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## The Cycle of Violence and Its Effect on Revictimization

Shelby Stevens

sls288@zips.uakron.edu

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# The Cycle of Violence and Its Effects on Revictimization

Shelby Stevens

Department of Sociology: Criminology and Law Enforcement

**Honors Research Project**

Submitted to

*The Williams Honors College*

*The University of Akron*

## **Statement of Problem**

Women around the world suffer from sexual violence, assault, and rape at the hands of their partners. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, or NCADV, states that “Nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States”, which equates to over 10 million men and women that face domestic violence (“National Statistics”). Despite the enormous prevalence of this issue, many incidents are never reported. Organizations such as domestic violence shelters seek to alleviate the stress that comes from leaving an abusive relationship, giving victims a safe place to report the crime while empowering them to become independent. Women who go to shelters often find themselves fleeing because they are scared for their lives and feel that they have no other choice, with nowhere else to go. Victims are forced to rebuild their lives, and if they decide not to report, their abuser will never face proper punishment for their crimes. They are also likely to reoffend, as “domestic violence offenders have higher rates of recidivism than non-domestic violence offenders” (Harmon and Miller 2013). Shelters seek to help manage the effects of domestic violence by supporting women after they have been victimized, but they alone will not solve the problem of domestic violence, as they can’t undo what has already been done or prevent the perpetrator from abusing again.

Research in the past on child abuse has been focused on victims becoming perpetrators later in life. The results of studies on the intergenerational cycle of violence find that “children exposed to violence are more likely to become violent themselves and to later pass these same behaviors on to their own children” (Juan et. al 2020). However, child abuse affects everyone differently, and some are more likely to be subjected to further victimization due to the lack of emotional management of their abuse. Without a strong attachment to a caregiver due to

childhood abuse, victims may not understand how a healthy relationship operates as they are desensitized to the abuse and believe it to be a normal side effect of love. The emotions necessary for communication and negotiation are not developed in childhood, and aggression is used against victims as a result. An insecure attachment to a caregiver is “associated with deficits in interpersonal functioning and risk for intimate partner violence, suggesting insecure attachment may mediate the relationship between child maltreatment and the experience of betrayal trauma as an adult” (Hocking et al. 2016). When choosing a partner in adult life, victims may find partners who behave similarly to their caregivers. The actions of the perpetrator may be a red flag for abuse that goes unnoticed due to the maltreatment and learned behaviors that create expectations for adult life. These beliefs about relationships put victims at a high risk for further victimization as an adult since they were not socialized properly in their early formative years.

## **Introduction**

For my internship in the Summer of 2019, I worked as a volunteer at Genesis House domestic violence shelter. This experience drove my interest in the topic of the cycle of violence, as many victims staying at the shelter stated that they had also faced child abuse. I was able to experience sociological concepts and theories at work, such as attachment theory, differential association theory, labeling theory, and the Power and Control Wheel. These concepts, explained in the pages below, are crucial when analyzing revictimization and will be used within this research. The purpose of this thesis is to apply what I have learned throughout my internship and use it to propose a future research plan. This study will focus on the long-term effects of child abuse on adults later in life, and the role that the cycle of violence plays. I hypothesize that this study will prove a link between child abuse and the entrance in abusive romantic relationships as an adult.

## **Internship Reflection**

Genesis House does not serve as just a shelter for victims of domestic violence. There are many sectors including victims' advocates, community education, support groups, and aftercare. The shelter program is widely known to the public, although it resides in an undisclosed and confidential location for the protection of residents. The staff house victims of domestic violence fleeing an immediate and dangerous situation. They can stay in shelter up to forty-five days, and during that time they are aided in completing goals such as finding a job or acquiring affordable housing. Regular chores are divided between those staying at the shelter, such as cooking and cleaning, to give them a sense of normalcy and teach necessary skills for adequate community living. The shelter staff focus on social change over social service. They aim to equip victims with the resources they need to leave their abusive relationship and live on their own. Empathetic listening is practiced by the shelter staff to allow victims space to vent about their current situation, the trauma of their past, and their fears for the future. Residents are also taught about the dynamics of an abusive relationship through the presentation of the cycle of violence, the Power and Control wheel, and red flags in a relationship. This empowers the women who stay at the shelter and works to dissuade them from entering another abusive relationship if they can recognize the signs early.

