



8-2020

Legal System Disclosure Experiences of Young Adult Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Amie Kahovec entitled "Legal System Disclosure Experiences of Young Adult Children Exposed to Domestic Violence." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Child and Family Studies.

Megan Haselschwerdt, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Elizabeth Johnson, Jenny Crowley

Accepted for the Council:

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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

**Legal System Disclosure Experiences of Young Adult
Children Exposed to Domestic Violence**

A Thesis Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Amie Ellen Kahovec

August 2020

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank several people who have made the completion of my thesis possible. First, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Megan Haselschwerdt. I am very thankful to have you as a mentor and role model in addition to having the opportunity to work with you on my thesis. All of your guidance, support, and mentorship has helped me not only complete a thesis, but also helped me to grow as a critical thinker, a writer, and a researcher. I appreciate every response to my never-ending questions. To my committee, Dr. Elizabeth Johnson and Dr. Jenny Crowley, thank you for your ongoing support and contributions throughout the research and writing process. I also extend thanks to my fellow lab members, Amanda Capannola, Shahad Subiani, and Meagan Stewart for their insight and feedback regarding my thesis. Finally, I would like to thank Nick, my family, and my friends for their support and encouragement throughout this process; none of this would have been possible without you.

ABSTRACT

Children exposed to domestic violence (CEDV) disclose their experiences to a variety of people, most commonly peers and less commonly formal (e.g., teacher) and legal (e.g., police) professionals. Legal system disclosure is more common than formal system disclosure yet remains understudied, leaving unanswered questions about the nature of these disclosures and factors that influence them. Guided by communication privacy management theory and Johnson's typology of domestic violence (DV), this study addressed gaps in the CEDV literature through a theoretical thematic analysis of the CEDV and legal system disclosure experiences of 25 young adults (19-25 years; 23 women; racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse college students) exposed to father-mother-perpetrated DV during their childhood. I specifically focused on factors that influenced their legal system disclosure decisions. Half of the participants had no legal system disclosure ($n = 12$; nondisclosers), and half had at least some legal system disclosure ($n = 13$; disclosers). Factors influencing the nondisclosers' lack of legal system disclosure included compartmentalizing their fathers' violence, contextual constraints, and fearing their father; this group was further distinguished by whether or not they discussed the DV within their family. Over half of these young adults were categorized as being exposed to situational couple violence. The factors influencing the disclosers' legal system involvement varied based on whether it was an initial versus subsequent disclosures. Initial disclosure factors included escalating violence and wanting to protect themselves or other family members, whereas subsequent disclosure factors were specific to whether their disclosure goal aligned with the outcome, whether it produced a self-perceived positive (e.g., violence decreased) or negative (e.g., feeling blamed/guilty) outcome, and familial responses upon disclosing and associated outcomes. The majority of these young adults were categorized as having been exposed to coercive controlling violence. Overall, these young adults' legal system disclosure decisions were heavily dependent upon their family's secrecy norms pertaining to non-familial involvement. Findings from this study provide empirical and practical implications, as they unpack the conditions under which youth choose to (not) disclose, the factors influencing these decisions, and how the responses and reactions from legal systems inform any subsequent disclosure decisions.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence (DV) is a public health epidemic with over 12 million people affected each year in the United States (Center for Disease and Control [CDC], 2019; National Domestic Violence Hotline, 2019). National studies suggest that 17.3% of children and adolescents are exposed to DV in their lifetime (Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2013). Children's exposure to DV (CEDV) occurs when they see, hear, or become directly involved in or experience the aftermath of physical or sexual assault that occurs between the child's caregivers (Evans, Davies, & DiLillo, 2008). DV-exposed youth often disclose their DV exposure experiences to a variety of individuals, including informal (e.g., family, peers), formal (e.g., teachers, doctors, DV agency), and legal (e.g., police officers) for support, intimacy and bonding, and help (Howell, Cater, Miller-Graff, & Graham-Bermanns, 2015).

Unlike the adult DV literature that has emphasized the salience of understanding victimized, adult women's formal and legal help-seeking experiences, (e.g., Haselschwerdt, Mitchell, Raffaelli, & Hardesty, 2015; Letourneau, Young Morris, Stewart, Hughes, & Secco, 2013), less is known about CEDV and legal disclosure decisions and experiences. The literature suggests that formal and legal help-seeking is far less common than informal support seeking but legal system disclosure is more common than formal system disclosure (Bottoms et al., 2016; Howell et al., 2015), particularly, who they disclose to, under what conditions they disclose, the purpose of their disclosures, and the kinds of responses they receive remain understudied. To address these gaps in the CEDV literature, this study applied communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 2010) to examine the legal disclosure experiences of 25 young adults who were exposed to father-mother perpetrated DV during their childhood. Communication privacy management theory (CPM) addresses the way individuals need both

privacy and openness concurrently, as well as how individuals make privacy and disclosure decisions within and apart from the family (Petronio, 2010).

Not all DV is the same, and thus, mounting evidence suggests there are two distinct, yet common types of DV, coercive controlling violence (CCV) and situational couple violence (SCV; Johnson, 2008). Both types involve physical violence, but they differ based on the extent to which the violence is enacted in a general context of power and control (Johnson, 2008) with CCV entailing higher levels of coercive control, or the use of several tactics to maintain control over one's partner (Dutton & Goodman, 2005) and SCV entailing lower levels or no coercive control (Johnson, 2008). Studies have recently documented the salience of assessing the degree of coercive control or two types of DV in the CEDV literature (Haselschwerdt, 2014; Jouriles & McDonald, 2015), yet this is an emerging subfield and no studies have applied Johnson's typology (i.e., CCV versus SCV) to CEDV legal disclosure. Thus, in this study, I examined also the role of DV exposure type to better understand CEDV and legal system disclosure decisions from the retrospective perspective of DV-exposed young adults.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Disclosure in the Context of Domestic Violence Exposure

The majority of the CEDV disclosure research has focused on disclosure to informal support networks versus formal and legal support networks; only a small percentage of studied youth report formal and legal system disclosure (Bottoms et al., 2016; Howell et al., 2015). Between 4% and 7% of DV-exposed youth disclosed their experiences to a legal or formal system or provider. (Bottoms et al., 2016; Howell et al., 2015). For example, in a sample of 703 DV-exposed participants, 5% disclosed to a formal or legal support – most commonly the police (Howell et al., 2015). Similarly, 7% of participants in Bottoms et al.'s (2016) study disclosed their DV-exposure experiences to school staff (e.g., teachers, counselors) or clergy and 8% disclosed to a therapist. In their study of 1,621 youth reporting on DV exposure, child abuse, and disclosure strategies, Ungar, Barter, McConnell, Tutty, and Fairholm (2009) found that disclosing was fraught with many challenges, and thus, the majority of youth chose to not disclose at all.

Though the majority of studied DV-exposed youth disclose their experiences to a peer, a substantial percentage choose not to disclose their experiences to anyone. For example, Howell et al. (2015) found that 41% of participants kept CEDV entirely private, with Bottoms et al. (2016) reporting similar findings (i.e., 30% not disclosing). Youth with DV exposure experiences may not disclose to any informal, formal, or legal system individual for a variety of reasons. First, they could feel ashamed of their family or their DV exposure experiences. For example, participants in Bottoms et al. (2016) study kept their DV exposure private due to feelings of shame and interconnected feelings of fear, including fear of being ridiculed (Ungar et al., 2009). Additionally, Bottoms et al. (2016) found a prevalence of fear of retaliation if the perpetrator or

others involved found out youth disclosed DV. Youth in Chester & Joscelyne's (2018) study feared getting hurt upon disclosing.

Concerns of sharing family secrets or discussing what might be viewed as a private family affair could also deter disclosure. Some youth chose not to disclose due to fear of deviating from the family norms or not being heard or believed (Callaghan, Fellin, Mavrou, Alexander, & Sixsmith, 2017). Bottoms et al. (2016) found that several youth were fearful of familial disruption, therefore keep the violence a secret. Further, the participants in Callaghan et al.'s (2017) study were aware of the interpersonal (e.g., exposing family violence, not being taken seriously, having to manage their self-expression) and social constraints (e.g., cultural differences, deviating from social norms) that exist within and outside of the family, leading to a sense of caution when considering disclosing. Howell et al. (2015) similarly found that youth held beliefs that no one could do anything, or that a family member (e.g., mother, sibling, aunt) knew they witnessed the DV, so disclosing was unnecessary. For some, disclosing DV was viewed as an act of defiance to family members, as most families consider violence to be a secretive, unspoken topic, and thus, kept their experiences a secret (Callaghan et al., 2017). The present study further examines the DV-exposed youths' disclosure decisions, including the decision not to disclose.

