

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS  
WITHIN NATIVE AMERICAN FAMILIES

By

MELISSA TERESE NORRIS

---

A Thesis Submitted to The Honors College  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelors degree  
With Honors in  
Family Studies and Human Development  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

M A Y 2 0 1 9

Approved by:

---

Dr. Timothy Ottusch  
Department of Family Studies and Human Development

### **Abstract**

The prevalence of Native American women becoming victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) is much higher than the general population and any other ethnic group. IPV can impact the relationship between a child and their parent and can shape how they view themselves and others. This study sought to understand how IPV impacts the parent-child relationship within Native American families before, during and after the experience. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with Native American parents and children who previously experienced IPV. Results implicated parent-child relationships can withstand the negative effects of IPV with involvement and continuing support from their abused parent, regardless of how their relationship quality was before the IPV began. The relationship quality was also dependent on the parental protectiveness interpreted by the child. Conversations about the abuse and emphasis on healthy relationship building has allowed the relationships to evolve over time. Internal working models were found to be affected by the mother's involvement in the IPV relationship. Barriers for Native American women leaving the relationship were found to be inconsistent with previous findings. However, contributors to increased violence was consistent. Professionals, tribal policy makers, and law enforcement should work together for the sake of future generations.

## **Introduction**

There is minimal research on Native American parent-child relationships in the context of intimate partner violence (referred to as IPV from here on), commonly known as domestic violence (DV), in the home. Here we focus on parent-child relationships within Native American families and how they evolve throughout a negative experience such as IPV. One aspect of IPV is the significance it may have on the child with their abused parent and their perceptions of the quality of the parent-child relationship before, during, and after the abuse and in other relationships. Another aspect is the interpretation of the quality of the parent-child relationship from the abused parent's point of view. It is therefore, important to gain a better understanding of their experiences. The focus for this study is to provide the perspectives of the parent-child relationship amongst Native American families who have experienced IPV, where their primary caregiver was victimized.

### **Implications for parents and children**

The issue of intimate partner violence is not just a family issue, its affects are widespread and touches on every facet of our communities, regardless of race, socio-economic status, gender, religion or nationality (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2019). Domestic violence has a costly effect on society as it is the leading cause of injury to women (Domestic Violence Statistics, 2019). Every day in the US, more than three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends (Domestic Violence Statistics, 2019). An additional 1 in 4 women have experienced domestic violence in her lifetime (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). Focusing on this issue can provide society with healthier families and overall health and well-being to individuals, which in turn may lower the costly effects it has on society. Education,

awareness and prevention efforts are needed to create desirable outcomes for future generations of families.

IPV, commonly known as domestic violence, is a worldwide issue and is present in all cultures (Domestic Violence Roundtable, 2008). Women with children are more likely to experience domestic violence than childless women (Buchanan, Wendt, & Moulding, 2015). In addition, the prevalence of Native American women becoming victims of IPV is much higher than the general population (Jones, 2008) and any other ethnic group (Hart & Lowther, 2008).

Women become so terrified of their partners that they may neglect their children, lie to advocates that try to get them out of the violent relationship, feel if they do not comply with advocates suggestions to leave the relationship they will receive less support and threats of child protective services involvement (Keeling & Van Wormer, 2012). In addition, a victim seeking resources may cause their partner to retaliate against them (Dugan, Nagin, & Rosenfeld, 2003). Many women in abusive relationships stay with their abusers because they are unable to get help for themselves and their children, some are held captive with threats of physical force, and others may lack transportation and financial means to leave (Yamawaki, Ochoa-Shipp, Pulsipher, Harlos, and Swindler, 2012). The social work model from Keeling and Van Wormer (2012) states that many women want the violence to end, not the relationship.

An estimated 3-4 million children are at risk for exposure to domestic violence (Domestic Violence Roundtable, 2008). Being a witness can mean seeing, hearing, or observing, including the aftermath (Domestic Violence Roundtable, 2008). IPV can have short and long-term effects for children, including uncertainty of their safety, constant worry, lack of worthiness which can last a lifetime; further, the effects of IPV can contribute to death at an earlier age (Domestic Violence Roundtable, 2008). In addition, girls who witness IPV between her parents, have an

increased chance of becoming a victim herself and boys who witness IPV between his parents are more likely to become an abuser to his partner and/or children (Domestic Violence Roundtable, 2008; Domestic Violence Statistics, 2019,). Experiencing IPV may lead to a continuous cycle of violence.

Children as young as 1-year old who have witnessed or even heard intimate partner violence can experience trauma symptoms, especially for those that experience extreme instances of IPV (Bogat, DeJonghe, Levendosky, Davidson, & von Eye, 2006). Children in families where domestic violence is present may have difficulties in school from not being able to focus their attention and may have lower grades than those who do not experience violence in the home (Office on Women's Health, 2019). Children in these cases also report being on edge preparing for an event to occur (Domestic Violence Roundtable, 2008; Office on Women's Health, 2019). Individuals who experience domestic violence at a young age do not develop a normal level of trust with their parents because they do not receive a sufficient amount of safety in their environment (Amanda, 2015). These individuals then are unable to form healthy relationships within the family, as well as outside the family (Amanda, 2015). These effects can last years or for the remainder of their lifetime, depending on the frequency, intensity, and duration of the violence in their home (Amanda, 2015).

Children are often the silent victims in violent relationships involving their parents or caregivers. The effects on children and what they hear, see, or experience can be undermined by those in the relationship. Research shows that a child's view shifts in understanding as the child grows into an adult and they can better understand the situation (Buchanan, et al., 2015). The child's internal working models may determine the fate of their relationship with their caregiver and all other future relationships (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). In addition, those with

negative attachment experiences can break the intergenerational cycle of poor parenting, depending on their ability to comprehend negative experiences (Phelps, Belsky, and Crnic, 1998). It can also shape the way they view themselves, their relationships with romantic partners and others, as well as the type of parenting they provide to their own children (Phelps et al., 1998).

### **Native American Families**

There is very little research on domestic violence within Native American communities, hence the need to address this issue, as well as all aspects in order to provide adequate resources. The information provided in these studies find high occurrences of domestic violence within Native American families. One study by Jones (2008) found that isolation, lack of services and remoteness of those services, and lack of jobs were factors of an impoverished community and possibly led to the high levels of violence. In addition, other studies have found that the high rates of alcohol and substance abuse, historical trauma, and intergenerational cycles of abuse should also be considered (Jones, 2008; McEachern, Van Winkle, & Steiner, 1998).

There are many factors, specific to living on the reservation, to consider when leaving a violent relationship, especially when children are involved. In Native American communities these include, lack of cell phone service in a majority of the homes, distance becomes an issue when the need for services arise, and the lack of resources to support a battered individual and their children until they can provide their own stability (McEachern et al., 1998). Often times, this requires a woman to leave the reservation and possibly everything she has known, to start a new life (McEachern et al., 1998). There are also common barriers within Native American families, including parents wanting a father/mother figure in their child's life, fear that the abuser will take the child away, and cultural and family influences (Rivers, 2005). It is particularly vital

then to understand perspectives of parent-child relationships from those who have experienced IPV amongst Native American families.

This topic is important to understand for many reasons, including the safety and well-being of future generations of Native American families, understanding different perspectives of what the parent and child experience, which may help in the restoration process of these relationships, improvements in tribal programming and resources, and helping victims understand their situations so that they can maintain balance in their lives and build healthier generations of families. Along with providing more knowledge on the topic for practitioners, advocates, and tribal justice systems.

### **Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory describes the relationship between the child and their primary caregiver as the most important aspect of human development throughout life (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). The primary caregiver, usually the mother, is the basis for the child's behavior and permits them to explore and play, while also trusting that their attachment figure will be there for support (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). These are based on the relationship between the child and the primary caregiver as the child begins to develop an internal working model.