Victims' advocates work in courthouses across Lorain County, including Elyria municipal court and the Lorain County Justice Center. They speak to victims before or after court to provide emotional support, explain the process and their rights, and provide resources for help. Advocates often help victims file for a Temporary Protection Order or Civil Protection order from their abuser to ensure their safety. Staff working in community education work in schools, juvenile detention centers, or churches to give young adults a comprehensive education

on safe dating and healthy relationships. Genesis Houses support groups are open to women in shelter as well as women in the community in an abusive relationship or dealing with the aftermath of leaving. Aftercare events are for women who have left shelter to check up on how they're doing, provide them with supplies they may need, and regain their sense of community and safety. All sectors of Genesis House are modeled around feminist theory, the Duluth model, and the empowering of women in relationships that treat them as inferior.

The residents that I met in shelter often came from a low socioeconomic status and low education. Many of them had been homeless for most or part of their lives, and they were familiar with living paycheck to paycheck, if they were lucky enough to have a job. Many were also subjected to child abuse by a parent or close relative, as they indicated on their intake form. However, the residents came from all ethnic backgrounds and ages, as domestic violence does not occur more often in one specific ethnicity or age group. Many residents also suffered from severe mental illness that had never been treated. The shelter was focused on group activities, harmonious group living, and completing goals in an attempt to combat feelings of isolation and helplessness that could trigger a worsening of mental health. This also helped to create a victim subculture. Women were encouraged to attend support groups and aftercare events to maintain a sense of community in which others could relate to them. I often witnessed the residents building friendships through learning about each other's lives and stories, while also giving items like clothes to others who needed it more.

While working at Elyria Municipal Court, the concept of deterrence was often questioned. Civil Protection Orders and Temporary Protection Orders can give victims a sense of safety, since any form of contact from their abuser can be filed as a violation, but many defendants saw the order as nothing more but a piece of paper. They did not care if they received

a violation, and it did not serve as a deterrent. When receiving protection orders, the judges and magistrates often told victims that they still needed to be safe and remain aware of their surroundings, because the protection order could not help until after an incident occurred and formal paperwork could be filed at the police station. I witnessed multiple violations during my internship, since many abusers still needed to feel control over their victims and wielded their control through harassment.

During my time interning with Genesis House, I worked in multiple different fields that allowed me to learn about the innerworkings of a nonprofit organization while further developing my sociological imagination. The clients and residents I met were often facing circumstances that I have only learned about, and never seen in person. My proposal is centered around attachment theory, which is concerned with early formative relationships with caregivers. They are believed to influence the development of future relationships, emotions, and behaviors necessary for healthy partnerships. Without a strong attachment to a caregiver, residents were left without knowledge of what healthy dating and love looks like, along with a lack of emotions needed for a successful relationship.

I experienced multiple sociological concepts and theories, including differential association theory, which states that an individual's attitudes, behaviors, value, and motives for deviant behavior are learned from the interactions with others in their community. This concept is usually applied to criminal behavior, stating that "persons acquire patterns of criminal behavior in the same way they acquire patterns of lawful behavior- through learning in interactions with other persons" (Cressey, Donald A). In the case of this study it is applied to explain how experiencing abuse as a child can lead to a skewed perspective on relationships as the abnormal interactions of their parents influence the child's behavior with their own future