Communication Privacy Management Theory

Communication privacy management (CPM) theory provides us with a theoretical model to better understand CEDV and legal disclosure decisions, as this theory helps explain how people manage private information or secrets, providing a systematic understanding of how disclosure, confidentiality, and privacy are interrelated (Petronio, 2002; 2010). Due to the variety of individuals who may function as recipients of information, privacy management should be

understood as having multiple levels across and among individuals and groups (Petronio, 2010). CPM theorizes that decisions to conceal or reveal typically take place at the same time and are at the center of decision making when it comes to family privacy (Petronio, 2010).

A core concept of CPM is privacy boundaries (i.e., what to share and when) of individuals and families as well as the expectations to regulate those boundaries (Petronio, 2004; 2010). Privacy boundaries are used as a metaphor to demonstrate the way privacy is managed between individuals and families with efforts to understand how people regulate the flow of information and set borders for access to their private information. Privacy boundaries are coordinated by both parties and ensue when privacy ownership and privacy co-ownership are present. Privacy ownership refers to the way individuals regulate ownership issues for private information. With the co-owned privacy boundaries, there are expectations that are negotiated between the original owner of the information and the confidant in regard to third-party disclosures (Crowley, 2017; Petronio, 2004). When disclosure occurs, there is a degree of control and ownership of the information that is lost, as now both parties own the information. Further, privacy rules are developed in order to decide the conditions in which others may be granted or denied access to private information (Petronio, 2010). These rules are embedded in criteria that people create to frame their disclosure decisions and can shift from situation to situation. For example, youth may not disclose CEDV to an adult or formal system individual based on the criteria they have formed, however they may disclose to a peer because it feels less risky and fits with their disclosure criteria and conditions.

There are a variety of reasons why individuals may keep information private or attempt to conceal secrets. First, individuals are often motivated to conceal sensitive information in order to protect themselves or to protect others (Afifi, Olsen, & Armstrong, 2005; Petronio, 2002). This is

particularly important to consider with CEDV, as there is often a power imbalance between the DV-exposed children and the parents involved in the violence. Afifi and Olsen (2005) found that power may influence privacy management, for example, children may be less likely to disclose information about their parents because their parents can restrict their resources if they disagree with the disclosure of their child. Privacy regulation is used to ensure protection. Even if individuals believe they could communicate a secret, they may choose to keep it concealed if there is any fear that disclosure of the secret could lead to hurting themselves or others (Afifi, Olsen, & Armstrong, 2005). When secrets were revealed, it was often when there were less concerns related to factors, such as a negative evaluation of the individual, their relationship with the confidant, and communication difficulties when revealing the secret (Caughlin, Afifi, Carpenter-Theune, & Miller, 2005). Additionally, privacy management can change over time, for example, privacy boundaries may initially be flexible, but become more structured and thought out as they experience responses from others, particularly the legal systems. For example, the adult DV victims in Haselschwerdt and Hardesty (2017) study adjusted their privacy boundaries over time depending on the responses they received upon disclosure.

Johnson's Typology of Domestic Violence

Beyond examining the influential role of family secrecy norms and boundaries on CEDV's legal system disclosure decisions, I also integrated a DV specific typology into this study to assess the complexity within the larger umbrella of "DV exposure." For example, despite increasing evidence that not all DV nor DV exposure experience is the same, no studies to date have examined how variations within DV exposure (i.e., differing types of DV) may affect disclosure decisions. Research suggests that characteristics of the physical violence (e.g., severity, and frequency) and degree of coercive control (e.g., general pattern of coercion versus

violence not rooted in coercion) influences developmental outcomes (Jouriles & McDonald, 2015) and interpersonal relationships (Callaghan et al., 2017; Hlavaty & Haselschwerdt, 2019; Howard et al., 2017), yet we do not know whether these variations influence decisions surrounding legal system disclosure.

In order to fully understand the complexities within DV, it is essential to recognize the differences that exist within violent relationships, as not all DV is the same (Johnson, 2008). Researchers have contended that the degree to which physical violence is embedded in a pattern of coercive control is central to understanding the complexity of DV (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Leone, Johnson, & Cohan, 2007). Coercion is when someone is forced into doing something by the use of threats or force; coercive control refers to the use of physical violence in conjunction with nonviolent tactics rooted in a general context of power and control through the use of threats and intimidation, undermining their partners will and ability to resist the violence, placing blame for the violence on the partner, and financial control (Dutton & Goodman, 2005). Coercive control is the central factor used to make distinctions between CCV and SCV (Johnson, 2008). In contrast to CCV, SCV entails physical violence that is not rooted in an overarching pattern of coercive control (Johnson, 1995). SCV occurs situationally and often arises from an argument or disagreement that leads to physical violence (Johnson, 2008). On average, CCV is more likely to be associated with more frequent and severe physical violence that is more injurious in nature (Hardesty et al., 2015; Johnson & Leone, 2005).

Leone, Johnson, & Cohan (2007) found that different violence types were associated with different disclosure patterns among adult DV victims. Their research found that victims who experienced CCV sought help differently than victims who experienced SCV. For example, CCV victims were more likely to seek medical and legal help than SCV victims, whereas SCV victims

were more likely to seek help from friends or neighbors. Since CCV typically entails social isolation with the purpose of maintaining control over one's partner (Johnson, 2008), women with this DV experience may be less likely to seek help or disclose their situation to friends or family (Leone et al., 2007). In a study of divorcing mothers, Haselschwerdt et al. (2015) similarly found that mothers who experienced CCV during marriage were more likely to disclose and seek help from both formal (e.g., employer, doctor or nurse, shelter or hotline) and informal (e.g., friends, family) networks during marriage and months after separation than divorcing mothers who experienced SCV.

Not only does Johnson's typology help to explain the differences in the adult DV literature but can also be useful in explaining the differences in CEDV (Haselschwerdt, 2014; Jouriles & McDonald, 2015). To date, only a few CEDV studies have incorporated what is known about coercive control (e.g., Hlavaty & Haselschwerdt, 2019; Jouriles & McDonald, 2005; Katz, 2015; Øverlien, 2013) or Johnson's typology (e.g., Haselschwerdt, Carlson, & Hlavaty, 2018; Haselschwerdt et al., 2019) into the CEDV literature. Findings from several studies (Hardesty et al., 2015; Izaguirre & Cater, 2016; Jouriles & McDonald, 2015) point to differences within SCV and CCV when examining DV-exposed youth (e.g., child outcomes, involvement in violence, family life). For example, Haselschwerdt et al. (2019) identified several distinctions between children's exposure to SCV and CCV, including reports of variations of family life, being involved in or intervening on the violence, and overall exposure experiences. Hlavaty & Haselschwerdt (2019) found that youth exposed to higher levels of CCV experience more bullying victimization and better friendship quality than SCV-exposed participants and those not exposed to violence. Yet, no research to date has applied the concept of coercive

control or Johnson's typology to the CEDV formal or legal disclosure literature—a core focus of the present study.

Summary and Research Questions

The purpose of the present study was to more thoroughly understand how young adults with diverse DV exposure experiences made decisions regarding formal and legal system disclosure, addressing some notable gaps in the current literature. This study used communication privacy management theory and Johnson's (2008) typology of DV to theorize the experiences of youth. Aside from the empirical gains, this study has implications for service providers who work with families who experience DV, as well as teachers and other school faculty. DV-exposed youth have a variety of experiences with disclosure particularly with what they disclose and who they disclose to, this study provides further insight for those providers into the decisions youth make. Additionally, there are implications regarding the differences between CCV-exposed youth and SCV-exposed youth and the role that coercion plays in the context of violence. This may be particularly useful for those working with DV-exposed youth or families experiencing violence. Two main research questions guide this study: (1) What factors influence formal and legal disclosure decisions of DV-exposed young adults while they were growing up? (2) How might different DV exposure experiences (e.g., CCV versus SCV, severity and frequency of physical violence) influence legal system disclosure decisions?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This study is a part of a larger qualitative study (Young Adults Live and Learn Project; Haselschwerdt et al., 2019) on the experiences of 25 DV-exposed young adults attending one public, southeastern state university. The original research team was comprised of one faculty member, two graduate students, and two undergraduate students. Participants were recruited from September 2014 to March 2015 through advertisements on campus and in newspapers, via emails from faculty, class announcements, social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter), and word of mouth. Eligibility criteria included: (1) between the ages of 19-25, (2) their father or father-like-figure must have physically hurt their mother on more than one occasion (e.g. pushed or shoved with force, slapped, punched, kicked, or beat up), and (3) their parents must either still be married, or must have separated or divorced sometime after their 13th birthday. Halfway through recruitment, the eligibility criteria were altered to include participants' whose parents had separated after their 8th birthday, as all interviewed participants vividly recalled their earliest DV exposure experiences around this age, therefore the eighth birthday was a modest cutoff for eligibility in the study.