Internal working models, or mental representations, are one's expectations of self and others (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). These models are established through repeated, pervasive, and consistent interactions with their parent or caregiver (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). In violent households, an abused parent may not have the capacity to provide comfort and support to their child or may be punished by the other parent for providing these basic needs (Bancroft, Ritchie, & Silverman, 2012). It is through past experiences, that patterns created by the responsiveness of the caregiver are established (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). An

internal working model contributes to how individuals view themselves as acceptable or worthy of love, and how individuals view our attachment figures as reliable for providing comfort throughout their lives (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). An abuser's actions can cause major disturbances in the parent-child relationship (Bancroft, et al., 2012).

Children look for protection from their parents; in abusive relationships, the parent-child relationship experiences increased demands, which may cause the parenting to become ineffective and the child may become sensitized to stressful situations (Davies, Winter, & Cicchetti, 2006). Violence within these families negatively impacts a child's internal working model, which results in the lack of worthiness in future relationships (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). Those who perceive their mother as failing to protect them in a violent relationship, report feelings of betrayal, regret, and unresolved relationships with their mothers (Buchanan, et al., 2015). Individuals with coherent memories of their mother's efforts to protect them were more likely to reveal feelings of empathy and closeness to the mothers, throughout childhood and when reflecting back as an adult (Buchanan, et al., 2015). Children who experience mothers who are supportive and available are better able to have open conversations with their children, within the circumstances of effective parent-child interactions (Buchanan, et. al, 2015).

It is also important that mothers are able to hear and accept their adult child's viewpoints about their experiences (Buchanan, et al., 2015). These discussions allow for closer parent-child relationships (Buchanan, et al., 2015). It is important to understand IPV within Native American families to better understand the disturbances created in parent-child attachments, given the circumstances of living on the reservation, and the higher rates of domestic abuse within these families. It is also important to understand how it relates to their internal working models towards their abused parent and for future relationships.



## Methods

The research was conducted in the American southwest region. The criteria of inclusion consisted of Native American adults, 18 years of age or older, who identified themselves as previously being in an abusive relationship where a child was present, or a child, now an adult, who had previously experienced intimate partner violence where their parent or primary caretaker was the victim and they were a minor child being exposed to the violence. For this study there were two individuals; one parent and one child who were interviewed using a semi-structured interview method. This included questions relating to their experience and how they interpreted their parent-child relationship before, during, and after the intimate partner violence occurred. It was also important to gain knowledge about their attachment to their parent and how that may have changed over time. A different interview guide was used for parents and children (See Appendix for interview guides). The interviewer probed with follow-up questions when relevant. Sample questions asked to parents and children include:

### Questions to child:

- From what you can remember, what was your parent-child relationship or interaction like before he/she was involved in the abusive relationship?
- How would you describe your level of protection by your parent during or immediately after an event?
- How did this experience influence, if at all, your expectations of what a relationship is like or should be like?

### Questions to parent:

- Describe the quality of the relationship you had with your child (before the IPV/domestic violence occurred).

- Probe: What makes you believe that you and your child were close at his/her early age?
- How would you describe your child's knowledge of what was going on at the time?
- What conversations did you have with your child about the abuse after it had stopped?

Recruitment was done by posting flyers, through listserv email messages, and social media posts asking to share or forward the information to anyone whom the research might interest. The flyers and listservs occurred within a large public university. These methods allowed for convenience of the public to view the flyer and supported viewers sharing of the study's information (i.e. snowball sampling).

Eligibility called for Native American adults who were either a parent or child who had previously experienced intimate partner violence within their family. All participants had to be 18 years old or older at the time of the interview. This study was not limited by gender. To determine eligibility, screener questions were asked about the person's age, whether they identified as Native American, and if they had experienced intimate partner violence as a victim where their child was present, or if they were a minor child when their parent or primary caregiver was involved in a violent relationship. If the individual was deemed eligible, then a date, time, and location, convenient for the participant, was chosen. One study was conducted in a quiet interview room on a university campus and another was done over the phone. Prior to each interview, consent was obtained. A question regarding the safety of the location was also asked to the participant to ensure that they felt safe participating in the study and at that particular location. Demographic information was then taken. This form asked questions relating

to age, tribal affiliation, sex, marital status, level of education, whether they were interviewing as the parent or child in the situation, and their household make-up at the time of the experience.

Analysis of the study consisted of the interviews transcribed verbatim and thoroughly reviewed by the author and the advisor. All names and sensitive information were given pseudonyms. Open coding was conducted to reveal major ideas and concepts being discussed (Babbie, 2013). The open codes helped refine the analysis towards major themes. Sample open codes include: “Single-provider household (mother),” “Dad did not work,” “Parental encouragement,” “Hiding the abuse,” “Dad drunk,” “Stayed with family to escape,” “Protection by mother” and “Talking about the abuse.” The major themes focus on issues before, during, and after the abuse. The major themes and sub-themes are reported below.

## **Results**

### **Before the Abuse**

Prior to IPV in the home, parent and child interpretations of the relationship varied. For Sally, the parent participant, her interpretation about the relationship differed as she recalls not having a relationship with her child due to her job as a full-time worker. Whereas, Norma, the child participant, perceived her relationship quality as a strong bond. In both situations the mother was the primary financial provider and the father was not employed so he stayed at home with the child and provided child care needs. The mothers were involved in the child’s physical and medical needs and education and would make efforts to support their child’s interests in various ways. Sally’s child was four-years-old when the violence began, and Norma was ten-years-old when the violence occurred in her household.

***Subtheme 1: The mother-child relationship and parent involvement.*** Before the abuse, the parent-child relationship was noted to be a positive relationship in both the parent and child

participant's view. There was a great deal of involvement in the child's everyday activities, needs, and interest in the child's education. For example, Norma, a child during the abuse, noted her mother as being very affectionate and encouraging. Her mother was physically and emotionally there for her and she gives examples of how her mother attended school field trips with her and hosted birthday parties:

I was very, very close with my mother, and I loved her. She was always volunteering at my school, really encouraging me, really providing the emotional support that I needed. She was very loving, like physically loving, giving that physical affection which is what I liked. – Norma, child

It was good, like I said she (mom) was always around, helping me with school work and you know going with me on field trips, she was just very involved in school for me and very involved in my life. She would be the one to encourage me too. She would drive me to all my friends' houses and she would host birthday parties for me. – Norma, child

Another quote from Norma described the affection she was given, "they would definitely hug me and hold me and yea, just give me that physical affection." She also described how her mother encouraged her and became more involved in her life:

I would say, supportive-wise my mom helped me in all aspects. My dad probably more helped me with physical support in terms of, you know, if I got hurt he would to help me. But my mom was a big encourager. – Norma, child

My mom would always, has always encouraged me since day one, that didn't really change. I think she might've put more focus on me because she was getting a lot more involved in my school and kind of my life. – Norma, child

For Sally, she viewed her relationship with her child as more needs based. She provided him with support that required her attention, such as doctor's appointments and clothes for school.

I kind of think it was more based on the needs he had. He needed you know glasses I would take him to get his frames. If he had a doctor's appointment, I would make sure to take him. You know if he needed shoes or clothes or going to school I was there. – Sally, parent

She worked long hours and was usually away from the child for most of the day and sometimes on weekends. Sally noted, “I think that’s where he saw me a lot in the work setting or talking to people.” She also says she sometimes would leave early to work and come back too late to even see her son. Sally worked from the time her son was a young child and continued to work throughout his childhood.

He always just saw me working. I started when he was about 6 months...I’d just been working crazy long hours or be out of the house before he’d wake up or come back really late when he was done for—down for bed. – Sally, parent

Sally felt as though she missed out on the early days of her child’s life due to her having to work all the time, “I missed out a lot and I was realizing that as he was growing up, I’m missing out on everything.” She stated that when she would come home from work, her child would show excitement upon her return, despite her not being physically there for him.

I would come back after an evening shift at my job and I would open the door and he’d scream, MOM! And the dog would start jumping and he would come and hug me and it was pretty cool, like to see that he was excited that I was finally back home, just like not upset, just more like happy. – Sally, parent

She does mention spending quality time with her family in things like going on walks, visiting museums and watching movies at home:

We’d take walks around town. We were always, like we’d try to pick fruit from the trees, just what we could get. Yea a lot of walks, a lot of like, he liked trains so we took him to train museums, watched movies on trains, just a lot of home time. We were there sitting together and watching different movies, different tv shows, playing with the dog, feeding them, cooking, yea. He was a very fast paced boy. – Sally, parent

She also made efforts to check in on her child at school and to contribute to his education, “I’d make time to go and visit, step in and see how he was doing in Head Start” and “we’d read together before bedtime...that was a big deal to him that we read books.”

