Domestic Violence Exposure and Legal System Involvement Experiences of Young Adults: A Retrospective, Intersectional, Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Children's exposure to domestic (CEDV) has received increased recognition due to the numbers of CEDV rising; thus, so have the legal systems (e.g., police) that respond to CEDV. Children are rarely viewed as direct victims despite being present at nearly half of all DV-related police calls. Youth perspectives are missing from our understanding of the intersections between CEDV and police involvement. To address this empirical and practical gap, this study applied intersectionality, theoretically and methodologically, to inform recruitment, data collection, and analysis of semi-structured interviews with 10 young adults with CEDV ranging from minor aggression to severe physical violence, some with subsequent legal system interactions and others without. Intersectional multilevel analysis guided the examination of how interlocking oppressive systems at multiple levels informed CEDV and legal system interaction perceptions and experiences to inform empirically grounded recommendations for legal system providers, centering the needs and experiences of youth from historically and contemporarily marginalized and harmed families and communities. Findings from this study show that CEDV have predominantly negative perceptions and experiences of police, which are informed by their community and familial level perceptions and experiences of police, and prior interactions with police. Conservative ideologies, individualism, and type of community (e.g., rural, suburban) were key factors that informed participants' perceptions and experiences. Additionally, White supremacy and patriarchal manifestations (e.g., racism, sexism) informed participants' perceptions and experiences of police. This study has implications for legal systems responding to CEDV and CEDV researchers, as our findings unpack the legal system experiences of CEDV by identifying and acknowledging the interactions of multilevel factors that can create unique experiences with the legal systems.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Children's exposure to domestic violence (CEDV) occurs when they see, hear, or become directly involved in or experience the aftermath of physical or sexual assault occurring between a child's caregivers or parent and their romantic partner (Holden, 2003). CEDV can also be understood as witnessing or being exposed to non-physical forms of violence, or patterns of control that affect the adults and children in the home (e.g., coercion, financial abuse, manipulation; Haselschwerdt et al., 2019; Katz, 2015). National studies suggest that 17.3% of children and adolescents are exposed to domestic violence (DV) in their lifetime (Finkelhor et al., 2013) and nearly half of all DV-related calls include a present child (Swerin et al., 2018), yet children are not often viewed as direct victims (Callaghan et al., 2018; Elliffe & Holt, 2019; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012; Swerin et al., 2018). With rising numbers of youth exposed to DV (Centers for Disease and Control [CDC], 2020), the seriousness of family violence has received increasing recognition, and thus, so have the legal systems (e.g., law enforcement) that are in place to supposedly assist and support these families (Hamby et al., 2015; Överlien, 2010). However, little is known about legal system interactions from the youth perspective and the nuances and complexities within experiences of CEDV and disclosure. The purpose of this dissertation is to qualitatively examine DV-exposed young adult children's experiences with law enforcement with intersectionality as the guiding theoretical framework to further examine social structures and ideologies influencing legal system interactions. This dissertation contributes to the CEDV literature by examining the complexities associated with family violence and legal system interactions, specifically the ways in which legal systems respond to DV-exposed young adults and what informs DV-exposed young adults' perceptions of law enforcement. I use the terms law enforcement and police interchangeably throughout this dissertation. I also used the

terms involvement or interaction to describe youth interaction with the legal systems, as this can include their own disclosure, or being involved with the systems due to familial circumstances or other reasons such as abuse or neglect.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The majority of the literature on CEDV and legal system involvement is focused on law enforcement (hereafter referred to as law enforcement or police) rather than other legal systems of help-seeking (e.g., child welfare services, court systems; Jouriles et al., 2017; Howell et al., 2015; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012). Though the current literature focuses on police interactions, there are many gaps in the literature as it pertains to DV exposure and the legal systems more broadly, specifically the when, why, and under what circumstances youth are engaged with legal system professionals, as well as the ways in which legal systems respond to CEDV. When youth and adolescents are engaging with or disclosing to legal help-seeking professionals (i.e., child welfare, police) they most commonly disclose their experiences to police, yet only 4%-7% of young adults report actually disclosing to legal systems more broadly (Bottoms et al., 2016; Howell et al., 2015). Considering that police report hesitancy in directly engaging with youth present during DV-related calls, these low percentages may not reflect the reality of CEDV and police contact but rather, just youth DV exposure disclosure and help-seeking (Kahovec & Haselschwerdt, 2022; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012; Swerin et al., 2018).

Police officers are often the first responders and serve as gateways to additional help or intervention for families experiencing violence, emphasizing the importance of police involvement in CEDV (Shields, 2008). Youth's actual experiences with police vary based on the desired outcome when engaging with police, with some having positive interactions, while others have negative experiences, or an outcome that did not match their desired outcome (Elliffe & Holt, 2019; Jouriles et al., 2017). For example, though police involvement may be anxiety-provoking due to parental arrests, a police encounter is generally viewed as a negative experience when there is not an arrest made during a DV call (Hamby et al., 2015). Though there

is variation with findings, recent studies have documented that DV-exposed youth recall their police encounters as negative or anxiety-provoking (Jouriles et al., 2017; Kahovec & Haselschwerdt, 2022; Överlien & Aas, 2016; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012). This negative sentiment may be due to a combination of factors such as witnessing a parent being interrogated or arrested, preconceived notions of the police (e.g., familial or cultural influence, media, past experiences), or having a general mistrust of legal systems given the ways in which these systems have historically harmed individuals in the past (Jouriles et al., 2017; McNeely & Grothoff, 2016; Shlafer et al., 2013). Further, these findings provide insight into the ambiguity and variability of experiences with the legal systems from a youth perspective, that subsequently inform their perceptions of police.