Sample

After learning of the study, potential participants contacted the project via email or telephone ($n = 41$) and were screened for eligibility, resulting in 27 eligible and 12 ineligible young adults; 2 never responded to the eligibility questions and subsequent follow-up attempts. Of the 27 participants that were eligible, 25 participated. The current study included the full sample, consisting of 23 women and 2 men between 19-25 years old ($M = 20.48$ years old; $SD = 1.46$ years). The majority were European American/White ($n = 13$) or African American/Black ($n = 7$); the remaining participants identified as biracial or bi-ethnic (e.g., Black and White,

Latina and White; $n = 3$), Latino/Hispanic ($n = 1$), or Asian/Asian American ($n = 1$). Most reported about martially violent biological fathers ($n = 17$); 8 participants reported about stepfathers who were their sole father-figure or played a substantial role in their upbringing. At the time of the interview, 11 of mothers were still married to the participants' father, 12 were divorced, and 2 were separated. Based on the participants' self-report, they came from a nearly equal distribution of rural ($n = 9$), urban ($n = 7$), or suburban ($n = 9$) communities. Half of the participants reported that their family received at least one type of public assistance support (e.g., free or reduced cost lunch) during their childhood or adolescence.

Procedure

In order to protect the rights of the participants in this study, approval from the Auburn Institutional Review Board (IRB) and a Certificate of Confidentiality from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) were obtained. IRB approval from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville was obtained prior to beginning the secondary analyses for this study.

Written informed consent forms were completed before each interview; verbal consent was provided to audio record. Interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol focused on overall family dynamics, violence and abuse, and other interpersonal relationship experiences (e.g., peers, legal support) (see Appendix A). Broad questions were used to allow for follow-up questions, consistent with grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2014). All interviews were held in a private room on-campus and lasted from 48 minutes to 142 minutes ($M = 86$ minutes, $SD = 26$ minutes). Two additional interviews were conducted due to follow-up and unintentionally missed questions in the first interview, these lasted 12 and 24 minutes. Upon completion of the interview, participants received \$25 and a resource list including on-campus, local, and national resources. All audio recordings were transcribed. Participants were assigned pseudonyms; all

easily identifiable information (e.g., names, specific town names) were altered without effecting the meaning of the quote to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Larger Study Analyses Relevant to this Thesis

Data collection and analysis for the larger project was initially concurrent, however data collection concluded when the larger project sample size was met and there was a comparatively equal distribution of participants within the two types of DV (i.e., CCV and SCV). To reach that distribution, the original research team categorized participants' exposure experiences into no, low, moderate, or high coercive control along with written reasoning following completion of the interview and transcription. These categorizations focused particularly on the participants' description of their fathers' use of non-physical abuse tactics, perceptions of why their father used DV, whether they perceived their fathers as controlling of their mothers, and the overall family environment. Upon categorization, the researchers met weekly to discuss the individual categorization notes, documenting and discussing any discrepancies. Following this discussion, group consensus was reached with no and low coercive control participants categorized into the SCV group ($n = 10$) and moderate to high coercive control into the CCV group ($n = 15$) to be consistent with Johnson's typology of DV (2008). These categorizations and subsequent findings are published (Haselschwerdt et al., 2019). This study utilized these previously created and published categorizations.

Data Analysis

Theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify, analyze, and report themes, or in this study, factors across and within the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2014). Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that theoretical thematic analysis is often driven by the researcher's theoretical interests, leading to the research questions being situated

within particular theoretical frameworks (i.e., CPMT and Johnson's Typology). Given the importance of family communication norms and documented, diverse DV exposure experiences by DV types, CPMT and Johnson's typology provided guiding frameworks for this thematic analysis. More specifically, this study focused on DV-exposed youth's legal disclosure decisions in the context of CCV versus SCV, comparing results found between and within these two groups.

Along with a team of collaborators, I conducted a thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). Consistent with phase one, I became familiar with the interviews by reading and rereading the interviews as well as notetaking and memoing. Memoing is particularly important in that it allows for the opportunity to analytically identify and connect factors related to DV disclosure within and across the interviews (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). During this early stage, I wrote summary memos of each interview. These memos served as detailed summaries of each participant's DV disclosure decisions, which allowed me to later pull up specific instances, factors, and quotes from each participant without requiring I re-read the entire transcript. The original project PI and my thesis advisor also re-read the interviews and added her notes and comments to my summary memos to assure all salient parts of the interview were included.

After writing a handful of summary memos, I also began creating initial codes, signifying the beginning of analysis phase two. I read the interviews specifically looking for factors that contributed to formal and legal disclosure experiences. Two additional graduate research assistants participated in this coding process; we met weekly to compare and discuss initial coding. After we identified a significant number of codes (i.e., factors, general experiences), I created a codebook of factors that influenced young adults to disclose or not disclose their DV experiences. These codes were refined and merged over time to better fit participants'

experiences. For example, we initially created *positive police involvement* and *negative police involvement* as two separate codes, but later combined them into *legal* because it was not always easy to distinguish how each police encounter was perceived in early analysis stages. Upon creating the initial codebook, I entered the codebook into Dedoose, a cloud-based qualitative coding software, and used the software to further sort and analyze the interviews while continuing to code in Word or on hardcopies of the transcripts.

During the third analysis phase, I continued to search for and adapt the factors from the initial codebook to stay true to the data as we finished independent coding of each interview. I shifted from focusing on specific codes to filtering the codebook and analysis through the lens of “what factors contribute to legal disclosure?” which then became further refined to focus on “what factors contribute to legal disclosure decision making” since many factors were associated with *not* disclosing. In this stage, I began collapsing codes into larger categories, or factors, and identified their relationship to one another. For example, I adapted the factor, *escalating violence*, over time to shift from defining it as interactions that related to formal or legal help-seeking as an attempt to stop or deescalate the violence to defining it to also include any violence that occurred for the first time (e.g., child abuse) and violence that did not reach a particular threshold that would warrant formal disclosure.

Based on phases one through three, I divided the participants into two groups – those who did not disclose to formal or legal systems and those who did disclose to formal or legal systems – as it appeared that the factors influencing their decisions were best explained separately. I tabled the data while also coding and memoing. I used tabling to organize and visualize memos and other relevant information related to identified patterns in a detailed table format. For example, I created tables to compare what factors aligned with each participant. Memoing and

tabling both aided in my ability to “articulate, explore, contemplate and challenge their interpretations when examining data” (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008, p. 71). Throughout this process, the research team and I reviewed each memo and table, comparing them within and across participants (i.e., constant comparison; Charmaz, 2014). When comparing the tables and memos, I was further able to distinguish within group (i.e., disclosers, nondisclosers) differences. For example, within the disclosing participants there are some who disclosed only once, while others disclosed many times, tables helped to distinguish the factors that influenced subsequent disclosure. The comparison memos ultimately became the write up of my findings, as they provided rich details into the differences of seemingly similar experiences, tables aided in this as well. For example, the tables provided a visualization of the factors associated with each participant, their DV-exposure categorization, as well as being color coded to show the differences in the experiences. In the final stage, I refined, defined, and named the factors and within group subgroups that comprise the Findings section of my thesis.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness can be defined as the degree to which the findings are supported by evidence and can be trusted as accurate reflections of participants’ beliefs and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I strived to achieve trustworthiness in the following ways. First, all interview transcripts were read, memoed, coded, and tabled by myself and additional coders and reviewers. All codes and factors were discussed as a pair or group. All stages of coding, emerging factors, and relationships formed between factors were discussed to reduce the potential for individual bias. Second, coders used memo-writing and tabling throughout the analysis process; the triangulation of these three analytic strategies helped to assure more accurate interpretations of the data. Direct quotes from the participants were included as