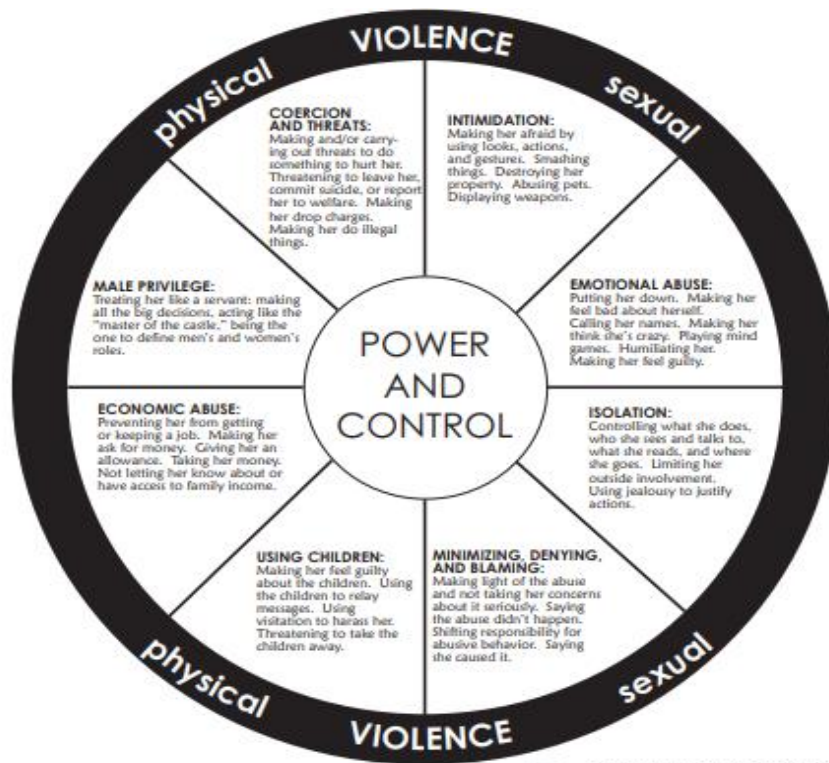
partner. Labeling theory was first hypothesized as an explanation for the creation of deviant individuals. Labeling those who strayed from the norm was a form of social sanction in which the “identity assigned to an individual is in some respect altered to his discredit” (Knutsson 1977). Throughout the process of labeling one’s identity, their self-concept is challenged and may change based on “how he has been treated and of the expectations placed upon him” (Knutsson 1977). The terms used to describe an individual and their identity may lead to an internalization of their given label, which for the purposes of this study would be the label as a victim. How an individual is treated, spoken to, and spoken of can influence their beliefs about themselves as they become their own stereotype. Within this study, emotional abuse is thought to lead to a decline in confidence, self-esteem, and mental health, resulting in an adult relationship with a partner that abuses them the same way their childhood abuser did.

During my internship and observations, I recognized sociological concepts at work in resident’s lives. Many residents had internalized self-hatred projected by their abuser and they felt helpless and dependent when trying to flee. Many women also suffered from role engulfment, in which they felt trapped and powerless in their role. Their abuser had made them feel that they could not leave, and they were stuck in their role as girlfriend or wife. Even if they knew the abuse was unacceptable and wanted to get help, their abuser had made it seem impossible, either because he would follow them wherever they went or because he made them feel as if they couldn’t support themselves.

I often witnessed the Power and Control Wheel at work in victim’s lives. The Power and Control wheel is a diagram originally developed by Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs in Duluth, Minnesota. It is used in “understanding the overall pattern of abusive and violent behaviors, which are used by a batterer to establish and maintain control over his partner”



(NCDSV: National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence). Victims faced threats, intimidation, isolation, emotional abuse, and economic abuse. Their abuser may have also used their children to get what they wanted. Strict gender roles were enforced for women and their children as a necessary way of living by treating victims like servants, ensuring that they completed all housework. Prohibiting women from working or contacting friends or relatives made it more difficult for them to leave since they had no access to money and no support system. These tactics served as a way to maintain the power and control in the relationship, while forbidding their partner from having any sense of power or independence.



(NCDSV: National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence)

Developed by:  
 Domestic Abuse Intervention Project  
 202 East Superior Street  
 Duluth, MN 55812  
 218.722.4134

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 on Domestic and Sexual Violence  
 812 Wood Creek Blvd. • Austin, Texas 78738  
 512.507.8625 (phone and fax) • www.ncdsv.org

## **Literature Review**

Recent research demonstrates the effects of child abuse in a light that has not been studied or adequately discussed, even though it is common. Further victimization in adulthood is shown in these studies and can begin a discussion on the importance of empowering victims to understand that they are not deserving of the abuse they are subjected to. In Anu Manchikanti Gómez' study "Testing the Cycle of Violence Hypothesis: Child Abuse and Adolescent Dating Violence as Predictors of Intimate Partner Violence in Young Adulthood", the cycle of violence theorizes that children who experience abuse or maltreatment have a higher chance of experiencing or perpetrating violence as adults. The study is focused on young individuals aged 16-24, since they are at the greatest risk of intimate partner violence. Past research has often studied married couples, who are past the age when they are at the greatest risk. Older studies have also used cross sectional methods with samples that are not representative of the population and stereotype men only as perpetrators and women only as victims.