The children dealt with health and developmental issues early in their lives and their parents made attempts to aid their child. Norma stated that she was asthmatic and had body aches as a child.

A lot of physical affection and they also supported me health-wise. As a kid I struggled with asthma and these, kind of weird pains, so I would wake up coughing and not being able to breath, and all my joints would just be hurting. So, they would just be there emotionally and physically kind of helping me throughout the night and making sure that I was ok. – Norma, child

Sally also described her son's speech delay and how she encouraged him to keep talking:

He has, kind of a speech delay so he's, he'd just go on and on and on and we'd just sit there and say "really", "oh my gosh" like just encourage him to keep on saying whatever he was saying, cause it was intensely explained and all these different words were coming out. – Sally, parent

The quality of the parent-child relationship as described by the participants was interpreted as predominately positive, as far as they both remember beneficial influences and involvement in the child's life. The parental involvement impacted the child's view of their relationship a great deal, especially going into the abusive relationship, unknowingly. Parental involvement affected the parent's interpretation of their relationship as beneficial, regardless of whether the parent felt like she did not have a relationship with her child. The examples given show high involvement and occurrences of quality time spent with the child.

***Subtheme 2: Father alcohol issues.*** The presence of alcohol was an issue in the families and a major factor in the violence itself. The alcohol was introduced to the family at different times. In Sally's situation, she states that her partner's family had a history of alcohol abuse, "I think what his dad did is what his father's father did, you know he treated his son the same way and my son's dad grew up that way and grew up around alcoholics," but her partner did not drink until later in the relationship and was influenced by another family member.

I found out over time that, of a relative of his was who coming to visit or asking you know for things, cause I think he was homeless or he was just living with people. He would come over to our place and hang out with, with my son's dad and then eventually it became where he was showing up with beer and he would get, he would get, he would get, not drunk but, what do they call it when they're just, buzzed. Getting a little bit of buzz going on and then these weird conversations over the phone happened as I'm driving back. It was just, and I'd ask him over time, are you drunk? And he wouldn't give me a straight answer and then it would turn into, "no, I'm just saying this", "I'm just talking. – Sally, parent

She adds that alcohol was not something her child even knew about, therefore he did not know how the alcohol was affecting his father's behavior.

I feel like he knew something bad was happening. I don't think he understood why or that his, dad was drunk. Actually, I have come home and asked my son, has your dad been drinking. Seeing if he knew what that meant, and he shook his head, no. I'm not sure, that's still ambiguous, that could, you know, mean that he knew he wasn't drinking water or a soda, but he was drinking. I just don't think my son understood that's what he was doing and what it was doing to him.  
– Sally, parent

In Norma's case, she said her dad's alcoholism was present from an early age as she remembered, "when I was born, we moved down to New Mexico, and so, at that time, my dad had been drinking a little, but it wasn't anything big." Her father's alcohol consumption increased gradually over time to where it was becoming an issue within the family. She remembers times when his drinking had caused arguments with her mother, "being that my dad is an alcoholic, so of course he would use all that money...he would leave to go to the bar or go to karaoke." Her father, at first would remove himself from the arguments to further pursue his drinking, "eventually my—you know after, my dad would leave, or he would go in the back and start drinking again so he would just leave." Norma also described how the alcohol led to threatening behavior from her dad:

when she (mom) was picking me up to bring me back home, she was panicked and on the way back to my house, she said that your dad was drunk again and he's passed out right now, but basically he told me that I would never be able to leave the house, I would never be able to speak to my family, basically he was holding

her—he threatened to hold her hostage, and that she couldn't leave but when he was passed out, luckily she was able to leave the house and pick me up. – Norma, child

Here Norma talks about how she felt knowing her mother was being abused and how her father often did not remember his behavior or the violence after passing out from being drunk:

It made me feel awful. It made me angry, especially to my dad that he would be like, he would even do that to her and that he would forget about it the next morning and not really know what happened. –Norma, child

Her father eventually stopped drinking upon his incarceration and continued his sobriety after being released from jail. It was then that the abuse had ended, “I think things kind of ended when my dad was arrested because after he had been in jail for about 7 months. He was of course sober in jail, so he remained sober after that incident.”

While participants described the significance that alcohol had on the family, and its relation to the abuse of their mother's, it also impacted the mother-child relationship as the women had more responsibilities for protecting their child during the abuse.

### **During the Abuse**

*Subtheme 1: Strategies to protect the child.* The mother's protectiveness was a common theme in the parent-child relationships, however the ways that these mothers protected their children differed. Norma remembers her mother's efforts, at first, to stay silent about the abuse, “my mom wouldn't say too much anymore. Saying anything about my dad or any of the struggles.” At the time of the abuse, Norma was old enough to hear and understand the implications of physical abuse. At first, she would hear her parents arguing in their bedroom. As these altercations became violent, Norma remembered hearing loud noises coming from her parent's bedroom and then her mother crying afterwards. She stated that she could sense that her mother was hurt.

They would be in the bedroom and I would hear them yelling, behind closed doors mostly. And then I would hear, like some sort of knock on the wall or



something and I think at, I think, a lot of this kind of happened behind closed doors in the beginning. My dad would punch through the wall or he would knock stuff down and then, and that's how it started and eventually I feel like I kind of heard them, and my mom kind of crying, not really yelling but crying. I could sense that she was hurt. –Norma, child

Norma's mother would check on her immediately after an event of IPV to ensure her that she was ok, in an effort to ease her child's worries, "so she would definitely come and see me and check on me and tell me you know, just tell me, 'I'm sorry' and that 'I'm here' and I guess just reassured me that she's still doing ok." Her mother's attempts to guarantee her security continued, "my mom, she probably over-comforted me in some areas, just to like assure that I was going to be ok. She definitely tried to protect me as much as she could, while everything was happening."

As the violence intensified, her mother would take her to stay at her friend's house or other family members' houses to escape the violence:

That was probably when I was 14-13, and then after that, I started staying with my friends at the time, my best friend at the time, I started staying at her house a lot, so I wouldn't really see too much of what was happening cause I just really wanted to avoid it. – Norma, child

Her mother recognized that the violence was affecting her child, so she would allow Norma to stay with her family during the summer and on other occasions, for various days at a time.

I think she just accepted that its best that I you know be away during that time. I know sometimes I would actually stay with my grandma or my aunt too, especially during the summer when school was off. I would stay with my family in Phoenix for multiple days at a time. – Norma, child

There were alternative ways of protection from Norma's mother, such as making sure that her teachers knew some type of struggle with home life was distracting her from keeping up in school:

She would actually make sure like even at school that the teachers knew that there was some tough situation happening at home. So, she would be over protective in terms of making sure that I was still doing good in school and explaining to the teachers the situation that was happening. So, she would go to great lengths just to make sure that I was going to be ok in all ways. – Norma, child

Sally also describes how the protectiveness of her child factored into their parent-child relationship. She stated that she made efforts to protect her child from witnessing the violence, but her child knew something bad was occurring, he just didn't know what it was, "the physical, he never knew. I don't think. Yea, I don't think he knew the physical stuff was happening, but the verbal abuse, for sure. He heard, he'd hear us yelling or, (I'd) send him to his room." Sally stated that the physical abuse would occur at night, while her son was asleep and the arguments occurred at various times. She would send him to his room when she felt an event of IPV was about to occur and she knew that he could sense an oncoming IPV event:

I feel like he knew something bad was happening. I don't think he understood why, but I—I discredit my son a lot, cause he can read body language, he can read when something's not right. So, I think that he understood there was a lot of wrong being done. I just don't know if he knew the capacity of like the violence and, these things took place, physical stuff took place usually when he was asleep. The verbal arguments took place when he was in his room, but I think he knew that something was wrong. – Sally, parent

Sally recalled the violence that occurred in her own home as a child, and how the silence triggered unwanted memories, so she would make sure that there was some type of noise to soothe her son from hearing the altercations.