Additionally, Nordberg et al. (2016) conducted a review of qualitative studies on Black and Latinx youth's involvement with legal systems, reporting that the youth perceived their police interactions as prejudiced and dehumanizing given the ways in which the legal system treats youth depending on their racialized identity, immigration status, and gender. In addition to personal, family, or community histories of mistreatment by the police, feelings of shame (Bottoms et al., 2016), fear of being embarrassed, (Ungar et al., 2009), as well as fear of not being heard, believed, or helped (Callaghan et al., 2017) also discouraged CEDV from viewing the police as a source of support. These findings further emphasize the importance of examining youths' experiences to inform best practices and other professional resources, specifically focusing on the complexity within what youth view as helpful versus unhelpful and how police can better implement practices to aid in ensuring the safety of children.

Best practices for police officers interacting with CEDV can be understood as the practices deemed the most effective in restoring safety for the child(ren) and family, assessing

children's needs, and collaborating with other agencies (e.g., child welfare services; Hamby et al., 2015). Some examples of best practices recommended for police include describing court procedures, giving information about services, discussing effects on children, assessing children's needs, helping make a safety plan, connecting family with other services, and conducting a follow-up after initial contact (Hamby et al., 2015; Stover et al., 2010). Though these best practices are described in the literature, how often these best practices are followed remains unknown. This gap in the literature may be due to a lack of reporting or a lack of training in involving and acknowledging children present at a DV call. Additionally, it is unclear as to which of these best practices are developmentally appropriate or how they are perceived by CEDV.

Findings from numerous studies highlight the importance of recognizing children as direct victims of violence, as well as acknowledging, hearing, and believing their experiences (Richardson-Foster et al., 2012; Swanston et al., 2014). Yet, children report receiving minimal, if any, communication from police officers, leading children to describe officers that arrived at their home as being faceless, nameless, and genderless (Överlien & Aas, 2016). In some cases, the child was the one who contacted police, yet they were not acknowledged nor were their needs addressed upon police arriving (Överlien & Aas, 2016). Elliffe & Holt (2019) conducted interviews with both children and police officers, finding that children are unseen as direct DV victims, thus, leading to children remaining invisible to the police due to both children's own actions of hiding (e.g., remaining in their bedrooms while police are there) and recommendations for police that suggest uninjured children are irrelevant at the scene (Elliffe & Holt, 2019). When a police officer speaks directly to a child, they present an opportunity for the child to speak about their concerns, which has been found to influence children's experiences with police and overall

satisfaction with legal system encounters, potentially influencing their willingness to seek help through the legal systems in the future (Överlien & Aas, 2016; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012; Swerin et al., 2018). Though current findings suggest that police should acknowledge and speak to CEDV, it is unknown if and when these practices are being utilized by police officers responding to DV calls. This is an important gap in the literature, as it can be incredibly impactful on CEDV, the resources and help they receive, and whether or not they will utilize police as a form of help-seeking in the future.

Many legal system professionals report a lack of training as it relates to how to respond to children within the context of DV (Överlien & Aas, 2016; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012). Additionally, police reporting is not standardized throughout the United States, leading to gaps within the practices of legal system professionals, specifically in what is recorded in police reports and what is left out of police reports. This can in turn influence the additional services and resources children and families may or may not receive (Nordham & Pritchard, 2018; Shields, 2008). In one study by Richardson-Foster and authors (2012), interviews with police officers found that the officers were reluctant to speak with children when they arrived to a DV call due to a lack of confidence or skills in speaking to children. Additionally, the officer's expressed concerns with the potentiality of further traumatizing the children, or not having enough resources to help a child dealing with DV (Richardson-Foster et al., 2012). Similarly, Överlien and Aas (2016), found that many times, police officers did not appear to give children a role in a DV incident, some stating that this was due to worry they would further traumatize the child by asking them to discuss or 'tell on' their parents for violence. These findings emphasize the concerns within the CEDV literature, as professionals within the systems do not feel they have the skills or resources to provide the best emergency response, and even more so in the

context of CEDV as this could influence access to additional assistance or resources. Whether or not police are following best practices recommended in the context of DV or which of the best practices are youth-informed is still unknown, however greater links between all domains (research, policy, and practice) is crucial in forming effective responses to DV from professionals (Holt et al., 2018). Additionally, there is a lack of literature published on CEDV and legal systems, from the youth perspective, that are conducted within the United States. Thus, further examination is needed as to how youth experience the legal systems (e.g., police) and understand their experiences, in addition to establishing youth-informed best practices for response to DV calls in the United States.

Intersectionality Theory

An intersectional approach uses critical theory to establish the basis of the examination and description of experiences of individuals living within a system of interconnected social hierarchies (Collins, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality theorizes that systems of oppression, including racism, classism, and sexism, intersect to create unique lived experiences of complex privilege and/or disadvantage depending on a person, family, or community's proximity to power and socially constructed dominant groups (Collins, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991). Romero (2017) describes how an intersectional analysis "requires uncovering power, privilege and opportunity structures and examining their link to social identities" (p. 11). We, as researchers, must take into consideration the way that social hierarchies, family power relations, communities, and even nations are not explained without looking at the multiple dimensions and ways they interact with each other. Intersectionality as a framework can guide the researchers to examine both the micro-level and macro-level influences to understand the behaviors they are studying.

An intersectional approach to CEDV experiences with the legal systems highlights the importance of taking multiple intersecting identities into account simultaneously when trying to understand a particular experience or phenomena, rather than acknowledging identities as separate from one another. It is important to keep in mind that a person's intersecting identities are not what creates barriers and oppressions, but it is the power, privilege, and opportunity structures and hierarchies that are embedded within our systems and society that create barriers and oppressions. This is the intersectional lens in which we need to approach the issues related to CEDV and challenges associated with legal help-seeking. By disentangling the complexities of systems of power, we can focus on the various forms of oppression as they exist in our everyday life (Romero, 2017). Historically, our legal systems have operated in a way that maintains gendered and racialized control which helps to continue the narrative and notion of white supremacy and patriarchalism that is systemically integrated into our systems here in the United States (Haley, 2016). This is shown within our legal systems, as we see issues with mass incarceration of Black men (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2021), police brutality against Black women (Crenshaw et al., 2015), and a lack of training as it pertains to interacting with CEDV (Överlien & Aas, 2016; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012). More specifically, CEDV are an important population to acknowledge and hear, as they are situated within a power structure associated with their age in addition to their other intersecting identities that influence their ability to obtain help (Etherington & Baker, 2018).