Gomez updated the methods of this study by using a longitudinal, nationally representative, school-based survey of adolescents that examines dating violence as well as child abuse. The data used in this research is taken from three waves of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Throughout the waves, adolescents are studied in all three and their parents were interviewed in only the first wave, resulting in a total of 4,191 participants. This study also incorporates parental and social factors into its research. Along with the cycle of violence theory, Gomez uses ecological systems theory, social learning theory, and social disorganization theory to help understand the causes of violence against women. Ecological systems theory incorporates individual, situational, and sociocultural risk factors to explain why some individuals may be at greater risk for intimate partner violence. Social learning theory,

developed by Albert Bandura, states that behaviors are learned from observation, meaning that children who see their parents deal with conflict through aggression are more likely to mirror those behaviors as adults or exhibit learned helplessness. Social disorganization theory argues that a lack of neighborhood cohesiveness affects how crime is addressed, leading to a lack of collective efficacy as well.

In the test of the cycle of violence, Anu Manchikanti Gómez found that for female intimate partner violence victimization in young adulthood, child abuse is highly significant, with victims of child abuse having a 210% increase in the odds of victimization as compared to women who were not abused (2011). Victims are more likely to be female, black, have less than a college education, and be in a cohabitating relationship rather than a marriage. Their parents are likely to be in a lower socioeconomic status and their neighborhood community is also more likely to have lower residential stability. The risk factors are thus demonstrated to have great significance on the experience of intimate partner violence, as ecological systems theory and social disorganization theory suggest.

The study's results show that child abuse and adolescent dating violence are predictive of intimate partner violence as a young adult. It also shows that there are short term and long-term consequences to child abuse, and although not all children will become victims or perpetrators, they face a greater risk than the general population of further intimate partner violence. The significance of the short term and long-term effects shown in the study implies a great need for child abuse prevention and counseling. The wave two data also demonstrate that many respondents, who were between their sophomore and senior year of high school, had already faced adolescent dating violence. This implies the need for better education on healthy relationships and red flag warning signs for high school students. Gómez states that early

intervention may “be an important opportunity to stop the cycle of violence” (“Testing the Cycle of Violence Hypothesis”, 2011). This intervention may decrease the risk of further intimate partner violence as an adult by teaching students the differences between a healthy and unhealthy romantic relationship.

Similar to Gómez’ study of the cycle of violence hypothesis, research conducted by Tara Richards, Marie Tillyer, and Emily Wright analyzes the effect of childhood maltreatment on adolescents and young adults. This study also used the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health but focuses on the data collected from wave four of the study rather than wave one through three. The study, entitled “Intimate Partner Violence and the Overlap of Perpetration and Victimization”, goes further than the cycle of violence hypothesis to include emotional abuse as a factor in child maltreatment, along with physical abuse and sexual abuse. Rather than only study individuals who become either victims or perpetrators, this study also analyzes individuals who become both as a result of the child abuse they faced. The study sought to improve society’s understanding of the cycle of violence by considering more of the effects of child maltreatment, such as short term or long-term consequences and the number of individuals who later become both victims and perpetrators.

The results of this study found that women reported higher levels of sexual and emotional abuse than men, significantly adding to their level of child maltreatment due to the inclusion of emotional abuse as a variable. When analyzing levels of physical abuse, males and females experienced similar rates, which led to an increased risk of intimate partner violence victimization for both genders. However, the higher rates of emotional abuse that women face put them at a greater risk of victimization. This emotional abuse often has a long-term effect on victims due to the disruption of secure attachment with their caregivers. The study found that

there is a “causal relationship between experiencing physical abuse in childhood and later intimate partner violence through the adoption of physical violence as normative behavior in interpersonal relationships” (Richards, Tillyer, Wright 2017). The authors also state that childhood emotional abuse may prevent individuals from learning and practicing a range of important emotions in their formative relationships, and as a result, victims may suffer emotional deficits that negatively impact their interpersonal relationships over time (Richards, Tillyer, Wright 2017). Child maltreatment may lead to issues when trying to process emotions without using violence or accepting victimization when violence is used by others. Children are also not properly equipped with the skills they need to express their positive or negative emotions in a healthy way.