Well I'd say that there was noise, I always made sure there was like music or the tv was on loud. In my house when I was growing up, when stuff was going down, fights and stuff, there was no noise, it was very quiet. People were in their separate rooms, it was just a scary noise to have no noise and I always made sure that there was always something on. There was something coming from the tv, a cartoon, something he enjoyed that was on, music or somebody talking. I felt like that was going to ease me and then I would be able to ease on him. – Sally, parent

Like Norma's mother, she would send her son to stay with relatives for multiple days at a time, to escape the violence:

I'd send him out. I'd send him with his grandparents. I'd ask them to intervene a lot with his care while I was dealing with all of that and they helped me, they helped me out a lot to just keep him during the week, during the weekends.  
– Sally, parent

As the father threatened to leave and take their child with him, she would physically intervene by standing in his way. She then always felt she had to keep her son with her, to prevent his father from taking the child away from her:

My son's dad would, man, repeatedly threaten me that he would take him from me and not let me see him and I would physically try to prevent him from doing that. I would block him from his room and say you can leave, but you're not going take him and yea I would, I just you know, kind of have a standoff with him, physical standoff because even though, I was smaller than him I would at least try, you know to prevent him from doing that. –Sally, parent

At the time, Sally was travelling a long distance to and from work. She would take her son with her to work or to a family member to ensure that her son would not be taken away from her.

I was doing the back and forth thing, it just became necessary to take my son with me wherever I went. So, I'd bring him to my job or, and he'd wait there with me, or yea I'd take him to my aunts with me when we were staying there with her and her family. Yea, I just tried to keep him with me all the time cause his dad was very threatening about separating us. – Sally, parent

During the violence, Sally's child could not comprehend the situation his mother was in, perhaps because he was too young or because, as Sally says, she doesn't think he knew what was happening at the time. She tried to make things seem as normal as possible, "I have a younger sister...so being around her and bringing a little bit of like, just child-like interaction, just being around another kid and having the freedom to run around and play and not be worried, just trying to normalize all of this change." It wasn't until later, when the child was old enough to

understand the situation that she began telling him why they moved away from the reservation and why his father was in jail and no longer in their home:

I never explained any of that until he got older. I just didn't feel like he would have the understanding to know what gets you there (jail), what's the consequences of being there and also, what it's like for somebody to do that to somebody else. Hurt them and talk to them in the ways that his dad did, until he got older and then I started to explain why, how we ended up in California and why he, you know why he can't, why he wasn't able to go back (to the reservation). – Sally, parent

Her son would have to travel with her for the hour-long drive to and from work, but it was these trips that they began to establish a meaningful relationship, in her eyes, as this time provided long conversations and they were able learn more about each other and increase the quality of their relationship.

***Subtheme 2: The quality of the mother-child relationship.*** The participants described the quality of their parent-child relationship as being mostly positive throughout the experience of IPV. Sally's child experienced the IPV from ages five to seven-years-old and Norma experienced the IPV in her family from age 10 up until she was 16-years-old.

Sally described their relationship as, not as close as she wanted it to be in the beginning to building a stronger bond and spending more time together during the IPV, partly because of the repeated threats by the father to take the child away from her. Sally stated that as her child grew older, she was better able to explain their situation. They were both in school at the time so that provided them with more time together. The time they spent together allowed for a more meaningful relationship.

As he got older, we became more, and I, as we were together all the time. That's where it radically became more open to conversation. We'd go for walks in the evening... It became just a thing like, oh yea, we can work this out. So, it was like school, kind of rounded us to have a lot of time together and a lot of time to talk, a lot of walking around here so we talked a lot and I think that's what helped to

come from being distant and going through grieving to talking one on one about stuff and what his thoughts were. – Sally, parent

In Norma's case, she stated that her and her mother's relationship was close at an early age. She described her parent-child relationship as strong when the IPV first began, as her mother would confide in her, "me and my mom talked a lot more, cause I was basically her, the person she confided in." However, as time progressed, and her mother continued to take her father back, her relationship with her mother changed in a negative way because she could not understand why her mother would continue to let this happen. She talked about how she would shut down and not want to be around either of her parents:

I think initially when they would first get back together, I would lose, I just feel like I couldn't depend on them because I would just think they were crazy for getting back together. But I think at those points, I did kind of not trust my mom. I think that's what caused me to just close off periodically, was just not understanding why she would you know, go through all of this and have us still live with my dad...yea and it would just be when they first got back together or were together. That's when I would just kind of, not either want to be around them at all. – Norma, child

Norma described how her mother supported her dad while he was in jail. She remembers her mother asking her if she wanted to go visit her dad and it made her angry that she even asked.

There was a point at the end when my dad did get arrested and he did serve time for about seven months. And when my mom supported my dad through all of that, I think I kind of lost it around there too...it definitely bothered me. She would go and take my sisters to go see my dad at the jail and I refused to see him for a couple of months and I would kind of get angry with my mom when she would ask me if I wanted to go and see him. I just didn't know why she wanted me to go see him – Norma, child

The parent-child relationship has since grown stronger now that her parents are no longer together and the two were able to talk about their feelings towards each other and what they experienced during that time.

***Subtheme 3: Mother-child conversations about the abuse.*** There are similarities in being able to talk about their experiences within the dyad relationship. The participants stated that they have talked to their parent or child about the IPV relationship and how it impacted them. The parent-child relationship has evolved with these conversations. However, most of the conversations during the abuse were not as easily approached while the abuse was still present.

During the abuse, Sally did not have conversations with her son about the IPV, partly because of his age and she didn't think that he would understand. She also stated that although her son did not ask questions, she still would apologize to him:

He just went along with it, he went along with whatever I was able to do for him. I think a lot of him saw that I struggled. And he's just so young, it's not fair. I told him that too, "it's not fair to you and I'm sorry." Nobody should go through that as a kid. – Sally, parent

She said he knew something bad was happening and there were times when she couldn't hide that something was wrong, but she just did not know how to explain it to her son:

I feel like there's a part where he saw me really break down so it wasn't like, there wasn't breaks in between of him not knowing what to do cause I just didn't know what to do either and I didn't have words either. – Sally, parent

Other times it was evident, like when the cops would show up at their house, but she still felt that he could not understand at such a young age:

It was not something that I was able to cover up though cause police were there, sirens were on, people were taking photographs, there were things that were happening that I just couldn't explain to him. He was really, to me he was really young. He couldn't really, he, going back to that thing where he knew something bad was happening and I couldn't get myself together to explain to him or where his dad was...I didn't want to have to explain. – Sally, parent

She also didn't think that he would understand when his dad was in jail and why he was there, but the dad called her parents and urged her to take him. She then took her son to visit his father, because she felt it would help answer some of her son's unasked questions about him:

He called to my parents and asked if I could bring my son to see him. So, there was a lot of mediation between that and so, I just dropped what I felt I need to explain and just took him and didn't say much but he wanted to see his dad. He felt like that was going to ease a little, like whatever he was going through. His curiosity, where he went, what he did. I never explained any of that until he got older. I just didn't feel like he would have the understanding to know what gets you there, what's the consequences of being there and also, what it's like for somebody to do that to somebody else. Hurt them and talk to them in the ways that his dad did until he got older and then I started to explain why. – Sally, parent

Norma remembers her and her mother's conversation about what was going on within their household, but she says her mother was never disclosed the physical abuse, even though she knew it was happening. Her mother only talked about the stress and her worries about Norma's father. She would apologize to Norma about having to witness the violence, but her mother never explicitly talked about the violence.