Within the context of DV, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPoC) women survivors of DV are often unsatisfied with police responses to their DV calls for a variety of reasons including fear of what could happen to their family members (e.g., partner or spouse, children), their immigration status, and fear their partner could have negative experiences with

the criminal justice system (e.g., police brutality, immigration surveillance), thus resulting in BIPoC women deterring from utilizing police for help (Harper et al., 2021; Tam et al., 2016). Additionally, CEDV are influenced by the media, their family, or their culture as to how they view institutions (e.g., legal systems), consequently their familial experiences with legal systems may influence the ways in which they experience and interact with legal systems (McNeely & Grothoff, 2016; Nordberg et al., 2016; Shlafer et al., 2013). In a meta-synthesis examining Black and Latinx youth involved in the criminal justice systems, and their encounters with police, Nordberg et al. (2016) described how youth reported that police officers discriminated against them based on their immigration status, racialized identity, and social class (e.g., racially profiling them, using name-calling, racial slurs, humiliation). The girls recalled how their maltreatment was compounded as they also encountered sexual harassment and assault by police officers. As a result, these youth perceived the police ineffective during the police encounters, at best, not providing the safety and protection that youth with more privileged identities might express. These findings further emphasize the need to examine CEDV and the legal systems through an intersectional lens to capture the multifaceted experiences of youth and the legal systems, particularly when there are systems of oppressions working against them.

As previously discussed, intersectionality theory emphasizes the systemic oppressions found within our society, structures, and institutions that create barriers for people of marginalized identities. Intersectionality helps us to understand complex circumstances (e.g., DV) within the context of social issues rather than simply looking at it as an individual level problem that would require individualized changes to behavior. Intersectionality is an important framework to consider within DV alone, but especially related to the legal systems as there are findings that show negative interactions with the legal systems due to a variety of reasons. For

example, the historical violence Black communities have experienced by medical and legal institutions (e.g., Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, increased risk of Child Protective Services involvement) has led to years of limited and cautious engagement with legal systems (Anyikwa, 2015; Decker et al., 2019). This furthers the understanding of why Black women and children may be less likely to help-seek through legal systems and often utilize other resources before seeking help from a system (e.g., familial resources). Furthermore, there is research to support that individuals may not contact legal systems during an emergency (e.g., DV) due to fear of police response, specifically fear for their own safety, or their partner or children's safety from the police (Jouriles et al., 2017; McNeely & Grothoff, 2016; Shlafer et al., 2013). United States culture and politics do not value children and their rights, so CEDV are operating within an ageist power structure that impacts their help-seeking decisions and experiences (Etherington & Baker, 2018). Therefore, there is a clear gap within the CEDV literature of literature specific to legal system involvement (e.g., police) that utilizes an intersectional approach, specifically one that examines youth perspectives of legal systems and their responses to CEDV.

Intersectionality theory has most commonly been applied to women's help-seeking within the context of DV. The use of intersectionality theory helps to describe women's experiences and the differential treatment by the legal systems of women who are experiencing multiple oppressions (Decker et al., 2019). Though the adult help-seeking literature has applied intersectionality theory many times to explain the why, how and who surrounding help-seeking (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005), the CEDV literature lacks application of intersectionality theory (Etherington & Baker, 2018). Thus, it is not known how the experiencing multiple, interlocking systems of oppression and/or privilege influence CEDV and their legal system engagement, or decisions not to involve the police, as well as their suggestions for youth-informed interventions.

Youth exposure to DV is a multifaceted topic that requires researchers and practitioners to understand the intersections of identities that influence experiences. Many DV victims experience the stress and challenges associated with their relationship alone, and then the additional stressors related to complex barriers that exist due to their identities and where those identities are situated within society (Collins, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991). Recent studies that examine the lived experiences of BIPoC have utilized and emphasized the importance of an intersectional approach to centering individuals' experiences, thus, highlighting the importance of an intersectional approach to the current study focused on CEDV and the legal systems (Tam et al., 2016; Watson-Singleton et al., 2021). We must situate the individual within those structures and institutions to fully understand their lived experiences with CEDV and the legal systems.

Given the contextual factors that influence children and families' experiences with the legal systems, such as the fears associated with contacting police, mass incarceration, police brutality, and mistrust of the legal systems there is a need to address CEDV experiences through an intersectional lens. This theory is well suited to aid in understanding and analyzing the ways that different identities such as race, social class, gender, and related oppressions and privileges may produce distinctions in experiences for DV-exposed youth and legal systems. Specifically, police involvement from the DV-exposed youths' perspective, the kinds of responses youth receive from legal systems, which of the systems' best practices are, or are not, youth informed, and how these experiences inform youth perceptions of police.

The Current Study

Within the legal systems, children's experiences are often discounted or not taken as seriously as adults, the power structures and interlocking oppressions influence the experiences

of CEDV and the legal systems (Etherington & Baker, 2018; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012; Swanston et al., 2014). Currently, the CEDV literature focuses predominantly on informal help-seeking strategies (e.g., family or friends), and of the few studies that focus on legal help-seeking, most do not utilize an intersectional approach. In the studies that examine legal systems and CEDV, youth report their involvement with the systems as negative or anxiety-provoking due to factors such as witnessing a parent being interrogated or arrested, preconceived notions of the police (e.g., familial or cultural influence, media), or having a general mistrust of legal systems (Jouriles et al., 2017; McNeely & Grothoff, 2016; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012; Överlien & Aas, 2016; Shlafer et al., 2013). Consequently, CEDV may not receive proper support which can influence their future help-seeking decisions and trust in the systems (Överlien & Aas, 2016; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012; Swerin et al., 2018). Thus, there is a gap in the literature as it pertains to the youth perspective of legal systems, including police and their responses to DV calls. It is critical that researchers work to create greater links between all domains (research, policy, and practice) to form effective responses to DV from professionals, while also providing children with the best support possible including acknowledging, hearing, and believing their experiences (Holt et al., 2018; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012; Swanston et al., 2014).