The authors conclude their article with a statement of the need for further research on the subject of child maltreatment. Their analysis was more complex than past research, with the inclusion of emotional abuse as well as individuals who become both victims and perpetrators. The need to focus on more than just physical or sexual abuse is thus highlighted within their study, as intervention efforts may not be beneficial for those who are regular victims of emotional abuse. Even though this type of abuse is often overlooked, the study gives evidence that emotional abuse has long term effects as well. The authors find that screening for multiple types of child maltreatment and placing importance on mental health should be a priority in therapeutic interventions to protect a greater number of children from a dangerous home environment.

In another long-term study of the effects of child maltreatment, Penelope Trickett, a psychologist from the University of Southern California, began by interviewing a group of girls in Washington D.C. in 1987. The girls were aged six to sixteen and were all victims of sexual

assault that had been reported to child protective services. In her research, Trickett uncovered a pattern which demonstrated that individuals who had experienced sexual trauma at least once as a child or teen are at a greater risk for assault in the future than the general population. This early sexual trauma increases the risk of both an attack and an abusive relationship. The interviews also accounted for variances in socioeconomic class and found that the pattern remained constant in spite of differing environments and communities.

The author of this scientific review, Sushma Subramanian, seeks for an explanation as to why so many victims of childhood sexual abuse become trapped in the cycle of violence throughout their adult life. Subramanian found that researchers use emotional dysregulation as an answer for this phenomenon, meaning that victims are unable to manage their emotional responses. She also theorizes that childhood abuse can lead to victims developing unhealthy beliefs and ideals about romantic relationships. This is attributed to the early sexual trauma that victims may have faced that can “lay a blueprint for behaviors and expectations in adult relationships” (Subramanian 2016). Victims who develop post-traumatic stress disorder due to the early sexual trauma they were subjected to may turn to the use of sex or drugs as well, putting them at a greater risk of further victimization.

The relationship blueprint for victims contributes to their difficulty recognizing red flags early. Many victims also suffer from the feeling that they are not in control of the sexual activities they participate in. The perpetrator decides or demands when they will have sex, leaving the victim to feel that they are not able to participate in any decision making. Although this behavior is problematic, those who miss the early signs of an abusive relationship are at a greater risk for more inappropriate or aggressive behavior as the relationship continues. As a result, victims may desensitize themselves to danger and avoid the serious nature of the issue, especially if they are

dependent on their abuser or feel that they must protect themselves from feeling the extent of their trauma.

Despite the immense trauma brought on by childhood abuse and the common occurrence of revictimization, “researchers also see cases where young people appear to break the cycle and find healthy relationships— even after severe childhood abuse” (Subramanian 2016). The victim’s outlook on their abuse seems to be a key factor in living a normal life. If they can understand that the abuse was not their fault and confront their trauma, there is a greater likelihood that the victim will adjust well to adult life. Those who can escape a dangerous environment are also more likely break free from the cycle of violence than young girls who remain trapped in an unstable household. This evidence points to the importance of educating children how to express their emotions so that they may not be held back by their trauma or face long term consequences in adulthood. Educating and empowering victims so that they feel comfortable reporting abusive behavior may also led to a significant change in the number of children revictimized as adults.

While these studies provide prior research and precedence for this study, they each come with limitations. Gómez’ study testing the cycle of violence is dependent on the retrospective measure of child abuse. Participants may misremember the events that will be used as data, resulting in a possible overreporting or underreporting of their abuse. The questionnaire used for the study is also limited in the types of physical abuse it asks respondents, with only slapping, kicking, and hitting included. Gómez proposes that “As these behaviors vary in severity, it would be useful to examine the occurrence of each type of abuse as well as psychological and other types of physical abuse”, to correct this limitation (“Testing the Cycle of Violence Hypothesis”, 2011). Children who witness intimate partner violence between their parents may also face

further victimization due to their childhood psychological trauma, but this study does not include them in the data collected. Among important distinctions not considered in this study is the lack of inclusion of adolescent perpetration, as well as individuals who become both victims and perpetrators later in life.