She never out right came and told me that your dad is hitting me or slapping me or pushing me, but I could always sense it. I think she was just really, as time progressed she would just talk about how stressful it is, how much she worried about my dad and I would kind of be there to hold her. She would cry a lot around me, kind of just saying, "I'm sorry that you have to see this." I just remember her crying to me a lot more as opposed to just telling me her feelings, she would just cry with me a lot more. Especially when my dad left. So, I felt like, yea she would just let out her emotions physically as opposed just to talking about them, more. – Norma, child

Norma felt that her mother made excuses for her abuser's behavior in the way that she talked about how her father's issues with his health were of concern rather than explaining his behavior:

I'm sure there was a few times where she talked about, you know my dad had issues. And yea, I always hear about his issues from him too; his health. I knew there was a lot of things that he was going through but I guess she would just try to explain you know your dad, just is sick and he needs help, but yea. –Norma, child

Norma said her mother did not talk about the abuse to other family members, but they all knew it was occurring. Her mother encouraged her to talk about her own feelings and told her it

was ok to be upset, but she never hinted at ending the violent relationship and dismissed the abuse altogether:

Her response, hmm. I don't even know, I mean, when I remember her response was not really...she would always try to encourage me that I had a right to how I feel that even she's feeling angry or upset or sad, but that she will always be there for me. It was never, it was never like talking about putting a stop to it or—I don't even remember her saying she would ever tell anybody what was happening even though my whole family knew what was happening. I think a lot of it was just, you know, "I'm here for you", "don't ever be afraid to tell me anything", "it's ok to be upset, I'm upset too, this is just happening. – Norma, child

Norma's mother acknowledged her feelings about the abuse and her mother could tell that it bothered her, but Norma began to realize that she was getting the same result and it caused her to become distant and not want to talk to her mother:

Yea, to my mom it wouldn't easily be brought up, usually I would just be quiet. I wouldn't say anything and my mom could tell, you know, that something was different or something was bothering me so she would have to ask me multiple times you know, "what's wrong, tell me what's happening, what are you thinking" so you know, I mean we would, after each event we would, I would console her, we would probably cry together, and then I would kind of go—it would kind of go back to normal, but you know, after a few times, eventually things would just bottle up in me and I would just become quiet and not really be talking. I would definitely become depressed. And then my mom would finally come in and just talk to me and tell me to tell her what was happening with me so it would take, it would take a lot of prodding on her part to try to get me to express what I was feeling. – Norma, child

As the conversations about the abuse became more frequent and openly talked about, they helped reshape the parent-child relationship quality.

### **After the Abuse**

*Subtheme 1: The quality of the mother-child relationship.* There were changes in the parent-child relationship before, during, and after the abuse. These changes most frequently occurred while the abuse was present and regardless of the parent-child relationship before the abuse, the two parent-child relationships were able to withstand the stress and emotions that came with the



IPV. Both parent-child relationships have reconnected and built stronger bonds that continue to be reinforced today.

Norma stated that her and her mother were close before the abuse began, however, during the abuse, their relationship was challenged because her mother kept returning to her father and the abusive relationship. This caused her to lose trust in her mother to the point where they became disconnected. It was only up until her parents decided to end the relationship, that they two began to restore their relationship. As an adult, Norma says she still confides in her mother for advice on certain aspects of her own life, but she avoids talking about romantic partners:

With my mom I still, still know she's my mom and understand she is my mom but as an adult of course the relationship has changed. In terms, of just me making my own decisions for being away from home. I go to her for, I find myself going to her for work advice. And kind of just general people relationship advice but in terms of romantic partners advice I don't really talk about that. – Norma, child

Norma says she does not trust her mother's advice when it comes to relationships.

The only thing think I think I don't trust what she says is when we start talking about relationships. That's kind of why I go, where I don't really trust what she says. – Norma, child

She also states that she does not believe her mother is confident in her own advice and tries to push her step-father's opinions off on her:

I feel like, she doesn't really, she likes to bring in her husband, my step dad, into the conversation a lot and she kind of usually gives me his own advice in place of her own. So I guess that's really kind of where I'm a bit concerned cause I enjoy getting my mom's perspective but she usually tries to like get somebody else's perspective along with it, or in place of her own ideas. I just feel like sometimes she's not confident in the advice she gives about relationships so she kind of depends on my stepdad to kind of fill in for her. – Norma, child

Although there is a lack of trust in relationship advice, Norma states that her level of protection from her mother has not diminished:

Even though I protected her I knew if there was ever a chance that something was ever put on my she would be there to protect me. I never lost and still haven't lost that feeling of being fully protected by my mom. – Norma, child

Norma says her relationship with her mother remains close today, despite the level of trust in her mother's advice. She feels as though they have reconciled their past and have talked more openly, and have even joked about what happened and it has led to them a better understanding of each other:

Since the relationship, I guess, I mean even though we always kind of joke about it, but we talk about you know while they were going through that situation my dad was a practicing alcoholic, I became her husband, I became her partner. So, I think that really helped us in terms of becoming good friends, I guess. I guess it kind of helped our relationship now because we were very similar, so I can understand her since we kind of went through the same thing. I can kind of explain, I can already guess what's happening in her mind. Or I can guess the reaction that she's going to have, so I think when we do have the hard discussions, which we, we do still have those even though I'm hesitant, I'm working on it. It really kind of helped us, we can understand each other because we went through the exact same experience together. So, she knows where I'm coming from and I know where she's coming from. – Norma, child

However, she stated that she had previously made the decision to manage her issues and emotions elsewhere and that it is something that will remain throughout her life:

I don't think I ever thought it would go back to the way it was, just because at that point I was 18, 19 years old so I had already taken it upon myself, you know way back when I was 15, 16 that I would just have to find a way to deal with my issues somewhere else and I know to this day that it is something that I still—will always have to work on for the rest of my life is just learning how to talk to people about my own emotions and issues that I'm going through at that specific time. – Norma, child

For Sally, once she left the relationship, she would tell her son that they moved to the city to get a better education and to work, but she didn't say it was because she was leaving an abusive relationship with his father, "I explained to him that you know if it comes up that we need to be here because of school and that his dad, I don't even bring up his dad, I don't." When she felt he had reached an age of maturity, she talked to him about what had happened, "I think

we were just the thing about communication more. I told him things that happened later on about maybe two years after, two years after we moved up here I started to explain to him.” She tells him things that promote healthy relationships such as controlling his anger, talking about his feelings, and never physically acting out his emotions.

I feel like it’s necessary to explain to him how to treat people and how to deal with his emotions. I tell him you have two, two separate things in you, your dad’s side and me and you need to remember the anger that is inside of you can be tamed, if you only speak of it, if you talk about it, you never put hands on anybody. I tell him that. – Sally, parent

She feels that this is a more positive approach that will better help her son understand what she means when he is old enough to be involved in romantic relationships.

I try to at least express to him about how it’s important to talk about things and that it’s, that physical, physical things don’t work for anybody and that it just leads dad to bad consequences. I have given him insight into what happened between me and his dad, that’s why I tell him those things. But I’m just, talking to him like not spank—not using physical violence to push my point. Just a lot of talking cause, like that, he’s growing up in this world of masculinity and the different things that are encouraging boys to think a certain way. I don’t have, I’m not going to have control of that forever and he’s, I think he’s aware at some point, he’s going to be in control of that himself. So that’s how I’m trying to push for positive relationships. – Sally, parent

Sally stated that their parent-child relationship is a healthy one because they are together all the time. She states that her son is her best friend:

We are together all the time. That’s a really good positive. That we can’t I mean we have to be with each other. I told him we’re a team. We have to work as a team, so this can fly right. We get done with what we need to get done. Just a lot of conversations and a lot of silly things that we say to each other now. I feel like he’s my best friend.

The quality of both relationships is mostly positive. They continue to interact and have conversations about everyday topics. The conversations include advocating a relationship with their father’s as well.

***Subtheme 2: Staying connected to the father.*** The father was the abuser in both instances and although his actions and behavior negatively impacted the family structure, his presence, and absence, made a difference in the child's life. Both mothers realized how important it was for the fathers to remain in their children's lives, even after the abuse and eventual break ups. They have encouraged their children to remain in contact with their fathers.