An intersectional approach (Collins 2009; Crenshaw, 199) is well suited for studying DV-exposed youth and their experiences with the legal systems as intersectionality provides a tool for understanding of the variability and deep complexities that exist within legal system involvement. As evidenced by more seminal texts such as Sokoloff & Dupont (2005) and more contemporary studies including Tam et al.'s (2016) study of BIPoC women and their experiences with police and court systems in response to DV and Watson-Singleton et al.'s (2021) study of

BIPoC and the importance of centering their experiences around multiple forms of marginalization.

To conclude, there is less known about CEDV and legal systems, specifically, police, from the DV-exposed youths' perspective, the kinds of responses youth receive from legal systems, which of the systems' best practices are, or are not, youth informed practices, and how these experiences inform youth perceptions of police. Therefore, this study examines the gaps in the CEDV and legal system literature utilizing a qualitative approach and an intersectional multilevel analysis examining young adults (ages 18-25) and their experiences with CEDV and the legal systems. I utilized an intersectional approach to examine the legal system experiences of DV-exposed young adults by identifying and acknowledging the interactions of multi-level factors that can create unique experiences with the legal systems. The following research questions informed this study:

1. What are the experiences of DV-exposed young adults and their interactions with legal systems (e.g., police)?
2. How do community, familial, and participants' perceptions of the legal systems inform their interactions with the legal systems while they were growing up, and in turn, inform their perceptions at present?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This study followed a qualitative design utilizing intersectionality theory as the theoretical and methodological framework. This study was retrospective in nature since the participants reflected on their experiences with exposure to DV while growing up. A qualitative design is appropriate for the current study for a variety of reasons. First, qualitative methods are particularly useful for sensitive topics (e.g., CEDV), as qualitative methods provide an opportunity for participants to share their experiences (Goldberg & Allen, 2015). Additionally, qualitative methods are well-suited when there is little known about the topics (e.g., youth perspectives on CEDV and legal systems) because it allows for in-depth exploration of those topics (Goldberg & Allen, 2015). Qualitative integrity is crucial when conducting a qualitative research design, as it requires the researchers to utilize theoretical grounding while also acknowledging and critically examining their own biases and assumptions, interpretation and analysis of the data, and decisions throughout the research process (Roy et al., 2015). This intersectional qualitative methodology is well-suited to my research questions and aim as this design is structured to understand "how the interrelatedness of categories of inequality on various levels can be grasped and analyzed as a part of the empirical research process" (Winker & Degele, 2011, p. 52).

Sampling

Qualitative analysis provides an opportunity to examine context, meaning, and processes through analyses that are focused on maximizing the understanding of a case in all of its diversity (Sandelowski, 1995). I used selective sampling, a type of purposive sampling, to recruit the participants. This type of sampling helped me sample for specific characteristics tied to my research aim (Sandelowski, 1995). The sampling informed not only my theoretical and

methodological framework, intersectionality, but also the research aims, such as recruiting young adults who had legal system involvement due to CEDV while growing up. Young adults were the target sample as the literature suggests that due to their age and mother's willingness to discuss the violence, they would be best to recall and discuss CEDV and the complexities associated with DV-exposure (Black, Sussman, & Unger, 2010). However, young adults were also the target sample for convenience purposes as they are most likely further removed from their family of origin compared to adolescents. Youth may require parental informed consent or may have greater risks to their wellbeing in participating in a study of this nature, thus increasing risks and reducing benefits of their participation. The eligibility criteria for participation in this study included: (1) between the ages of 18-25, (2) while growing up one parent/caregiver must have physically hurt their other parent/caregiver at least once (e.g., pushed or shoved with force, slapped, punched, kicked, or beat up), and (3) had some involvement with police or other legal systems (e.g., child welfare services, court systems) specific to DV.

To address how an intersectional approach might explain different experiences with CEDV and legal systems, I compared across and within groups. Specifically, I compared across and within racialized identity and socioeconomic status (SES) groups as the literature suggests racialized identities and SES are particularly impactful factors in youths' experiences with the legal systems (McNeely & Grothoff, 2016; Nordberg et al., 2016). Because I aimed to move beyond an identity focus and address this study from a systems perspective, I also focused on within-group differences, which are fluid, dynamic, and multidimensional (Few-Demo, 2014). Bowleg (2008) describes that simply comparing different social groups does not represent intersectional research, rather, it is the analysis and interpretation of findings within the sociohistorical context of structural inequalities for groups positioned in social hierarchies or

unequal power that creates and defines intersectional research. To stay grounded in intersectionality theory, I situated all participant's experiences within a sociohistorical context, as mentioned above. Further, Bowleg (2008) describes that a sample is not intersectional by nature, therefore a study that focuses on "the dimensions of experiences (e.g., stress experiences) that are shaped by the participants experiences of intersecting identities of racial or ethnic identification, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation exemplify intersectional research" (p. 316). Thus, emphasizing the importance of maintaining theoretical grounding throughout the entire study, beginning in early stages of recruitment and data collection.

