

Understanding Mothers and Children Experiences with Police During Domestic Violence Incidents to Recognize and Acknowledge Them

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BACKGROUND

- Due to traditional police models, **children remain largely invisible** during domestic violence, therefore it is required that children be recognized to ensure their experience is fully acknowledged and the appropriate services are provided
- Police **minimized mothers' and children's experiences** and expressed reluctance about speaking to children directly about the domestic incident
- Police officers clarified that children were not a primary focus; in that they were seen as neither the victim or perpetrator, viewing children as **"forgotten victims"**
- Children's attitudes and experiences with police officers were negative, appearing to be attributed to untrusting beliefs and **lack of services** being provided

Gap in literature: Research is needed to examine how mothers and adult children describe their experiences when exposed to domestic violence with police officers. The purpose of this current study was to further understand the experiences of mothers and children with police during domestic violence incidents by examine the different aspects during the interactions

Research Question: How do mothers' and adult children describe their experiences with police in situations of domestic violence?

METHODS

Data of The Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative (CDHPI), 6-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Grant focusing on homicide prevention was used. Involved researchers from 12 universities and over 60 community organizations.

- The purpose of these interviews was to understand context around high-risk domestic violence within the four populations that have an **increased vulnerability to domestic violence**
 - Indigenous populations
 - Immigrant and refugee population
 - Rural, remote, and northern populations
 - Children exposed to domestic violence
- The interview participants were survivors who were **exposed to severe domestic violence and feared for their lives at one point**
- The participant criteria included:
 - 18 years of age or older
 - Experiences between 2006 to 2016
 - Currently safe
 - Willing to have interview audio-recorded
 - Criminal proceedings completed

Narrative Interviews which used story prompt and story exploration to let the interviewees control the direction, content and pace of the interview, to allow better understanding of their experiences and behaviours

- The interviews highlighted
 - Barriers to help-seeking
 - Gaps in services and missed opportunities for intervention
 - Effective practices and policies

Sample

- 12 CDHPI children survivor interviews from a total of 74 interviews
- Consisted of interviews done by mothers who reflected on both their and their child's experiences with police
- Interviews were chosen based on references to police and until saturation was reached