Sally says that her educational background in Psychology has given her more knowledge about the effects of fatherless children and has influenced her decision to let her son stay in contact with his father:

I decided that my son, shouldn't be, shouldn't be taken away from him. That we should come to a compromise and that you know I went to this school, I was getting educated, I knew better, I kind of had a sense of what would happen or not happen if my kid didn't, wasn't allowed to see my son. – Sally, parent

She says she did not want her son to feel like he had to dismiss his father from his life because they did build a relationship together early on. She provided a cell phone for her son to call his dad whenever he needs to and allowed them to spend quality time together.

I just didn't want him to feel like he needed to ex out his dad from his life, especially because he was with him for so long. You know I was always working and driving him around with me to my work, so as a peace offering, I told my son, here's a cell phone call your dad when you need to, if you want to just talk to him, you know, you guys still should connect. And eventually, he would make arrangements to visit with him on the weekends, and his dad would meet. I would drop him off and he would take him for the weekend. – Sally, parent

She has created rules about disclosing information regarding their location and homelife but has supported a relationship between the father-son duo.

It was really important for my son to understand that he couldn't share where we were at. I asked him not to share where we lived with his dad. I asked him to not share anything about our lives, our new lives. I would let him know, you can tell him about your day and your school and the things you're doing, but not about home, not about me, not about anything at home or what we're doing cause it's none of his business anymore just like, when you go to see him, that's cool, that's you guys, that's your business but I don't, that's none of my business. So, I just

try to create that division of not to let him give him insight about anything. –  
Sally, parent

She has made attempts to keep his father involved in her son's education. She does this despite the father's feelings of anger toward her. She states that her last conversation ended with her hanging up on him:

My son was going to finish at the school where he was ...So, I told my son invite your dad, tell him you're finishing and you would like him to see, you would like him to be there and he didn't show up but the last, last, last, last conversation I had with him, he was still blaming me for not showing up and I felt like I didn't even need to take that anymore, that's so old I thought, so I hung up on him. And I haven't talked to him since. – Sally, parent

Norma stated that her and her father were close as a young girl, she even described herself as a "daddy's girl", however that relationship deteriorated over time, especially during the abuse and while her parents continued their on again-off again, relationship. She stated that during the abuse, the father-daughter relationship was terminated, "at that point, my dad never really comforted me. I was close with him when I was a little girl but as things progressed, our relationship pretty much ceased."

After her parents agreed to end their relationship for good, Norma's mother encouraged her to reconnect with her father.

She's encouraging me to spend more time with my dad, which I have been. She just always says that you know your dad is always going to be there for you. So, she tries to keep, keep it, keep the relationship positive with her and my dad. –  
Norma, child

She did so and said that they have established connection and she now makes time to visit with her father, "I visit my family you know maybe at least once a month. I go drive down to Albuquerque and occasionally visit my dad."

## Discussion

This study sought to understand how IPV affects parent-child relationships within Native American families, specifically their attachment. We sought to learn more about the changes that occur in these relationships and attachments before, during, and after experiencing and/or being a victim of IPV.

The results indicated the parent-child relationship remained unbroken despite their experiences with the presence of IPV. Attachment theory provides that human development is based on the connectedness and responsiveness of the primary caregiver to their child and continues throughout the life course (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999.) The foundation that both mothers provided which included encouragement, support, protection, and open conversations regarding the situation they were in, allowed the children to form a positive view of their parent and thus, enabled a positive relationship after the violence. We believed that the parent-child relationship would be negatively affected by the experience of IPV and that the child would continue to have a negative outlook on their abused parent for failure to leave the relationship or the impression of being able to leave.

These interpretations are consistent with attachment theory in that the child's connection to their primary caregiver is based on the responsiveness of their mother. The repeated, pervasive, consistent support and encouragement from their mother's established the child's internal working model of how they view themselves as worthy of love and how they view others ability to provide comfort (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). The mothers were supportive of their children before, during, and after the abuse and were able to provide protection, which may have aided in deterring negative impressions of their primary caregiver. The parent-child relationships remained in-tact for majority of the duration of the violence and

has provided the child with a coherent understanding of their own and their mother's experiences. Conversations about the violence has strengthened their relationships. The mother's encouragement extends further by promoting a relationship between the child and their father, despite their perceptions of him.

While the interviewees indicated mostly positive parent-child relationship outcomes, Norma's internal working model did appear affected by the exposure of her mother's repeated actions of returning to her abuser, to where she is skeptical about accepting her mother's advice in romantic relationships and also has an immediate fight or flight response to disagreements in her own relationship (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). We predicted that the internal working model would be affected in a similar way, however, it was expected to be affected earlier in the abuse.

The parents provide open conversations about the abuse. This has helped to preserve the parent-child relationship. The mothers also encourage their children to remain in contact with their fathers, despite their negative experiences with him. This was not predicted to be something that the abused parent discussed nor advocated for. The literature supports our findings regarding the adaptability of the parent-child relationship (Buchanan, et al, 2015) and attachment (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). The internal working model of the child is consistent with the literature as well (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999).

Barriers for leaving the relationships included isolation, lack of services (Jones, 2008), lack of transportation, in addition, in Native American families with children, intergenerational cycles of abuse were common and having to start a new life off the reservation had to be considered when leaving an abusive relationship (McEachern, et al., 1998). Both mothers were mentioned as the primary financial provider for the family, they both had personal transportation

and also contacted law enforcement to intervene. This contradicts the findings that they lacked proper resources and financial means to leave the relationship (Jones, 2008; McEachern et al., 1998). However, Sally did have to leave the reservation to escape her abusive relationship, which is a major factor of consideration for Native American women with children (McEachern et al., 1998). Sally also referenced the intergenerational cycle of abuse that developed in the father's family. Norma did not state whether her father inherited the cycle of abuse. Nor did her family have to leave the reservation to escape the violence because her father stopped drinking and therefore, ended the violence. The contributors to increased violence within Native American communities include, lack of jobs and high rates of alcoholism (Jones, 2008). These families experienced both. The fathers were not employed most of the time and the violence escalated with alcohol.

The social work model presents that women want the violence to end, not the relationship (Keeling & Van Wormer, 2012). This was evident for Norma's mother as she stated her mother showed affection towards Norma's father in bad times, she also supported him while he was in jail. In Sally's experience, she stated that her and her child's father were together for 15 years and he was the only person she had been involved with. She would have most likely stayed in the relationship had the violence not occurred. We believe that both mothers identified with this model.

The children were both reported as having difficulties in school, which was found to be true for children who experience domestic violence within their homes (Office on Women's Health, 2019). Norma reported that her mother would occasionally have to talk to her teachers about the difficulties at home and her teachers would sympathize with her so that Norma would not fail a class. Sally's son was reported to have a speech delay, which continued to affect his



education. She mentioned that he is received an individualized education program (IEP), which is provided for children to receive special education services.

Implications for the child included the child's view can be altered as the child grows older and is better able to comprehend their experiences (Buchanan, et al., 2015). This was the case in the event of IPV. For Norma, a child at the time, she explained that during the violence, she did not understand why her mother continued the relationship with her father, knowing that he would abuse her. After the relationship ended, she recognized that it was something that was out of her control and her and her mother began to reconnect. As for Sally, the parent participant, she says that her son was young at the time of the violence and had no knowledge of what she was going through, but now that he is older and she has explained what happened, he is able to understand why they are no longer in the same household as his father. Their parent-child relationship continues to evolve as well.

Further, children exposed to domestic violence construct a lower level of trust with their parents because they do not receive ample safety in their environment as a child (Amanda, 2015). It was also noted that these effects can last for years or even throughout their lives. Norma stated that there are particular areas where she does not trust her mother's advice. She also stated that she knows her issues will remain throughout her life (Amanda, 2015). This is consistent with these findings. For Sally's son, this was not verified because there were no examples given to determine the degree of trust in his mother and how this will affect him over time. A further study of both parent and child interviews was specified in the limitations section.

Research found that children, as adults, who had coherent memories of their mother's efforts to protect them were likely to feel empathy and have closer relationships with their mother (Buchanan, et al., 2015). Norma, who was the only adult child participant, proved this to

be true. She remembered various efforts that her mother made to protect her, including checking on her immediately following an event of IPV, removing her from the household to avoid witnessing these events, and being over protective in terms of her education. Norma stated that she sympathizes with her mother and views her as a strong woman for having to experience abuse. Her mother has allowed her to express her feelings about her own perceptions, which is also found to be important in building closer parent-child relationships (Buchanan, et al., 2015).