The study “Intimate Partner Violence and the Overlap of Perpetration and Victimization” does make this distinction by including individuals who are victims and perpetrators. However, polyvictimization is not considered within this article because of its’ small sample size and small scope of the research. While the analysis of individual maltreatment provided conclusive results, the inclusion of combined forms of maltreatment may alter these results. The impact of the abuse on an individual can also be affected by other factors not included in this study, such as the “timing of the abuse, duration/chronicity of abuse, or perpetrator characteristics [that] were also beyond that focus on the current study” (Richards, Tillyer, Wright 2017). Similar to “Testing the Cycle of Violence Hypothesis”, this study also relies on self-reporting, increasing that likelihood that participants will misremember abuse due to their limited ability to recall events.

As an article reviewing studies on victimization, Subramanian’s review is limited in its recommendations for intervention and prevention efforts. The author suggests that dialectical behavior therapy, or DBT, may help to confront the emotional dysregulation that victims of sexual assault struggle with. However, few studies have been able to definitively prove the effectiveness of this therapy with women who have been victimized. Some larger studies have shown some progress and promise while other, smaller studies have not proved that DBT can “prevent revictimization in patients with a history of sexual assault” (Subramanian 2016). Since the research on this therapy is fairly inconclusive, access to DBT for victims is difficult and unlikely. As with all studies included in this literature review, more research on the topic is



needed to provide greater evidence on the effects of child abuse towards revictimization and the prevention efforts that will help the issue.

### **Methods and Data**

Based on my internship experiences and literature review, I propose a research study to address the issue of revictimization from child abuse to domestic violence. The topic of research for this study is whether individuals who face abuse throughout their childhood from parents or close relatives are likely to enter abusive relationships in adulthood. The proposed research plan for this study is a qualitative analysis of past and present domestic violence shelter clients throughout the state of Ohio. A face to face interview will be administered to participants. It will be comprised of eighteen questions focusing on different forms of child abuse including physical, emotional, and sexual. Including the complex components of child maltreatment will allow the interviewer to gain a deeper understanding of the abuse these individuals may have faced, as each participant will have a different story, and some may not have experienced every form of abuse listed. As a qualitative analysis, the questions asked will be open ended, to ensure the most important and relevant information is collected. The questions will also allow respondents to expand on their answers further than closed 'yes/no' questions. The interviewer will also be better able to avoid interviewer bias by allowing participants to describe their experience in their own words.

According to the Domestic Violence Report of the Ohio Attorney General, there were 65,845 domestic violence reports in 2018. Using this number as a population size, a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, the sample for this study should be at least 382 individuals. To receive an effective and accurate number for domestic violence in Ohio, a random sample of 400 client files will be collected from domestic violence shelters throughout

the state. This will include clients from the past ten years as well as clients currently residing in their shelter that will have the opportunity to participate and respond. A random sample of clients will allow for participants of all ages and ethnicities, education, and socioeconomic status, barring that they are over 18. This will ensure that the sample is representative of the population and will consider the effect of other risk factors, such as a lower income bracket or minority status. The research question will ask if relationships and socialization throughout childhood shape relationships later in life, and if community education on healthy relations and equality can impact adults who feel that their abusive relationship is normal and choose not to leave.

### **Participants**

The participants of this research project will be clients of domestic violence shelters in Ohio dating back ten years, most of whom are adult women. However, these women may also have children of their own that stay in the shelter with them. These children will not be studied as they are not the main focus and their inclusion would bring along ethical concerns. Rather, the women included in the study will be asked to speak of their own childhood to analyze how it has affected their adult life. Each of the clients included in the study will have lived in the shelter for some period of time and will have an extensive file to be found in the client database. Their intake forms often include questions about abuse faced as a child and may provide further insight into how widespread this issue is.

### **Recruitment**

The participants of the study will be given \$100 cash as their compensation for inclusion in this research. The sample of participants will be randomly selected from their client files or from the database used at the domestic violence shelter in which they are currently staying or

have stayed in the past. As a backup, in case the first sample of residents do not want to participate or they have changed their contact information, fifty extra client files will be chosen to ensure a reliable sample size. The interview will take place at an agreed location, including but not limited to the participants house, an aftercare event, or a support group. However, the location will also have to be private, so it may need to take place either before or after these events. The information advertising this study will be distributed through the network of resources, such as aftercare and support groups, to recruit anyone else who may be interested in participating.