evidence of results and conclusions of the study and to ensure trustworthiness of the results. Finally, before beginning data analysis, I wrote a memo detailing my initial thoughts, biases, and opinions pertaining to DV exposure and disclosure that helped me recognize if and when my personal thoughts and experiences were coloring the ways in which I read the interviews. This critical self-reflection was carried out by all other team members and discussed as a group; within our group, there is diversity of family violence experiences and legal system disclosure, which increased our trustworthiness as researchers.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Twenty-five young adults exposed to DV during their childhood described their experiences with DV-exposure in detail, including whether or not they had disclosed to legal systems about their DV exposure experiences. I refer to legal system involvement as any encounter or recurring interactions with legal systems (e.g., court) or legal system professionals (e.g., police) due to DV-related events. Disclosure is a particular form of involvement, such that the participant or another family member disclosed DV to the legal system or professional versus the legal system otherwise intervening upon child protective service referrals or other disclosures coming from outside the family. Many young adults who disclosed to legal systems were also involved with formal systems (e.g., mothers going to the hospital for DV-related injuries) but did not explicitly disclose their DV experiences to those formal systems.

These findings focus on young adults' disclosure with legal systems, I categorized these young adults into two distinct groups: (1) those who had no legal system disclosure ($n = 12$; nondisclosers) and (2) those who did have legal system disclosure ($n = 13$; disclosers); additional nuances within each group will be discussed. I begin by describing the nondisclosing young adults and the factors influencing their nondisclosure decisions, followed by a description of the disclosing young adults and factors influencing their disclosure decisions. The role of family secrecy norms, in general and specific to DV, whether the young adults were categorized as being exposed to either CCV or SCV (i.e., degree of coercive control) and severity of physical violence are discussed within each category.

Nondisclosers

Twelve participants had no legal system disclosure nor disclosed DV to anyone outside the family. I refer to these young adults as “nondisclosers.” Despite never disclosing, three

young adults discussed how individuals outside the family threatened to involve the police to deescalate or stop the violence. For example, Barbara shared how her mother's boss threatened to call the police when her father became agitated at her mother's workplace, recalling him saying, "if he didn't leave, they would call the cops...so on the threat of the cops, he took us home." Within this group of nondisclosers, I identified two sub-groups based on the factors that contributed to their nondisclosure experiences: those keeping it within the family ($n = 8$) and those who just never talked about it ($n = 4$). Although these sub-groups' varied in meaningful ways, there were overlapping influential factors that impacted their overall lack of legal system disclosure that I discuss first. The overlapping factors were compartmentalizing fathers' marital violence from other perceptions of their father and contextual constraints (e.g., living in a small town, having few economic resources). Additionally, family secrecy norms within the immediate or extended family largely contributed to young adult's lack of legal disclosure and distinctions between these two groups of nondisclosers. These communication and secrecy norms can be understood as a way that young adults navigated to whom and what they disclosed about the DV.

Compartmentalizing their father's DV from other aspects of him as a father or family life was a factor that contributed to nondisclosure decisions. Those who compartmentalized the reality of their father's abusive behavior from their perception of their father often described him as still being a 'good dad' despite experiencing violence. These young adults avoided the reality of the violent experiences to keep a positive view of their father. For example, Ellie stated, "Me and my sister try to separate them because...we can't hate our parents...you have to kind of compartmentalize. You have to be like, he's a great dad. He loved us, but he was not a good husband."

Beyond their own perception, some participants worried about how their school and friends would have perceived their father or family if they knew about the violence, so they did not disclose. Shame and embarrassment contributed to nondisclosure. For example, Stephanie said, “I always had this air of being the perfect kid and getting really good grades and doing everything right, so I didn’t want people to think that there was just one little dark part of my life.” Additionally, contextual constraints such as being from a small town or having a lower socioeconomic status also influenced nondisclosure decisions. Lauren explained, “The school I went to was a really, really small school...It was like everybody was kind of family with each other, and I think they thought my dad was kind of a good person.” Young adults who came from lower socioeconomic status families additionally discussed the challenges associated with finding resources when violence occurred and family members were used as intervention resources instead of legal services. Additionally, unique nondisclosure factors were more nuanced and varied depending on whether they were *keeping it within the family* or *just never talked about it*.

Keeping it within the family. *Keeping it within the family* ($n = 8$) entailed talking about the DV within the immediate and extended family but never to legal system individuals. Roughly half of this group were categorized as having been exposed to more coercive and frequent DV. For example, five of the eight participants who were keeping it in the family were exposed to CCV and four were exposed to frequent violence. Not all families were fully open in their communication about the DV; some participants talked about it a lot with many family members, whereas others rarely spoke about it, and when they did, it was only with certain family members. Participants avoided telling certain family members due to that individual’s status in the community, that individual’s prior response upon learning about DV or other family issues,

and the individual's role in the general marital conflict. For example, Stefan never told his grandfather about the DV "...because my granddad, he's an authority figure, very prominent in the community, so if my mom said my dad hit her, then my granddaddy would of came with a shot gun." Barbara said, "sometimes some of the things she'd [grandmother] say would actually be why my parents would fight...so my mom tried not to tell my grandmother anything." These within-family communication norms created an environment that set the stage for nondisclosure beyond the family.

There were three main factors that contributed to the disclosure decision of keeping it within the family: (1) fearing any disclosure would lead to larger system involvement, (2) fearing they would not be believed, and (3) following the family's nondisclosure lead. Some participants chose not to disclose to formal support individuals, like teachers, out of fear that they would alert legal system authorities, triggering further system involvement that was unwanted. For example, Joshua explained that, "[teachers] probably would have gone for help, I think that's [their] legal obligation...I don't really know any other adults that I could trust, so I didn't [disclose]." Other participants kept it within the family because their father had connections within the legal system (e.g., friends with police officers) or broader community, and therefore felt that they would not have been believed had they sought help. There was also concern that disclosing DV might mean their father or family would be viewed differently in the community or also not believed given their father's role. Emma described her family as:

The typical American family ...[except] there is nothing dream-like about that whole situation...from the outside he was . . . He was a t-ball coach and PTA and big in the church... People never really knew what was going on behind closed doors, and if you were to tell them, no one would believe you.

Following the lead of the families, or not disclosing because this was modeled as the correct way of managing DV, meant that young adults monitored how their mother and others made

decisions. Alexis was present for many conversations among extended family members about the DV and assumed that if they didn't seek legal help, she should not either. She explained, "I just felt like I didn't need to intervene...I don't really need to tell nobody because [family members] already knew."

Just never talked about it. Unlike those who were keeping it within the family, four young adults just never talked about it, meaning that they did not discuss the DV with anyone, including immediate and extended family members. Fearing their father and feeling at fault for the violence contributed to their decision to never talk about the violence nor disclose to legal systems. All four of these participants were categorized as having been exposed to SCV and none reported exposure to severe physical violence. For these reasons, they may not have perceived the DV as reaching a threshold that warranted legal disclosure despite fearing their fathers.

Despite exposure to less coercive and severe violence, participants who were fearful of their father discussed how the repercussions of disclosing or intervening were too great to take action against their father, which is what they believed they were doing if they involved legal system professionals. In some cases, young adults would experience violence from their father as a consequence for not doing what he expected. These fathers regularly instilled fear in the entire family. In addition to feeling fearful, feelings of guilt or blame for the violence also influenced nondisclosure. Mia discussed feeling like she was largely a part of why her parents would fight, "They would often threaten to leave and take me...so that is what made the arguments more tense, when they talked about taking me...it was just a point of pride to say 'I'll take my daughter'...that was I guess, their leverage." Due to this guilt, Mia never disclosed her experiences to anyone within or outside of the family.