Recruitment

In May 2022, approval from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville Institutional Review Board (IRB), was obtained. I then began recruiting participants through universities and colleges, violence agencies, and student organizations with an effort of obtaining a broad enough sampling frame to ensure diversity of lived experiences yet contained enough to enhance feasibility. Participants were recruited with advertisements on the university campus, class announcements, emails and listservs, social media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook), and word of mouth. In an effort to recruit a racially and ethnically diverse sample, I used targeted sampling to recruit participants specific to my goals, I did this by contacting university student organizations specific to racial/ethnic groups that have been historically excluded or marginalized on college campuses.

First, I used an eligibility and demographics screener (see Appendix D) to ensure the participants were eligible and to enhance my efforts to obtain a racially and SES-diverse sample. In keeping with my goals to have a diverse sample in terms of sociodemographic identities but also regarding CEDV-related legal system involvement, I initially invited all participants who identified as Black, Hispanic, Asian or Asian American, and/or Indigenous as well as for SES

diverse participants. However, in keeping with the predominately White region in which we live, the database sample was predominately White, middle-class women. After conducting four interviews, I paused invitations for interviews as I enhanced my recruitment efforts to try and diversify my potential participant pool. During this time, I began reviewing all eligibility screener responses, specifically looking for racially or ethnically diverse and SES-diverse potential participants. I then sought out new recruitment tactics, such as reaching out to local and university student organizations (e.g., UTK National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, multicultural Greek organizations). After a few months, I consulted with my advisor and decided to shift to contacting all participants who met the study criteria and were willing to participate. The initial sampling focused on those who currently lived in Tennessee and responded with having DV exposure-related frequent, occasional, or rare legal system engagement. I could not obtain my desired number of participants who have had CEDV-related legal system experiences within Tennessee, so I included participants who had no legal systems involvement as well as those living outside of Tennessee. By including these participants, I was able to compare CEDV participants with and without legal system involvement. Though this is not a grounded theory study, I used some components of grounded theory, like utilizing theoretical sampling and interviewing young adults without CEDV legal system involvement whose narratives deepened and clarified my use of intersectionality in examining legal system involvement. The eligibility screener received 129 responses, I then contacted 29 eligible potential participants, resulting in 10 participants who responded, agreed to participate, and met with me for an interview.

Data Collection Procedures

A hyperlink on the recruitment flyer led participants to an introductory page that provided information on the project, a link to a downloadable PDF document with DV related resources in Tennessee and national resources, and a link to a brief eligibility screening. I then contacted the individuals who met eligibility over email or phone (depending on their preference selected in the screening survey) to arrange a meeting date and time for our interview. If participants chose an in-person interview, it took place in a private room on campus at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. If participants opted for a Zoom interview, I sent a HIPAA compliant Zoom link prior to the meeting time. In my initial email, I asked for their permission to send the consent form via email or text message so they could review it ahead of time, noting that the consent form does describe the focus of the study. All participants felt safe with this option. I sent the consent form via email or text message ahead of our interview and described the informed consent agreement with the participants at the beginning of our interview, confirming verbal consent for the audio recording of the interview. I received a waiver of signed consent from the IRB to reduce a paper trail linking the participants' real name with their interview data.

Data for the study was collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview protocol allow for greater breadth and depth from participants as the researcher is permitted flexibility to stray from the interviewer guide and probe based on the direction the participants take the interview (Blee & Taylor, 2002). Interviews lasted between 35 to 105 minutes (M = 65.9 minutes) and were audio-recorded with the verbal consent of participants; all participants agreed to have their interview audio-recorded. The interview protocol (see Appendix E) was guided by questions informed by my theoretical framework (i.e.,

intersectionality theory) and my research aims. After conducting the first few interviews, I revised my interview protocol by adjusting the order of questions and wording of probes to be more clear and concise. The questions examined topics related to violence and abuse in the participants' families and youths' retrospective experiences with the legal systems (e.g., police, child welfare services, court systems). For example, the interview protocol included questions and probes such as:

- In some communities, police are viewed as a source of support and comfort, whereas in other communities, police are viewed as sources of harm, how did your childhood community view the police? *Probe for family or cultural influences, specific encounters they have had.*
- **[If no police encounters]:** Can you tell me about why you think your family never encountered the police? *Probe for family perceptions of police, role of racialized identities, unrelated histories with police, secrecy.*

Participants were compensated after the interviews with a $25 gift card for their participation in the study.

After data collection, an undergraduate research assistant and I transcribed the audio recordings. I audio-recorded all interviews utilizing Zoom's recording feature, even in-person ones. For all interviews, I utilized the Zoom transcription feature to create an initial transcription that my undergraduate research assistant or I cleaned after the application created the transcript. I then began the analysis procedures.

Sample Description

Participants in this study (n = 10) were 18 to 24 years old (M = 20.9 years) and were all college-attending young adults. The majority of participants were women (n = 9), with one man

participating. Participants identified as White (*n* = 6), Asian or Asian American (*n* = 2), Black (*n* = 1) and Hispanic (*n* = 1). All participants were exposed to violence and abuse between their parents or caregivers growing up. The majority of participants had at least one encounter with the police (*n* = 6), and four participants had no police involvement. Majority of participants were from Tennessee (*n* = 7), with some participants from Alabama, Illinois, and Wyoming. Participants self-identified as growing up in rural (*n* = 4), suburban (*n* = 4), and urban (*n* = 1) communities and one participant described splitting time between two communities, with one parent living in a suburban community and the other living in an urban community. Socioeconomic status varied among participants, they described being from lower (*n* = 2), working (*n* = 4), middle (*n* = 2), and upper middle classes (*n* = 3). One participant described how her divorced parents were from two different classes (1 working class, 1 upper-middle class). This classification follows the American Class framework found in *The Family: Diversity, Inequality, and Social Change* (Cohen, et al., 2021).