### **Instruments**

A team of interviewers will conduct the face to face interview with each participant. Prior to the interview they will complete training to remain unbiased in tone of voice, response to answers, and body language so that respondents will not feel like they are being judged for their response. The team will ideally use a recording device during the interview, if the participant is comfortable after notification that their answers will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside of this research project. Rather than taking notes, or simply trying to remember what is said, they will have an exact copy of the participant's response and their data will remain clear and untainted. Participants will be asked a total of fifteen open-ended questions throughout the process of the interview, listed on page 13, which asks about their childhood and types of abuse they may have faced, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. The open-ended questions are structured to allow respondents to speak freely about their experiences.

### **Analytical Technique**

The study will begin with audio recordings of the entire interview that will be transcribed afterwards. This will allow the interviewer to focus their attention on the participants, rather than taking notes and possibly missing key points of their answers. The transcripts from each interview will then be compared to each other to identify patterns, such as threatening behavior faced throughout childhood. The data will be analyzed through a hand coding technique using a one tail test, in which the researcher is concerned with differences in one direction where the true population is greater than the value specified in the null hypothesis. The differences collected will align with the research question, which will work to prove that whether individuals who face abuse throughout their childhood from parents or close relatives are likely to enter abusive relationships in adulthood.

### **Ethical Concerns**

The group of participants in this study will be 18 or older in order to be eligible, to ensure that those who are responding are not minors that will need parental consent. This coincides with the research question as it focuses on adults looking back on their childhood and teenage years when they were at risk for child abuse and nonfatal intimate partner violence. Participants will be thoroughly informed of the purpose of this study as well as the procedure and layout, so that they may understand how their face to face interview will add to the data and allow for a more accurate conclusion.

All information learned throughout the study will be confidential and the participants names will not be revealed. It is crucial that all identifying information of respondents remain hidden to protect them from the abuser they have fled from. Participants will be informed the location of the interview with ample time to discuss another possible meeting place that is more comfortable. They will also be informed that, although they are being recorded, their audio and

answers will not be published and will only be used by the researchers. As they recount traumatic events from their past, participants may feel upset, anxious, or overwhelmed due to the nature of the questionnaire. Although this information is crucial to the study, it is unethical to push or force victims to relive their trauma. To alleviate this concern, interviewers will ensure participants that they are in safe space where they make take their time answering. They are also under no obligation to complete the interview if it becomes too much to handle, as the study will consist of a big enough sample to allow for some respondents to drop out while remaining representative. Those who choose to complete the interview will be encouraged to attend after care events and support groups held by a domestic violence shelter so that they may continue working through their trauma with likeminded people who understand their experiences.

### **Limitations**

The information acquired within this study is completely dependent on the participants ability to recall traumatic events from their childhood, such as physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. Since this study is dependent on the retrospective response of participants, it faces a limitation in underreporting, overestimating, or misremembering past abuse. If a participant wrongly responds, the data will be skewed with little chance of recognizing the error or pinpointing which answer was incorrectly completed. Although the interview asks about various types of abuse and asks the participant to expand on their answers, it is also difficult to determine the severity of abuse in a way that can be accurately measured. Unlike the literature reviewed for this study, adolescent dating violence is not included in the research as it focuses only on child abuse by a parent or close relative. However, dating violence as a teenager is also predictive of later intimate partner violence and should be considered within a larger study.

Interviewer bias can have an effect on how questions are asked or worded, and the participants may respond differently or inaccurately due to the presence of the interviewer. As a qualitative research method, face to face interviews are also labor intensive and expensive. Each interviewer must be properly trained to interview, a large number of interviews must be conducted, and data must then be configured from the answers given. The incentive given will be expensive, depending on the number of participants, but it is necessary to ensure enough participants for a representative sample. The sample will only be representative of the state of Ohio and the population of past or present residents within an Ohio domestic violence shelter. This could be solved by repeating the study in other states and creating a wider study that will include more shelters while allowing for a comparison across America.