Disclosers

Thirteen participants experienced legal disclosure but the factors that influenced their disclosure decisions varied depending on whether it was an initial or first-time disclosure or subsequent disclosure; many participants disclosed only once. Factors influencing initial disclosure included escalating violence and wanting to protect themselves or another family member. Subsequent disclosure was dependent on factors such as whether the initial disclosure experience was positive or negative, whether their goals of disclosure were met, and the family's response following the disclosure. I begin with a discussion of the factors that influenced initial legal system disclosure, followed by the factors associated with subsequent disclosure categorized into disclosed only once ($n = 4$) and those who disclosed again and again ($n = 9$).

Initial legal system disclosure. Escalating violence was the main factor that influenced young adults' initial disclosure decision, or more specifically, to call the police. Escalating violence entailed violence that became more severe and injurious or the violence shifted from solely towards their mother to also include perpetration towards the participant or their siblings. Ten of the thirteen young adults who disclosed or sought help were exposed to CCV and majority were exposed to severe physical violence. For the ten young adults who recalled DV rooted in coercive control (i.e., CCV), this violence was rooted in many other forms of non-physical abuse, yet, in these initial instances a violence threshold was crossed, warranting legal system disclosure as a way to deescalate the violence. Additionally, all three participants who were SCV-exposed, were also exposed to severe violence, thus severe violence is an influential factor of disclosure to legal systems. London recalled:

I grabbed the house phone and told my mom to stay in my room, I ended up climbing into my window and sitting there with my mom and calling 911...then he started banging on the door and so I just told my mom that we needed to go to the neighbor's house, so we climbed through my window and went to my neighbor's house until the police came.

In this instance, London also sought to protect her mother. Similar to London, many young adults who experienced escalating violence felt an obligation to contact legal services, particularly when no extended family members or friends knew about the DV.

For six participants, escalating violence entailed a shift from violence only towards their mother to also including violence towards them or a sibling. For example, when Keli sensed her dad was becoming violent towards her, she recalled how she “ran up to my room and locked the door. I don’t know how, but he was able to unlock it, I freaked out and called the police and he came in and started punching me in the head.” Like with Keli’s goal of disclosure, these young adults’ initial disclosure with legal systems was influenced by wanting to protect their mother, siblings, or themselves due to escalating violence. Disclosing when violence was escalating was described as less calculated but rather impulsive decisions made when violence crossed a threshold, resulting in fear of physical harm or injury.

Subsequent legal system disclosure. Whether or not young adults disclosed only once ($n = 4$) or disclosed again and again ($n = 9$) was influenced by factors related to their initial disclosure experiences. I identified three main factors associated with disclosing only once: (1) perceiving the initial legal disclosure as negative or not meeting their expected or desired outcomes, (2) feeling guilty or at fault for the outcomes of disclosure, and (3) experiencing familial repercussions for disclosing.

When the initial legal system interaction was perceived as negative or unhelpful, young adults disclosed only once and had no subsequent disclosure with formal and legal systems. For example, when police came to her house, Taylor’s mother was arrested instead of her father:

I got a call from jail, and it was my mom and I was like “why are you there? It should have been him. He pushed you, he was abusing you.” And she was like “I took the blame for it and since I left a physical mark on his body, they took me instead.

Taylor hoped that calling the police would deescalate the violence, but instead, her mother ended up in jail overnight. Taylor did not call the police again. Even instances in which the goal (e.g., father was arrested) to deescalate violence was in line with the outcome, for some, further system involvement led to feelings of guilt and regret. For example, when the DV was escalating and her sister was physically harmed, Blair called the police, resulting in her father's arrest. Despite his arrest being her goal, subsequent court dates and her father's imprisonment made her feel guilty. She said, "I kept feeling like this is my fault, this is my fault. Even though I didn't put my hands on my sister...I felt responsible for him going to jail...I felt like all of that was my fault." The family was subjected to numerous court hearings, including her sister needing to testify against their father, ultimately resulting in no action against her father, familial embarrassment by the judge, and ongoing guilt. Subsequently, she didn't seek legal help or disclose again.

In some instances, disclosing young adults experienced or directly observed repercussions from their family for contacting legal services, even if their personal outcome was achieved, contributing to only disclosing once. For example, Jasmine's sister called the police and her parents yelled at her, making it clear to her sister and Jasmine that they should never call the police. She recalled her mother angrily telling them, "you don't tell anyone what goes on in our house." Upon disclosing and being reprimanded for doing so, Jasmine's family created strict privacy rules related to DV disclosure confidants.

Nine disclosing participants disclosed again and again following their initial disclosures based on the following three factors: (1) perceiving the initial legal system disclosure as meeting their desired outcomes, (2) perceiving the overall experience with legal systems as positive, and (3) experiencing positive reactions from their family for disclosing. These three factors were intertwined with one another. Positive outcomes that met participants' goals included

deescalating the violence, removing someone from the home (e.g., mother and children stay in a hotel), or arresting the father. For example, Elizabeth contacted police several times with an effort to protect her mother, recalling how involving the police was helpful in deescalating the violence. She stated, “we still called the cops, and at least my dad was put in jail... If you are talking to a cop or you’re talking to a counselor or to a teacher and they’re not helpful, don’t let that dissuade you.”

Young adults who perceived the overall experience with legal disclosure as positive similarly described positive outcomes from their disclosure. For example, following his arrest for DV, Keli’s father was mandated to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and counseling; she said her father “hasn’t taken a drink since.” Similarly, London discussed how she and her mother felt upon calling the police: “It was almost a relief and I would feel like maybe it is going to be over now, but it would stop for a while after he got arrested, then it would start back after a while.” Although the violence continued overtime, the goal of deescalating the violence was met whenever London contacted legal systems. This perceived positive interaction was felt beyond the participants, as their families also viewed these interactions positively. After an incidence of child abuse, the courts put a restraining order on Keli’s father, and her mother then took the option of also obtaining a restraining order against her father. For these young adults, their overall experiences resulted decisions to continue disclosing.

