System

	Police	District Attorney	Presiding Judge
P1			1
P2	1		2
P3			1
P4	1		
P5	2	3	1
P6	1		
P7	1		
P8			1
P9	1	2	
P10			1
Total First Choices	5	0	5

Note. 1 = most influential