### **Contribution**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the correlation between victims who experience both child abuse and victimization through intimate relationships in their adult life. In providing evidence for this link, the study will also call for better prevention efforts when educating children on healthy relationships. Although the primary source of socialization and learned behavior for children is within the home, their schooling and outside activities can still help provide them with the skills they will need for adult life. This includes the ability to process and manage their emotions as well as how to recognize the early warning signs of an abuser. In addition, the data from this research will provide a better idea of the rates of child abuse in the past, which may have been underreported, along with the impact that a lack of prevention has had on the use of resources within nonprofit organizations. Collecting data on rates of child abuse in the past while continuing to collect data on current rates of child abuse may also help to keep track of the efficiency of future prevention efforts.

With regards to society as a whole, the abundance of women staying in domestic violence shelters puts a strain on the system. Although these organizations are essential to take care of victims and will remain essential as long as perpetrators continue to abuse, a decrease in clients at domestic violence shelters is ideal. Intervening in abusive relationships, especially if the abuse is recurring and chronic, results in an economic burden on the state. These costs include child welfare, criminal justice, medical costs, and loss of productivity for victims as both workers and consumers. Along with aiding in the betterment of society, this study will also provide research that is helpful for victims as individuals. As more researchers focus on this issue, the likelihood of improved intervention efforts increases as well. In removing children from dangerous or unstable environments, they will also have a better chance of escaping the cycle of violence. Rather than face abuse as an adult just as they did as a child, each victim will have the chance to live a normal adult life without fearing those who they are supposed to love and trust.

## **Interview**

### **Does abuse faced throughout an individual's childhood from parents or close relatives influence a likelihood to enter abusive relationships in adulthood?**

1. Describe your childhood. Do you remember feeling happy?
2. Did you feel safe in your home? Why or why not?
3. Did your family struggle financially throughout your childhood or teenage years?
4. Did you witness your parents fighting or were you sheltered from their disagreements?
5. Were you taught to deal with conflict through communication or through aggression?
6. Were your basic needs such as food, water, shelter, and appropriate supervision met?
7. If you had a serious injury or illness that required medical attention, were you promptly taken to a doctor?
8. Did you have close friends or participate in community/school activities as a child?
9. Did you feel criticized or rejected by your parent or close relative often?
10. Were you ever scared of a parent or close relative if you did something you knew they wouldn't approve of?
11. Were you ever disciplined by a parent or close relative in a way that left a physical mark, such as a bruise or cut?
12. Were you ever slapped, kicked, or hit by a parent or close relative?
13. If yes, how often was physical force used? Was it a rare or regular occurrence?



14. If physical force was used, was it for disciplinary reasons or a response to anger wrongly directed at you?
15. Did a member of your family suffer from drug or alcohol addiction?
16. If yes, were you often around them when they were using?
17. Did you ever commit sexual acts with a parent or close relative?
18. If yes, were you uncomfortable or aware that these acts were not appropriate?

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study is to provide a better understanding of the effects of child abuse and determine a link between victimization as a child and revictimization in intimate relationships as an adult. The study is based on the cycle of violence, in which psychological trauma follows an individual well into their adult life due to the behavior and emotions they learned to mirror as a child. It is hypothesized that individuals who experienced physical, sexual, and emotional abuse when they were young are more likely to enter abusive romantic relationships than those who have not. In taking a representative sample from domestic violence shelters in Ohio and using qualitative analysis methods of interviewing participants, the research study will provide data that hopes to prove this link and explain the phenomena.

### **Conclusion**

This study focuses on the complex issue of child abuse and maltreatment which impacts the likelihood of intimate partner victimization. While this study faces limitations in its scope, which reaches only the state of Ohio, it could help to understand the prevalence of the issue as

well as more of the lasting effects of childhood abuse. More research must be completed to show a definitive link based on the cycle of violence, through both statewide studies and national studies. As more research is completed, the results which prove the cycle of violence to be valid will be considered stronger and more accurate. This will allow for more aid in prevention efforts by ensuring that victims of child abuse are removed from their dangerous situation, helped in overcoming their trauma, and are therefore able to enter normal and healthy relationships as adults. By screening for multiple types of child abuse and improving therapeutic intervention through the consideration of the impact of emotional abuse on mental health, prevention efforts are more likely to break the cycle of violence and decrease revictimized individuals who experience domestic violence.

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