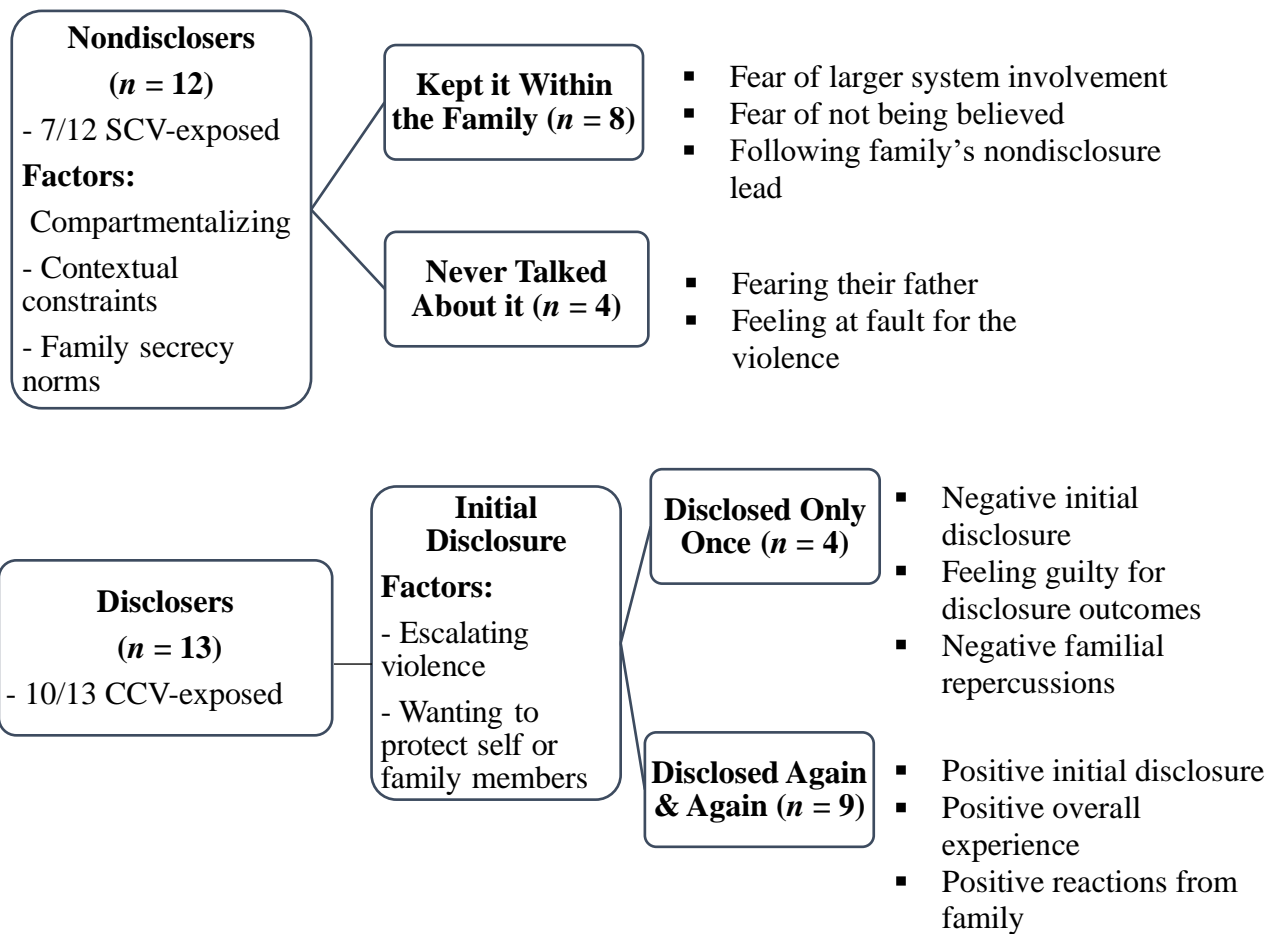


Figure 1: Factors Influencing Nondisclosers and Disclosers Legal System Disclosure Decisions

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to build on the current CEDV and legal system disclosure literature by examining how these experiences and decisions vary and the factors that contribute to legal system disclosure decisions. Compared to the informal (e.g., peers) support literature, few studies have examined CEDV and legal system disclosure from the perspective of youth exposed to DV. The current study focused the legal system disclosure decisions and experiences of DV-exposed young adults. These findings provide further insight into why DV-exposed youth disclose or not, complexities within each group of nondisclosers and disclosers, as well as their ongoing decision making over time. In the next sections, I situate this study's findings in light of the larger CEDV literature, emphasizing our finding that legal system disclosure is common and there are many influential factors when deciding to disclose or not, particularly family privacy norms and boundaries, which play a salient role in legal system disclosure.

The Role of Family Privacy Norms and Boundaries on Legal System Disclosure

Family privacy norms and boundaries are particularly important as they influence CEDV and legal disclosure. CPM theorizes that there are a variety of reasons why individuals may keep information private, as it pertains to CEDV, young adults may be motivated to conceal sensitive information regarding their DV-exposure experiences in order to protect themselves or protect others (Afifi, Olsen, & Armstrong, 2005; Petronio, 2002) and though four participants did not disclose for these reasons, the majority disclosed to protect themselves or other family members. The noted power imbalances, such as the imbalance between a CEDV and their parent or a CEDV and the legal system, likely also influenced privacy management (Afifi & Olsen, 2005), providing additional support from our findings that although legal system disclosure is prevalent, nearly half of our participants had no disclosure to any legal systems.

When secrets are revealed, it is often when individuals are less concerned with negative evaluations of themselves and communicating the secret may be easier in that given situation (Caughlin et al., 2005). Some participants only disclosed their DV-exposure experiences to family, perhaps due to feeling less concerned with the way their family would view them or, for those talked to their families about the violence often, felt this was easy communication due to those individuals already having some background information on the familial violence. With co-owned privacy boundaries, there are expectations that are negotiated between the original owner of the information and the confidant in regard to third-party disclosures (Petronio, 2004), some families privacy boundaries were not accepting of legal system disclosure. Four young adults did not disclose to anyone, this may have been due to the ways in which their family's communication norms influenced their decisions, participants recalled family members having negative reactions to their legal disclosure, thus leading to no subsequent disclosure. In some cases, family communication and privacy norms allowed for legal system disclosure therefore influencing those young adults to disclose again and again.

Although privacy rules are developed in order to decide the conditions in which others may be granted or denied access to private information, privacy management can change over time (Petronio, 2002;2010). DV-exposed youth may be fearful to have legal system disclosure, however if the violence reaches a particular threshold, they may adjust their privacy boundaries as an emergency arises. For instance, some young adults may feel less inclined to contact legal systems in less severe situations, but when the violence escalates, young adults may create more structured and thought out boundaries. Alternatively, some participants contacted legal systems due to having flexible privacy boundaries, then experienced a negative interaction with the legal

systems, leading them to create much more structured and thought out boundaries of when to contact legal systems.

Legal System Disclosure as a Common Experience for CCV-Exposed Youth

The current CEDV literature shows that although young adults most commonly disclose to police when disclosing to formal or legal systems, only 4%-7% of young adults report disclosing to formal or legal systems (Bottoms et al., 2016; Howell et al., 2015). Yet, our study found that nearly half of the participants reported legal system disclosure. The literature that found 4%-7% of DV-exposed young adults that disclosed to formal or legal systems did not distinguish the types of DV-exposure (e.g., coercion, physical violence, verbal abuse) and when discussed, only had about 20%-30% of the sample exposed to physical violence (Bottoms et al., 2016; Howell et al., 2015). In addition, these studies did not include questions related to frequency or severity of the physical violence nor degree of coercive control, likely important factors related to legal disclosure.

Escalating violence was the most prominent influential factor for those who did use legal help-seeking, whether it was due to child abuse or witnessing DV. Of the CCV-exposed young adults ($n = 15$), 10 had some legal system disclosure, whereas the other 5 had no legal system disclosure. Therefore, consistent with what is known about adult women's formal and legal help-seeking (Haselschwerdt et al., 2015; Leone et al., 2007), CCV exposure may be associated with higher levels of legal system disclosure, however, all three SCV-exposed young adults who disclosed to legal systems also experienced severe physical violence, thus furthering the idea that escalating violence is most influential on whether or not young adults seek legal help. It may be that this disclosure is much more common amongst the young adults who experience severe and frequent violence, potentially meaning disclosure felt like the only option to deescalate or end

the violence. Additionally, the four young adults who just never talked about the violence, were all exposed to SCV, further pointing to the idea that the violence must reach a particular threshold to call the police. Therefore, it may be that studies who have samples composed predominately of SCV-exposed youth will report lower legal help-seeking, whereas studies that have both or predominately CCV-exposed youth will paint a different picture. By assuring we ask about the complexity of DV exposure, including coercive control and characteristics of the physical violence, we will better understand who perceives legal system help-seeking as relevant and helpful to their experiences.

Our open-ended questions may have invoked more discussion of legal system involvement (e.g., court dates, other family members' disclosure) versus questions that are specific to youth calling the police, revealing greater disclosure than reported in the broader literature. For example, several participants recalled having legal system involvement even when they did not disclose themselves (i.e., other people disclosing – their mother, neighbors, parents, employers).

Limitations

This study's findings should be understood in the context of several limitations. First, the participants were asked to recall events from their childhood during the interview. Although they were able to provide many details of their past experiences, retrospective bias is still prevalent as participants did not recall all details of their experiences. Second, due to not being a part of the original research team and audio recordings had been deleted to comply with IRB guidelines; thus, aspects of participants' experiences may have been missed in my analysis with only having access to the transcripts. Further, this study is a secondary analysis of qualitative data; my specific focus and research questions were not part of the larger project and main goals, thus,

there were few specific interview guide questions on legal disclosure. Despite these limitations, the interviews provided rich and insightful information as it pertains to their DV-exposure experiences and legal system disclosure.

Finally, despite notable diversity within this sample, participants were all college attending and primarily female-identified, limiting generalizations of our findings to non-college attending and male-identified samples. Although the purpose of qualitative research is not to be generalizable, this study might be limited by its lack of gender symmetry as the current literature finds a mix of results associated with gender and formal and legal system disclosure, such that some studies report no difference in gender and disclosure whereas others report females disclosing more often (Camacho, Ehrensaft, & Cohen, 2012; Davies et al., 2008). This sample was racially and ethnically diverse, yet individuals from racial and ethnic minoritized groups tend to have less positive interactions with legal systems, particularly police (Nadal, Davidoff, Allcock, Serpe, & Erazo, 2017), but this was not investigated within the current study, limiting our understanding of the relationship between race, ethnicity, and CEDV-specific legal system disclosure.

Implications for Future Directions and Practice

Our findings highlight the complexities within the experiences of DV-exposed youth and their legal disclosure experiences. The current study focused on the ways in which DV-exposed youth make decisions around legal disclosure (i.e., who they disclose to, what they disclose and under what conditions).