### **Limitations and Implications for Future Studies**

A significant limitation for this study was the sample size. We interviewed two individuals; one parent and one child who identified as Native American and were exposed to intimate partner violence. Another important limitation was that the individuals were not from the same family. This provided one-sided interpretations of either the parent or the child and their perception of the parent-child relationship before, during, and after experiencing IPV. In addition, there were other siblings present in the home and extended family members who were aware of the situation, however, their interpretations were not included in this study. A longitudinal study of parent-child relationships within Native American families who experienced IPV may be more appropriate in understanding the outcomes. In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted, however, memories of past events could have affected our results.

Future studies should investigate the degree to which IPV within Native American families affects the parent-child relationship with the abuser in the family. Our findings are based on the mother-child relationship because she was the victim in these scenarios. Another instance should aim to address implications of abusive mother's in the family. This study focused primarily on the mother as the victim and the father as the abuser, however in some cases, the

father may be the victim. With the changes in family households, studies should also focus on same-sex couples and how domestic violence affects children in those families. A broader study should include how IPV impacts Native American families who reside on reservations compared to those living in urban areas and how the availability of resources differs.

Native American families experience high rates of alcoholism, which is a significant factor in families where abuse is present. This may also contribute to the common cycle of intergenerational violence; therefore, we should seek to improve existing programs to combine services that address both issues concurrently. Tribal policies have made improvements in their criminal justice systems and law enforcement on how to approach IPV, however there is further work to be done to ensure that justice is served and to deter abusers from becoming repeat offenders. Tribal law enforcement policies often rely on the federal courts to enhance punishments for domestic violence offenses, but occasionally these individuals slip through the tribal courts with lower sentences and sometimes without time served. This could be addressed by creating laws at the tribal justice level rather than expecting the federal courts to intervene.

### **Conclusion**

The parent-child relationships within Native American families who were exposed to intimate partner violence were found to have experienced changes in the quality of their relationships before, during, and after the abuse. The quality of the relationship before the violence began was noted to be mostly positive for both participants. Parental involvement was found to have a beneficial impact in how the relationship evolved. The responsiveness of parents to their children is a critical aspect in creating their internal working models. The importance of parental involvement needs to be emphasized when working with these families, to help keep parent-child relationships strong, regardless of their past experiences.

Alcohol was present in both families and intensified the violence. Alcohol is illegal on most reservations; however, it is notoriously widespread throughout these communities. As advocates against domestic violence, we need to understand the role of alcohol, not just as an issue in itself, but as an issue that negatively affects other aspects of families.

During the abuse, the mothers implemented various strategies to protect their children from witnessing the violence. The actions they took greatly impacted the sympathy and closeness they had for their mothers after the abuse. The parent-child relationship quality varied during the abuse. Norma, the child participant, stated that the parent-child relationship was close when the violence began and then was strained after her mother continued to remain involved with her father. While Sally, the parent participant, stated that her parent-child relationship improved throughout the abuse because her spouse at the time would threaten to take her son from her, so she always had to keep him with her, this provided the two with more quality time spent together.

Conversations about the abuse made a positive impact on the parent-child relationship. Although they were not easily brought up, they helped explain much of the ambiguity of the family issues during the abuse. Conversations continue to be an important factor in keeping the parent-child relationship strong. They also provide the duo with a healthy way to address other issues related to positive relationships for the future.

The quality of the parent-child relationship after the abuse proved to be resilient, despite previous perceptions. The participants indicated that father-child relationships were encouraged. Staying connected to the father was found to be important to the mothers and supported. Native Americans hold the family as the most important support figure throughout their lives. The family goes beyond the typical immediate family of mother, father, and siblings. It is essential to

keep these structures in place and for individuals to know that family can be a resource on its own.

## References

- Amanda, L. (2015). Domestic Violence in Families: Theory, Effects, and Intervention. *Social Justice Solutions*. <http://www.socialjusticesolutions.org/2015/06/25/domestic-violence-families-theory-effects-intervention/>
- Babbie, E. (2013). Analyzing Qualitative Data. In E. Babbie (13<sup>th</sup> Edition), *The Practice of Social Research* (pp. 389-412). United States: Cengage Learning.
- Bancroft, L., Ritchie, D., & Silverman, J. G. (2012). *The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2012. Web.
- Bogat, G. A, DeJonghe, E., Levendosky, A. A., Davidson, W. S., and Von Eye, A. (2006). Trauma Symptoms among Infants Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence. *Child Abuse & Neglect: The International Journal* 30.2 (2006): 109-25.
- Bretherton, I., & Munholland, K. (1999). Internal working models in attachment relationships: A construct revisited. In J. Cassidy & P. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (pp. 89-111). New York: Guilford
- Buchanan, F., Wendt, S., & Moulding, N. (2015). Growing up in domestic violence: What does maternal protectiveness mean? *Qualitative Social Work*, 14(3), 399–415.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018). Intimate Partner Violence. Date accessed: March 18, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/index.html>
- Davies, P. T., Winter, M. A., and Cicchetti, D. (2006). The Implications of Emotional Security Theory for Understanding and Treating Childhood Psychopathology. *Development and Psychopathology* 18.3: 707-35.

Domestic Violence Roundtable. (2008). The Effects of Domestic Violence on Children. Date accessed: February 22, 2019. Retrieved from:

<http://www.domesticviolenceroundtable.org/effect-on-children.html>

Domestic Violence Statistics. (2019). Date accessed: March 16, 2019. Retrieved from:

<https://domesticviolencestatistics.org/domestic-violence-statistics/>

Dugan, L., Nagin, D. S., & Rosenfeld, R., (2003). Exposure Reduction or Retaliation? The Effects of Domestic Violence Resources on Intimate-Partner Homicide. *Law & Society Review* 37.1: 169-98.

Hart, Rebecca A.; Lowther, M. Alexander. (2008). Honoring Sovereignty: Aiding Tribal Efforts to Protect Native American Women from Domestic Violence. 96.1 (2008): 185-233.

Jones, Loring. (2008). The Distinctive Characteristics and Needs of Domestic Violence Victims in a Native American Community. *Journal of Family Violence* 23.2 (2008): 113-18.

Keeling, J. & Van Wormer, K. (2012). Social Worker Interventions in Situations of Domestic Violence: What We Can Learn from Survivors' Personal Narratives? *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(7), 1354-1370. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcr137

McEachern, D., Van Winkle, M., & Steiner, S. (1998). Domestic Violence Among the Navajo. *Journal of Poverty* 2.4 (1998): 31-46.

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Date accessed: March 6, 2019. Retrieved from:

[https://www.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/domestic\\_violence2.pdf](https://www.speakcdn.com/assets/2497/domestic_violence2.pdf)

Office on Women's Health. (2019). Effects of domestic violence on children. *US Department of Health and Human Services*. Date accessed: January 16, 2019. Retrieved from:

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/domestic-violence/effects-domestic-violence-children>

Phelps, J. L., Belsky, J., & Crnic, K. (1998). Earned security, daily stress, and parenting: A comparison of five alternative models. *Development and Psychopathology, 10*, 21-38.

Rivers, M. (2005). Navajo Women and Abuse: The Context for Their Troubled Relationships. *Journal of Family Violence 20.2* (2005): 83-89.

Yamawaki, N., Ochoa-Shipp, M., Pulsipher, C., Harlos, A., and Swindler, S. Perceptions of Domestic Violence: The Effects of Domestic Violence Myths, Victim's Relationship with Her Abuser, and the Decision to Return to Her Abuser. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence 27.16* (2012): 3195-212.



## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Child Interview Guide

#### **Intimate Partner Violence and Parent-Child Relationships within Native American Families**

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This study seeks to understand how intimate partner violence affects parent-child relationships, specifically their attachment styles within Native American families. We would like to learn more about the changes that occur in these relationships and attachments before, during, and after experiencing and/or being a victim of intimate partner violence. This study will provide scientific knowledge based on interview responses and interpretations of participant experiences. Information will also provide us with a better understanding so that we may help those affected by IPV in the future. Attachment styles are ways in which children interact or respond to their caregiver. These behaviors usually define our attachments styles in future relationships including those with spouses, family, and friends.