Data Analysis

To analyze the interview data, I used Winker and Degele's (2011) intersectional multilevel analysis (see Appendix A) following Barrios et al.'s (2020) study as an exemplar. Intersectional multilevel analysis is an interpretive analytic framework that entails an eight-stage approach for incorporating intersectionality in research studies, with particular attention to three intersecting levels of influence – identity, representations, and social structures. An intersectional multilevel analysis was particularly useful for this study as it aids in describing and understanding "how the interwoven nature of inequality structures on different levels can be used in empirical research as a tool to analyze social inequalities" (Winker & Degele, 2011, p. 52). I also infused aspects of Braun and Clarke's theoretical thematic analysis method (2006).

Thematic analysis is used to explain participants' experiences by utilizing a categorization of themes and patterns across and within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I first categorized participants CEDV experiences by types of exposure (e.g., eyewitness, experiences the aftermath; Holden, 2003) as well as categorizing the types and severity of violence and abuse (e.g., minor aggression, severe physical violence) they were exposed to using the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2; Straus et al., 1996). For example, the CTS2 categorizes exposure to physical violence to include actions such as throwing things, slapping, or hitting one another, while severe physical violence includes threatening with a weapon and beating up one another. Then, I began phase one of intersectional multi-level analysis (phases 1-4), applying strategies such as memoing, tabling, and open coding from grounded theory (Birks et al., 2008; Charmaz, 2014), to describe *identity constructions*, or labeling when participants described themselves and/or their family members (e.g., references to their gender, race, and social class, phase 1). Simultaneously, I identified *symbolic representations*, or times in which societal norms and values surrounding their identities are explicitly discussed (e.g., how participants perceived the police due to their identities, phase 2). For example, one participant described the way the police viewed her family based on her families SES (lower class) and parents drug addictions. I then found references to *social structures* (i.e., legal system involvement, phase 3), while also documenting other salient components of the interviews such as DV exposure experiences. I created detailed summary memos of participants' CEDV and police involvement experiences as well as my interpretation of their identity constructions and symbolic representations.

My advisor reviewed each transcript and summary memo, adding additional comments or examples, as necessary. I then created a table in Microsoft Excel containing all applicable

identities (e.g., race, gender, social class), along with violence and abuse specific information (e.g., types of exposure, interactions with police) this was used as both a sampling and analytic tool. More specifically, this step aided in my recruitment decisions as I began completing each participant's table using the eligibility criteria first to stay grounded in my theoretical framework when choosing participants for interviews (e.g., focusing on diverse racial and class identities to make sense of their experiences in relationship to systems of power and the institutions of policing). An undergraduate research assistant reviewed and added additional comments within the tables to ensure nothing was missed.

Upon completion of the first three stages of analysis, I continued to familiarize myself with the data including reading and rereading the interviews and reviewing the summary memos I created for each participant. The summary memos to the creation of analytic memos and tables where I made connections within and between participants' experiences, and the development of initial themes began. My academic advisor and I reviewed and engaged in regular discussions of themes, tables, and reflexivity throughout this process. Initial themes were created by comprehensively pulling key features of the data in a systematic approach and organizing the data into relevant themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These were first organized by positive, negative, and mixed perceptions of police. The themes continued to be examined and refined until they were meaningful and representative of the data. After establishing themes within participants, I began stage four, making connections between themes or categories through analytic memo writing, focusing on seemingly salient themes from the tables to see how they might connect to the participants' identities, symbolic representations, and legal systems both within and across participants. After these phases of analysis, I focused on the different levels of perceptions of police (e.g., community, familial, individual), as these were salient in the

participant's interviews. I also began to incorporate a more prominent theme of conservative ideology into these different levels of perceptions of police. I did this by first writing up my findings organized by positive, negative, and mixed perceptions of police and then shifted towards an overarching theme of "previous police engagement" and incorporated experiences and perceptions of police that demonstrated a continuum of experiences from negative to positive.

The final stages of analysis (phases 5-8) concluded with refining, defining, and naming the themes that were found throughout analysis and attaching quotes to the findings to provide evidence and ensure trustworthiness of the results of the study. This stage aided in deepening my understanding of the roles of symbolic representations. Specifically, I really explored and refined conservative ideology and the role that played in my participants perceptions of and experiences with the police. During both stages, but especially the final four phases, I used a variety of analytic strategies, including tabling, diagramming, and writing analytic memos to aid in identifying patterns in the study. For example, I created visualizations of how community, familial, and individual perceptions of police influenced and were influenced by police interactions and police response, and vice versa. These analytic strategies helped to "articulate, explore, contemplate, and challenge their interpretation when examining data" (Birks et al., 2008, p. 71). Throughout the analysis process, I continued to review each memo and table with the goal of constant comparison, a characteristic of grounded theory, within and across participants to remain close to the data (Charmaz, 2014). It is important to note that these phases, though I am describing them as linear, did not always proceed in a linear fashion. For example, I identified symbolic representations in later analysis phases and would then return simultaneously to stage two while still further in my analytic process.

Ethical Concerns in Studying Human Subjects

To address potential ethical concerns in studying human subjects, I first obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville prior to recruitment. As stated in my eligibility criteria, all participants were over the age of 18 years old and were provided with an informed consent form. To ensure the confidentiality of my participants, all information collected was kept private (confidential), and their information was stored in a password-protected network or coding software. Only the project staff had access to the interviews, and pseudonyms were used for all individuals and deidentifying the transcripts before analysis. I asked participants for their permission before sending the consent form electronically and, otherwise, only communicated with them about the "Young Adults Lived Experiences Project" which did not give away the focus of this study. Data has been stored and shared on One Drive based on IRB-recommended practices for safe data management, and all audio recordings will be deleted upon conclusion of the study. The main risk associated with this study is that participants may have experienced distress during their interviews. To assist with this, I reminded participants that we could take breaks, skip questions, or stop at any time, and they would still be compensated for their time. An additional risk is other people finding out about the topic of this study, which could have been harmful to participants. To reduce this risk, I only contacted participants about the study using vague, non-abuse-related terms except emailing or texting the consent forms before the interview time, with their permission. Additionally, I shared instructions for clearing participants' browsers and shared information about meeting for the interviews at a safe and private time and location. I also provided resources for mental health and DV services, both on the university or college campus and in the community, from all three regions of the state with the informed consent packet. I notified them that there were currently no

direct benefits to those that participated in this study. However, I hoped that the findings in this study will help to influence the way legal systems respond to DV calls and DV-exposed young adults in the future by providing the young adult perspective of legal systems through an intersectional lens.