To date no studies have examined how variations within DV exposure (i.e., differing types of DV) may influence legal disclosure decisions. Coercive control is the central factor used to make distinctions between CCV and SCV and is considered a central component of

understanding the complexity of DV (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Johnson, 2008). By omitting questions or details about severity and frequent of physical violence exposure, we are missing a key piece of their DV experiences (Bottoms et al., 2016; Howell et al., 2015) that subsequently influence legal system disclosure decisions. Our study touched on the frequency and severity of the violence, as well as the importance of coercion in DV, therefore noting that majority of youth exposed to CCV or with severe violence exposure experiences were accounted for within the discloser category, largely driven by the urgency of escalating violence. Building upon the growing CEDV literature on the importance of assessing degree of coercive control, this study provides evidence for how DV type as categorized by degree of coercive control contributes to nuances in legal system disclosure decisions. Future directions should include testing these qualitative relationships in quantitative or mixed methods study to further examine the details of their legal system disclosure, being particularly mindful asking about legal system involvement beyond individually calling the police.

Further, our findings may also provide important considerations for clinicians and practitioners when working with CCV-exposed youth. Understanding the complexities that exist when coercion is involved may aide in the clinician's ability to help these youth, particularly those who are exposed to more severe or injurious violence. Clinicians and other professionals working with DV-exposed youth should also be aware of the various family communication norms at play – all of which could be influencing a young adult's willingness or ability to disclose specific details of their DV experiences. Gaining insight on the family's norms will only benefit the clinician or practitioner in their ability to help DV-exposed youth, in particular, recognizing that youth might be hesitant to disclose to formal systems if they do not want legal intervention and that family secrecy rules strongly influence their disclosure. It is also beneficial

for clinicians and professionals to keep in mind that if a young adult has a bad experience with disclosure, it may then deter them from future disclosure.

Conclusion

DV-exposed young adults have a variety of experiences with legal disclosure. We found that the escalation of violence was a leading contributor in seeking legal system help, suggesting that youth exposed to more severe and injurious violence may be more likely to be accounted for in studies targeting these youth. By better understanding factors influencing nondisclosure and disclosure, including initial as well as subsequent disclosure, we are better able to understand why DV-exposed young adults experience or do not experience legal system disclosure. Particularly the nuances and complexities that exist within these experiences, we found that although participants disclose to legal systems, there is a collection of influential factors that help determine whether or not they will experience subsequent legal system disclosure. Additionally, we found that family privacy norms and boundaries are heavily influential in whether or not DV-exposed young adults initially and subsequently experience legal system disclosure.

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Appendix

Appendix A. -- Interview Protocol for Young Adults Live and Learn (Y'ALL) Project

The purpose of this interview is for me to learn more about the experiences of young adults who were exposed to violence and abuse perpetrated by their father or father-like figure towards their mother. I am going to ask you to tell me about your family life while you were growing up through the present time as well as your past and current romantic relationships. I will also ask you how you managed your experiences within your family and community. I will ask about the violence and abuse you were exposed to in a variety of ways, but I'll encourage you to just share your story through the majority of our time together. Finally, I want to let you know that I will not be judging you based on your responses. If I don't comment on certain things you tell me, it is because I am listening and want you to continue your story. Do you have any questions before we begin?

We are going to begin with some demographic and background information pertaining to you, your parent's relationship, some specific questions about each family member, and then also a few about where you grew up, but first, how did you learn about the Y'ALL Project?

I. Demographics/Background Information

1. How old are you?
2. What is your race or ethnicity?
3. What is your highest level of education?

If participant did not indicate who his/her mother's abusive partner was/is during the initial screening, ask the following:

Over email/phone you had said that your father or father-like figure had physically harmed your mother while you were growing up, was this your biological or adopted father, stepfather, or mother's partner not from marriage?

Now I'm going to ask you a little bit more about your mom's marital status and relationship with _____ (refer to him as participant did)?

[Mother's abuser is referred to as her "partner" but will be identified according to participants' labeling during interview process]

What is your mother and her partner's marital status? *[Probe for when they got married, separated or divorced; who initiated separation/divorce; who do they primarily stay with or visit when they are home]*

[If parents separated or divorced, probe for current relationship status, remarriage, step or half siblings]

Now I'm going to ask you to tell me a little bit more about your individual family members.

1. What is your mom's age?
2. What is your mom's race or ethnicity?

3. What is your mom's highest level of education?

4. What does your mom do for a living? [Probe if these are jobs or occupations that have remained constant or have varied while growing up.]

5. What is your mother's partner's age?

6. What is his race or ethnicity?

7. What is his highest level of education?

8. What does he do for a living? [Probe if these are jobs or occupations that have remained constant or have varied while growing up.]

9. Do you have any siblings? [If yes, probe for...]

a. How many?

b. What is their age?

c. Gender?

d. What is the birth order of siblings (e.g., oldest, middle)?

e. Any still living at home?

10. Are there any extended family members or individuals (e.g., nanny, grandparent) who lived in your house while you were growing up? If yes, who? When did they live in your home?

Now I'm going to take the information that you gave me to draw out a picture of your family – it's called a genogram – so that I can get a picture of who is in your family and the relationships in your family. This genogram will make it easier for me to keep track of who is in your family and the relationships between your family members while you are telling me about your experiences.

Alright, now I'm going to ask you some questions about your family as a whole and the community you grew up in.

11. How would you classify your family while you were growing up? [*Probe for changes between then and present; would you classify your family as _____ at the current time?*]

Read as options, not like a multiple choice question:

a. Impoverished/living in poverty

b. Working class

c. Middle class

d. Upper-middle class

e. Upper class

12. Did your family ever receive any of the following public assistance services? Reduced or free school lunches, cash assistance, food assistance (food stamps), health care or child care assistance, or housing assistance (e.g., Section 8 housing)? [If yes, specify which

ones.]

13. In what town, village, or city did you grow up or spend the majority of your childhood?

14. What sort of setting did you grew up in (for example, was it rural, urban, or suburban)?

15. If you were an outsider (e.g., not close friend or family member), how would you describe your family?

- a. How does this compare to your perspective or the reality of your home and family life?

II. Violence, Abuse and Family Life: I am now going to ask you to tell me about your mom and her partner's relationship and how he hurt your mom, but I will also ask you some questions about your relationship with your mother's partner and the possible ways in which he may have hurt you.

1. How would you describe your mom and her partner's relationship while you were growing up? *[Probe for whether this has always been the case, or if there were ebbs and flows or patterns of change throughout their childhood]*

2. Reflecting back on your childhood, can you tell me about the first time you realized that your mother's partner was hurting your mother? *[Probe for specific age or year in school. They did not need to label it abuse at the time, but now when they reflect back]*

3. Can you describe the physical abuse against your mother while you were growing up?

- a. Moms who experience abuse often think or hope their children don't know about, see, or hear the physical abuse but research shows children and adolescents are often very aware of the abuse. Can you tell me about your experiences (and the experiences of your siblings if relevant) of witnessing or overhearing abuse towards your mom? *[Probe for whether they witnessed, overheard, saw the aftermath (e.g., bruises, property damage), or were told about it by someone else if they were not present; frequency; whether or not the participant or siblings intervened in any way]*

1. Some children and adolescent say they sometimes tried to intervene to stop the abuse, but others have said that they did not intervene because they were too scared or thought they would make things worse. Can you tell me about your experiences and opinion about intervening?

[Probe for factors that played into their decision not to intervene; if they did intervene, did the ways in which they intervened change over time; what happened when they intervened?]

4. In addition to physical abuse, can you describe some of the other ways that your mom experienced abuse by her partner? *[Probe with examples of emotional, sexual, financial, etc. abuse, if needed. Probe for possible controlling behaviors by asking to elaborate on examples of*

abuse; frequency]

a. *[If participant does not mention control issues in the preceding questions, directly ask if such behaviors were present.]* Would you describe him as controlling of your mother or not controlling? If yes, how so? Can you give me some examples? If no, why would you say he was not controlling?

b. Research has indicated that children and adolescents are often exposed to the physical abuse, but we do not know much about exposure to some of non-physical abuses that you described. Can you tell me about your experiences (and the experiences of your siblings if relevant) of witnessing or overhearing these non-physical but abusive behaviors towards your mom?