If there is a question that you do not understand, please ask to rephrase the question or ask to skip the questions and we come back to the question later. As a reminder, you have the right to stop the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time. You may also refuse to answer any question.

The terms intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence (DV) are used interchangeably throughout the interview and essentially refer to abuse within the relationship.

#### **Child:**

*BEFORE: Let's start by talking about you and your parent's relationship as far back as you can remember.*

1. What do you remember about your parent-child relationship as a young child?
  - a. Was it a positive or negative experience in your view?
  - b. What was your interaction like?
2. In what ways did your parent comfort you as a child?
  - a. Did you feel protected and/or safe?

3. From what you can remember, what was your parent-child relationship or interaction like before he/she was involved in the abusive relationship?
  - a. What type of things did you do that changed once your parent entered the relationship?

*DURING: Now we are going to talk about aspects of your relationship with your parent during the abuse*

4. When did you notice that the relationships had become abusive?
  - a. What type of changes or behaviors did you notice?
5. What did you visually see/hear/witness during the abuse?
  - a. How did this impact your view of your parent as a protective factor?
6. How would you describe your level of protection by your parent during or immediately after an event?
  - a. Explain how he/she comforted you or ensured your safety?
7. How did it make you feel knowing that your parent was being abused?
  - a. Did you ever express these feelings to your parent?
  - b. If so, what was their response?
8. How, if at all, was your parent's ability to parent you compromised because of the situation they were in?
  - a. Do you feel like your parent was ever too distracted by the relationship to care or comfort you?
  - b. Explain what made you feel this way.
  - c. Did this create problems in the relationship with your parent?
9. Was there someone that you sought out, outside the home, for comfort during this time?
  - a. If so who and why?
10. Did you have sympathy for your abused parent?
  - a. In what ways, if any, did you try to comfort them?
  - b. Did you ever encourage them to leave the relationship?

11. How, if at all, did the abuse affect the level of which you could rely on your parent for typical parent-child support?

- a. If you were dependent on them before and their parenting style changed due to the relationship, was there a point when you felt you could no longer depend on your parent for support?

*AFTER: ok, let's talk about what happened after the abusive relationship ended*

12. Please explain how the situation ended?

- a. Was this relationship a one-time experience for the family?
  - i. Was it a continuous cycle?
- b. Did your parent continue to get involved with abusive partners?
  - i. If so, how has this impacted your expectations for your future relationships?

13. How did you feel knowing that your parent left the relationship?

- a. Was there a sense of relief for you?

14. How did your parent talk to you about them leaving the relationship?

- a. What explanation did they provide for the reason why they left?
- b. Did you feel like yours/their safety was a factor in the decision to leave?

15. Explain whether you felt like things would return to the way they were before the abusive relationship in terms of your parent-child relationship?

- a. How did the parent-child bond change in a negative way?
- b. How did the parent-child bond change in a positive way?

16. In what ways did your parent seek to support your health and well-being after they left the relationship?

- a. Explain whether it improved your relationship?
- b. If not, what do you feel would have impacted your relationship?

17. Explain if you feel like your parent could have left the abusive relationship at any point?

## Intimate Partner Violence and Parent-Child Relationships within Native American Families 44

- a. If so, why? and how?
  - b. If not (had they left), do you feel things would have turned out better for you?
  - c. What type of feelings (negative or positive) do you have towards your parent for not leaving sooner?
  - d. If so why?
18. Describe the relationship with your parent now?
- a. Do you still talk to your parent? How often do you talk? What are your conversations like?
  - b. What type of advice and support do you feel like you can get from your parent?
  - c. Explain your level of comfort with your parent?
  - d. Explain whether you can openly talk with your parent about your feelings?
  - e. Explain whether you feel a stronger bond or connection with your parent after this experience?
19. How did this experience influence, if at all, your expectations of what a relationship is like or should be like?
20. Is there anything else you would like to add and/or things that we did not discuss?

I'd like to thank you for your time, I know that it is a sensitive subject and sometimes can be emotional. I am glad that you were willing to speak openly and honestly about your experiences.

Appendix 2: Parent Interview Guide

**Intimate Partner Violence and Parent-Child Relationships within Native American Families**

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

This study seeks to understand how intimate partner violence affects parent-child relationships, specifically their attachment styles within Native American families. We would like to learn more about the changes that occur in these relationships and attachments before, during, and after experiencing and/or being a victim of intimate partner violence. This study will provide scientific knowledge based on interview responses and interpretations of participant experiences. Information will also provide us with a better understanding so that we may help those affected by IPV in the future. Attachment styles are ways in which children interact or respond to their caregiver. These behaviors usually define our attachment styles in future relationships including those with spouses, family, and friends.

If there is a question that you do not understand, please ask to rephrase the question or ask to skip the questions and we come back to the question later. As a reminder, you have the right to stop the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time. You may also refuse to answer any question.

The terms intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence (DV) are used interchangeably throughout the interview and essentially refer to abuse within the relationship.

**Parent:** Description of parent-child relationship *before* the abuse

***BEFORE: Let's start by talking about you and your child's relationship before the abuse began***

1. Describe the quality of the relationship you had with your child (before the IPV/domestic violence occurred).
  - a. Probe: What makes you believe that you and your child were close at his/her early age?
2. What type of things would you do together?
3. How would you describe your parenting style before the abuse began?

Probe: For example: Did you enforce rules, did you discipline your child, was it hard to enforce rules due to certain circumstances, or did you give them freedom to make their own decisions and rules?

4. What was your parent-child relationship like leading up to when you began your relationship with your abuser?
5. What was the relationship like between the (abuser) and the child before the IPV/domestic violence began?

***DURING: Ok, now let's talk about your parent-child relationship during the abuse***

6. Within the bounds of your comfort level, can you briefly describe the abusive relationship you were in?
7. How would you describe your child's knowledge of what was going on at the time?
  - a. Probe: Do you feel like your child knew what was going on at the time?
  - b. Probe: Did you try to hide the abuse from your child?
8. How did you try to protect your child during this time from the effects of the IPV/DV situation?
  - a. Describe how you feel you protected your child
9. How did you try to comfort your child during occurrences of violence with your significant other?
  - a. What were things that you did to comfort them?
10. Describe the household atmosphere during the IPV.
  - a. OR Describe what the household was like before and after an IPV situation.
11. Describe how the IPV ended?
  - a. If you left the relationship, what prompted you to leave the relationship?
  - b. How did the safety of your child factor into that decision?

***AFTER: Let's talk about what happened after the abusive relationship ended***

1. Looking back, how do you think that experience influence your relationship with you child?
  - a. What were some of the negative influences?
  - b. What were some of the possible positive influences?
2. What influence did the abuse have on you in terms of your feelings of the quality of parent you were during that time?
  - a. Was there any sense of guilt because of the influence the abuse had on you as a parent?
  - b. Was there any sense of pride in how you were able to maintain your ability as a parent through the abuse?
3. Describe what your relationship was like with your child after the abuse occurred.
  - a. Were there any things that changed in your relationship tied to the abuse?
  - b. Describe the closeness of the relationship after, particularly about what it was like before and during the abuse.
    - i. Note: Refer back to your questions about the relationship before the abuse, did that change?
4. What conversations did you have with your child about the abuse after it had stopped?
  - a. What topics did those conversations include?
  - b. How did your child sympathize with your situation?
  - c. What did you try to convey to your child?
    - i. Probe: Even though the abuse wasn't necessarily your fault, did you apologize to your child for what they experienced in the home?
  - d. What did your child try to convey to you?
5. How do you think this influenced your child's expectations of future relationships? (close relationships with friends, family and partners)
6. Is there anything else you would like to add and/or things that we did not discuss?

This concludes our interview. I'd like to thank you for your time, I know that it is a sensitive subject and sometimes can be emotional. I am glad that you were willing to speak openly and honestly about your experiences.