Reflexivity and Trustworthiness

I utilized reflexivity memos and reflexivity discussions with my academic advisor before and during data collection with the goal of exposing any biases that may influence my reading of the interviews and interpretation of the findings (Goldberg & Allen, 2015). In these memos and discussions, I reflected on my thoughts, biases, and experiences and how those may impact my perception and interpretation of the interviews. Specifically, I paid particular attention to my status as someone who has experienced familial violence and legal system interactions growing up, as well as growing up in poverty. My experiences with violence and the legal systems give me a certain *insider* status, however I also have an *outsider* perspective, particularly when interviewing BIPoC participants, as I am a White woman. My insider/outsider status changed throughout each interview depending on if I chose to disclose my experiences or not and depending on the identities and experiences of each participant. For example, I disclosed parts of my experiences with dysfunction in my own family, the legal systems, or other experiences when I felt like it could help build rapport or trust with my participants. Nevertheless, my positionality influenced my interpretation of the data, and thus, strategies including memoing and discussing my reflexivity with others, including research team members (e.g., advisor, undergraduate research assistant) with different lived experiences were paramount. In one particular incident, I discussed with my advisor how my prior experiences with the legal system made it difficult for me to make interpretive analytical jumps, as I felt like I needed to report findings more literally.

We then talked through the ways in which qualitative work is interpretive, making my advisor, undergraduate research assistant, and myself all tools of the research and analytic process.

I practiced reflexivity by including my personal feelings and observations throughout data collection and analysis in the memo-writing process. For example, I described feeling connected to my participants, particularly those with negative police interactions due to my own negative experiences with police. I also had regular reflexivity discussions with my academic advisor and undergraduate research assistant. During these discussions, we talked through particular experiences we have had that may have impacted the way we interpreted what the participants said, any strong feelings we had through interviewing or transcribing processes.

Trustworthiness can be understood 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). In addition to the aforementioned critical reflexivity, I also held regular meetings were held with my advisor to discuss findings and analytic procedures, in addition to keeping methodological memos to keep track of any changes that were made to the interview protocol or challenges experienced throughout data collection and analysis. Additionally, analytic strategies such as memo-writing (e.g., reflexivity memos, analytic memos) and tabling were used throughout the analysis process to ensure accurate interpretations of the data. Finally, direct quotes from participants have been included in the findings to provide evidence and trustworthiness of the conclusions of the study. My undergraduate research assistant and I tabled quotes from participants specific to their police perceptions and involvement, both reading through summary memos and transcripts to ensure the quotes were contextually appropriate and fitting for the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Exposure to Violence and Abuse

All participants witnessed or overheard CEDV during their childhood. Six participants detailed bidirectional DV, such that both parents or caregivers were violent and abusive, three described their fathers as the main perpetrators, and one described their stepmother as the main perpetrator. CEDV occurred throughout two participants' childhoods through the time of the interview, and eight participants experienced exposure to violence and abuse through childhood and adolescence, but the violence and abuse ended during adolescence or into adulthood. For nearly all participants (n = 9), CEDV occurred at least weekly or bi-weekly, with half describing violence occurring regularly throughout the week. Parental heavy drinking or diagnosed alcoholism and drug misuse and addiction were common (n = 6, n = 2 respectively).

Types of Violence Exposure

Holden (2003) categorized and defined types of CEDV including participating in the violence and abuse, being an eyewitness, overhearing the violence and abuse, and observing or experiencing the aftermath. All 10 participants described multiple exposure types. For example, Alyssa (White woman, rural community) explained:

> We were there for a lot of it, we would be sitting in a car, and they would like just full-on start fist-fighting driving down the road. Then there would be times when we would hide as it was happening, so we were hearing all of it. And there were times when they'd go on vacation just themselves, and we'd find out about it because they didn't come back on time because one of them got arrested.

Most participants described wanting to escape or hide from the violence and abuse. Keiana (Black woman, urban and suburban community) stated, “I would be in my room and hide

away, but I would hear it. There would be things like things breaking, people screaming...I would definitely just stay in my room and hide and cry." Other participants were exposed directly and chose to intervene verbally or physically, and some participants contacted police or other family members when the DV escalated. Lena (White woman, rural community) described how she often tried to intervene, “I would just tell them to stop fighting. There's like multiple times it's gone physical. I've called the police on [my dad].”

Additionally, several participants (*n* = 8) experienced the aftermath or initial effects of the DV. For some, this looked like tending to injuries, seeking help through legal systems, or assisting in documenting the injuries. For example, Luis (Hispanic man, urban community) described how his mother sought his help after experiencing DV, “My mom did have me document some of it, like taking photos of where she was abused and things like that. It was just taking photos of her and her stuff, bruises and scrap marks, things like that.” Other participants, like Mallory (White woman, suburban community), had to deal with the longer-term emotional effects of the abuse. Mallory's relationship with her father became strained due to her stepmother's abuse:

> She would always get mad if me and my dad were talking. It's like she would get jealous, and now I even see it to this day when I go see him. I see it sometimes like I don't even ask him to go out to eat with me because I know it's going to offend her, which is really bad because I should do whatever I want to do. It's my life, but she just gets jealous of the fact that, like anybody else could have his attention. Even when we would be sitting at the table, it was like when he wasn't giving her attention, she would just, I don’t know, like literally just go crazy.