[Probe for whether they witnessed, overheard, or were told about it by someone else if they were not present; frequency; whether or not the participant or siblings intervened in any way; when they figured out that these behaviors were abusive]

5. From your perspective, why your mom's partner was abusive towards her or what was going on to cause or lead up to the physical and non-physical abuse? *[If necessary, probe regarding specific arguments, unpredictable violence, and violence used to control.]*

6. Some women who experience abuse respond by using violence to defend themselves or protect their children, whereas others use violence against their partner because they are angry with them or want to take control of the situation. How does your mom's behaviors align with what I just read? (Or, can you tell me about a time when your mother used acts of physical violence or other abusive acts towards her partner? *(If so, did she initiate or did he, what was her motivation for her use of violence; common? infrequent)*)

7. How has your mother and her partners' relationship changed over time? *(If divorced or separated and mom initiated divorce and/or separation. Probe for responses that indicate control, such as threats of violence if she left, or threats to the kids. [Probe for whether abuse continued post-separation, types of abuse])*

Alright, now I'm going to ask you a set of questions asks about actions your mom may have experienced in her relationship with her abusive partner. You have already answered many of these questions these past few minutes. These questions have only been used in research with adult women who were hurt by their partner, so we want to see if the questions are useful in better understanding the experiences of young adults exposed to violence and abuse.

PMWI: Using the following scale, tell me how often each statement occurred from childhood through the present *(If mom is separated or divorced from abusive partner, say: tell me how often each statement occurred from childhood through your mom and her partner's separation and divorce. You are also welcome to elaborate on or say more about any of the following items.*

	ever	arely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently	<i>[If never]</i> Has this ever been a problem for your mom?	
PMWI1. He monitored her time and made her account for her whereabouts.			2	3	4	5	0 ___ No 1 ___ Yes
PMWI2. He used her money or made important financial decisions without talking to her about it.			2	3	4	5	0 ___ No 1 ___ Yes
PMWI3. He was jealous or suspicious of her friends.			2	3	4	5	0 ___ No 1 ___ Yes
PMWI4. He accused her of having an affair with another man.			2	3	4	5	0 ___ No 1 ___ Yes
PMWI5. He interfered in her relationships with other family members.			2	3	4	5	0 ___ No 1 ___ Yes
PMWI6. He tried to keep her from doing things to help herself. <i>(Anything that would help her improve herself or situation.)</i>			2	3	4	5	0 ___ No 1 ___ Yes
PMWI7. Her partner called her names.			2	3	4	5	0 ___ No 1 ___ Yes
PMWI8. Her partner swore at her.			2	3	4	5	0 ___ No 1 ___ Yes
PMWI9. Her partner yelled and screamed at her.			2	3	4	5	0 ___ No 1 ___ Yes

PMW10. Her partner treated her like an inferior		2	3	4	5	0 ___ No 1 ___ Yes
PMW11. Her partner told her that her feelings were irrational or crazy.		2	3	4	5	0 ___ No 1 ___ Yes
PMW12. Her partner blamed her for his problems.		2	3	4	5	0 ___ No 1 ___ Yes
PMW13. Her partner tried to make her feel crazy.		2	3	4	5	0 ___ No 1 ___ Yes

We are about halfway through the interview, do you want to take a break or keep going?

III. The Impact of Abuse on Family Dynamics and Functioning.

For the rest of the interview, I'm going to ask you some questions about your family dynamics and functioning, how you managed your experiences, and how your experiences have influenced you, particularly in terms of your view of and involvement in relationships with your romantic partners and peers.

First, I am going to start off with some questions about your relationship with your mother's partner. Just as a reminder, I am a mandated reporter of ongoing child abuse, so if you report any ongoing child abuse towards a sibling under 19, I would have to report this to the proper authorities.

1. Many people report that they have a complicated relationship with their mother's partner if he was abusive to their mother meaning that they have both a good and bad relationship with him, whereas others report all positive or all negative memories or encounters with their mother's abusive partner. Can you tell me about your relationship with your mom's partner while you were growing up?

[Probe for whether this has changed over time; probe for physical and non-physical abuse, controlling behaviors; provide examples]

- a. *[If probes did allow for information on controlling behaviors]* Would you describe him as controlling over you and your siblings? If yes, how so? Can you give me some examples? If no, why would you say he was not controlling?

2. Compared to when you were growing up, what is your relationship like with your mom's partner now or in the past few years? *[Probe for discussion of all aspects of relationship, good, bad, controlling]*

3. (*Back up question if not getting enough detail*) Some people believe that a husband (or partner) who is abusive can still be a good father to their children or the mother's children while others argue that the two cannot be separated. What are your beliefs on this?

I am now going to shift our attention to your family and home life in general and how you managed your experiences in the context of your immediate family members and those outside your family.

4. If you were to describe what your family or home life was like in three words, what would the three words be and why would you choose them?

5. Can you tell me about a time when you talked with another family member about your his abusive behavior? (*Who initiated the conversation, when, what was the response of the other person, did the conversation remain ongoing; messages about secrecy*)

a. *If no communication*, what do you think the response would have been had you told others about his abusive behavior?

6. (*If not covered earlier*) As I mentioned in an earlier question, some mom's feel like should keep the violence and abuse a secret from their children to protect them from knowing, but other moms talk with their children and adolescence about their partner's behavior. How would you describe your communication with your mother about the abuse she experienced?

7. Can you tell me about a time when someone outside your family learned about your mother's partner's abusive behavior? (*Who initiated the conversation, when, what was the response of the other person, did the conversation remain ongoing; any other conversations with others*)

b. *If no one ever learned*, how do you think someone outside the family would have responded had they learned about his behavior?

8. Compared to when you were growing up, what is your family and home life like now? (*Probe for mother, mother's partner, siblings; reasons for change; beneficial or detrimental change*)

IV. Interpersonal Relationships. Alright, in this final section, I am going to ask you some questions about your relationships with peers as well as romantic partners.

1. Thinking back to your childhood and adolescence, how would you describe your relationships or how well you got along with your classmates, neighbor kids, and friends that you met while growing up? [*Probe for bully perpetration/victimization, ability to maintain close friendships; changes over time*]

a. Some young adults report that their ability to develop and maintain friendships has been negatively impacted by the abuse they experienced or were exposed to, whereas other young adults report that they have many positive friendships that helped them cope and manage their abusive home life. How does your peer or friend experiences compare

with these perspectives?

2. The romantic relationships, both positive and negative, that we are exposed to in our families of origin are known to impact our views of and involvement in romantic relationships. Can you talk about how your abuse exposure experiences have impacted or not impacted your decision to enter into a romantic relationship at this point in your life, your choice of romantic partner, and your interactions with romantic partners? *[If they have never been in a romantic relationship, ask them how they EXPECT the exposure will impact their choice of and interactions with a future partner]*

3. And finally, as we wrap up, if you were given the opportunity to talk with others who were exposed to violence and abuse in their family of origin, based on your experiences, what tips or advice would you share for coping and managing their experiences in a beneficial manner?

Do you have any questions or concerns for me? If not right now, please know that you can email or call if any questions arises after our meeting.

Thank you very much for your time and willingness to share your experiences with us. Please accept this thank you note, \$25 cash, and referral list.

In the future we may conduct studies similar to the Y'ALL Project, would you like to give me your contact information so we can invite you to participate in future studies? This information will be kept in a confidential file cabinet and electronic file. If we were to contact you in the future, we would be using a project name similar to the Y'ALL Project and would not identify as you a participant in the current project. If you provide your contact information, you can decline our invitation to participate in any future study. This does not commit you in any way to participating. [If the participant agrees, ask the following contact information]

Date of Participation: _____

Contact information: _____

(Email) _____

(Cell/phone) _____

(Additional contact information) _____

(Regardless of providing contact information for future studies) **Would you like me to contact you with an overview of the final results from this study?**

(If yes): How would you like me to contact you? [Regardless of contact method] I will not identify the nature of the study, but rather, I will refer to the study as the Y'ALL Project and ask to make sure you would still like me to provide you with the results via the mean of communication that you suggested today. For example, I will not just email the results to you without first checking to make sure that is what you would like.

(If yes and did not provide contact information above)

(Email) _____

(Cell/phone) _____
(Additional contact information) _____

VITA

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