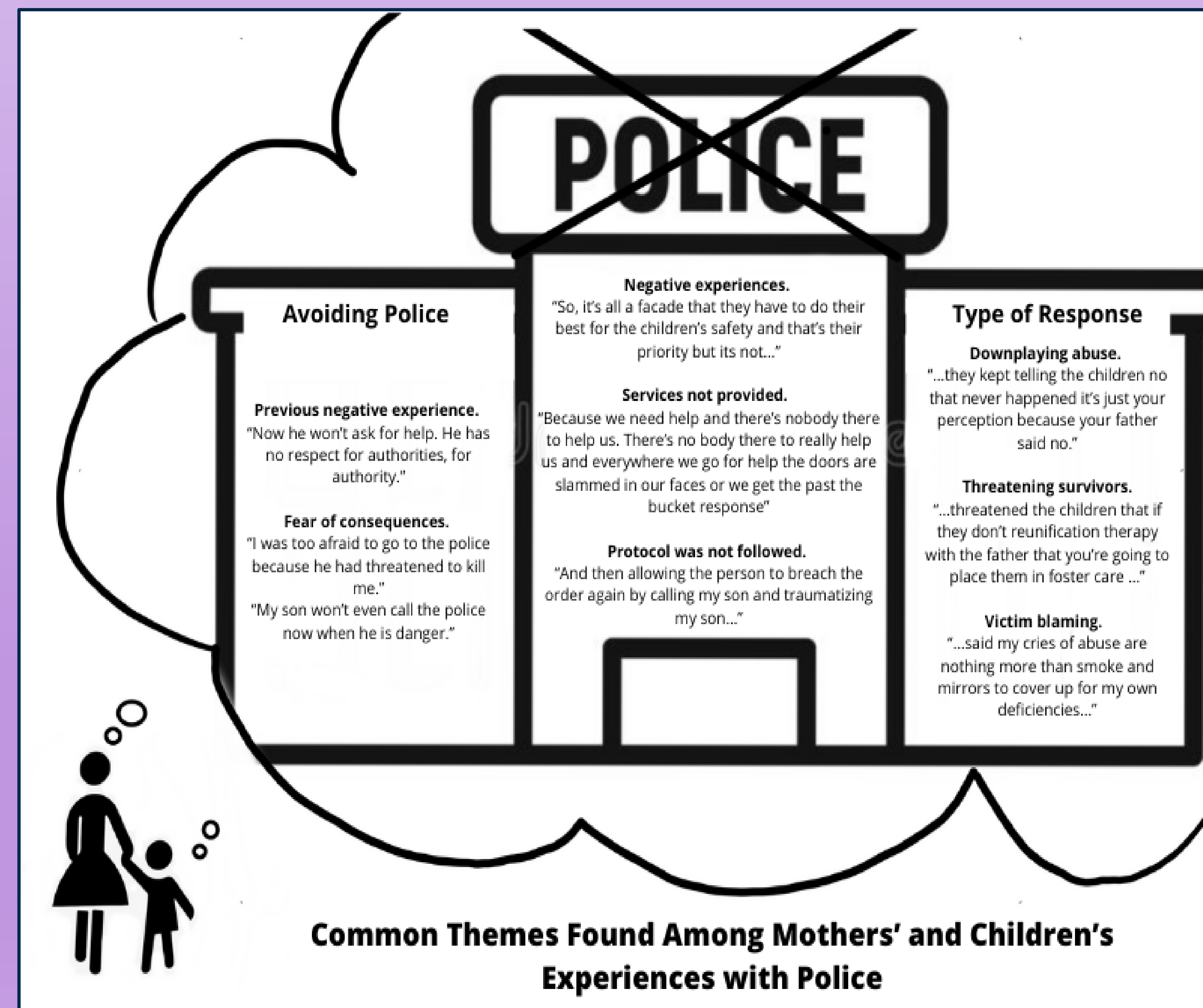
DATA ANALYSIS

- Interviews were analyzed using NVIVO 12 through both inductive and deductive thematic analysis
- **Inductive thematic analysis** allowed for open coding based on reading through the transcripts and letting the themes emerge
- **Deductive coding approach** was informed by previous literature on mothers and children's experiences with police

Deductive Coding Themes:

- **Type of Response:** Survivors' perceived type of response of police officers regarding domestic violence incidents
- **Experience with Police:** Personal feelings, attitudes, and beliefs of survivors towards police resulted from experiences with police officers
- **Avoiding Police:** Survivors avoiding contacting/seeking police help during domestic violence incidents
- **Services not Provided:** The police did not provide any services or additional information for survivors during domestic violence incidents
- **Protocol was not followed:** Survivors believed that during their interactions with the police officers, the police officers did not follow their protocol

RESULTS



DISCUSSION

- Mothers were **threatened** with their economical dependence on the abuser, to stay in the relationship by police officers. Mothers felt that the police used their child's future as tactics to **threaten them and accused them** of controlling and manipulating their children domestic violence incidents
- During incidents with children, the police officers **did not always inform the appropriate services**, such as children's aid society, or provide the needed services, highlighting how children are neglected during DV
- Mothers with positive experiences described police officers as kind and supportive because they **understood the sensitivity of the situation when children are involved**. This aligns with previous findings in which DV survivors described proposed changes to police officer approaches
- Consistent with prior research, data found that mothers felt that their children's safety was compromised when police was involved. The negative experience with the police resulted **children developed fear, anxiety, and disrespect towards the police**
- Overall, and similar to previous literature, mothers and children described their **experiences as negative** because they felt that the police did not put effort into provided help for children and children were not given access or recommended to victim services, such as counselling.

IMPLICATIONS

- The main changes proposed by mothers to existing policing education was ensuring all police officers understand **what domestic violence truly entails**, the different types, how it can be presented, the risk factors, and how to identify concerns
- There was heavy emphasis for police officers to know what services to provide for specific individuals. Mothers wanted to be provided **with services for family safety and support for their children**, highlighting the impacts on children when due the lack of
- Supported by previous findings, mothers described changes to police protocol to include increased and effective safety measures when the abuser is at large, **stressing the need for continuity of care** both during the incident and after
- A common finding among mothers and children was the **emotional strain which follows after police is involved**, that the process of collecting evidence and statements is isolating and fear-provoking. It was suggested that statements be taken without separating mothers and children and at a place where they are comfortable

Limitations

- The experiences analyzed were across different regions, hence the recommendations may not generalized because different populations require specific changes and attention
- With older experiences, the advice provided may have already been implemented in current policing policies

REFERENCES



This study is being conducted by a master's student enrolled in an OISE program. This study is not run by or affiliated with OISE and OISE does not endorse this poster.



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