Though physical and non-physical exposure were interconnected, most participants were exposed to both, often simultaneously. However, these are discussed separately for the sake of clarity. I categorized physical violence into two key categories, minor acts of violence or verbal aggression and severe violence, based on the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2; Straus et al., 1996). Severe violence included hitting, threatening with a weapon, and beating up one another. Seven participants experienced exposure to less severe or minor physical violence and verbal aggression, while three were subjected to severe physical and non-physical violence and abuse. Half of the participants were predominantly exposed to non-physical abuse.

Physical Violence Exposure

In keeping with the description of violence and abuse from the CTS2, exposure to physical violence was categorized to include multiple actions such as throwing things, slapping or hitting one another, beating up, threatening, or using a knife or other weapon. And severe violence was categorized as hitting, threatening with a weapon, and beating up one another. Eight participants had exposure to physical violence, but their exposure experiences varied by severity and frequency. Some participants were only exposed to minor acts of violence, whereas others were exposed to minor and severe physical violence. For three participants, their exposure included severe physical violence that was injurious. For example, Carley (White woman, rural community) walked into a room and saw blood on the floor, and her mom was "knocked out on the floor because she just got hit in the head really hard." Whereas other participants experienced exposure to minor physical violence that largely entailed threatening property damage. Mallory recalled:

> As a kid, she would hit him and throw stuff in the house. [One incident] she was throwing a fit and throwing everything, and then she was beating on the door to the point that I thought she was going to break it.

Many participants described the physical violence as escalating or changing over time or from one situation to another. For example, Alyssa experienced violence that varied by severity depending on the situation:

> It really was very physical. It was a lot of slapping, punching, hitting, kicking, throwing, like literally launching themselves. At times there were items getting thrown. There were plenty of times me and my brother were playing "duck" because kitchen plates and stuff were getting tossed. My mother has went after my father with weapons, which is why knives ended up [getting thrown] out the window. Shotguns, any dangerous weapon she could find.

Alternatively, some participants, like Mei (Asian American woman, suburban community) experienced less severe exposure:

> I did witness some physical violence. They were just fighting all the time and would yell at each other about literally the smallest things. They would just argue all the time, there was just constant yelling in my house for literally no reason. They would be yelling over what kind of salt they got or like if they were right or wrong about a fact they could google and things like that.

Some participants, like Alyssa, also discussed how they would attempt to intervene directly or indirectly, such as removing weapons (e.g., throwing knives out of the kitchen window) to avoid more severe violence from occurring. Whereas others knew that their presence as a child was

enough to reduce the likelihood of violence. Carley said, “I knew that the minute I wasn’t in the house, I knew it was going to be even more violent.”

Non-Physical Abuse Exposure

Non-physical abuse exposure entailed verbal and emotional abuse, financial control, coercion, manipulation, and isolation with the goal of manipulating and coercing their partner or to maintain control over them. Verbal and emotional abuse were most common with all recalling these abuse tactics. Rachel (White woman, suburban community) recalled:

> [He] was just like him verbally saying stuff to her that would hurt her feelings or him being childish and messing with her, not like hitting her but just being childish. I definitely feel like lots of coercion and more like putting her down, telling her she's not good enough, or she's fat, or something like that. He controlled her eating a lot.

Beyond verbal and emotional abuse, participants discussed how the perpetrator of abuse would also use control tactics to maintain control over the other, specifically through acts such as financial abuse, manipulation, and coercive control. Alyssa explained:

> My family grew up with separate bank accounts, but there were multiple times when, being in a smallish town, they can get access to each other's bank accounts and withdrawal all of their money which, of course, just led to more abuse in the household when the other one found out. Which was just an attempt to control and get one to come back. So [the abuse tactics] were broad, they covered all bases.

Coercive control takes place when someone is forced into doing something by the use of threats or force. Six participants mentioned some form of coercion taking place. Keiana discussed how her father used isolation and coercive tactics against his girlfriend to maintain control over her. In one incident, Keiana specifically described how her father would keep his

girlfriend from having contact with her family and hanging out with friends: “We didn’t go see her family or anything, and her family didn’t see us. Maybe coercion [too] to not hang out with other people because [he] did get jealous very easily.”

Child Abuse, Maltreatment, and Perceptions of Their Parents as Parents

Half of the participants were subjected to child abuse or neglect personally, and in some instances, to their siblings, with some of the abuse being physical and for others, it was verbal and emotional abuse or child neglect. The narratives also included abuse towards their siblings. For example, Mei said, "My dad told [my brother] to like, ‘Go kill himself’ the other day, but I would get beat myself for talking back or something.” In contrast, Alyssa described her experiences with child neglect and abandonment:

> I am not coming to school, I am not doing my work, I am wearing the same clothes usually every day, they are unwashed. I looked bad, and half the time, I never ate lunch because we couldn't afford school lunch, and cause dad was gone, mom was gone, she basically left too. She was an alcoholic, moved in with her boyfriend at that point, and she was spiraling. The worst time for her. My brother got the hell out the minute he turned 16, and he moved in with his girlfriend. So, by the time I was 15, I lived alone.

Although half of the participants experienced some child abuse or neglect, and all participants experienced CEDV, many tried to reconcile the family violence with positive perceptions of their parents as being loving or still being “good to them." Some described how their parents were doing the best they could, or they empathized with their situation. Mallory explained:

> My dad is a really good person, it's not him, but I feel like he used to stand up for himself, and I think he's just been…I have honestly been in an abusive relationship, and

> you, like, lose yourself, and I think he's just lost. It's been so long that he doesn't even see it. He's literally blind to it. But I think, yeah, at the beginning, he would stand up, yeah, like that time he made her leave, he would never do that now.

Additionally, Mei explained "[They] aren't that strict. They've actually gotten a lot better since I have grown up. But like, they could have been much worse." Alternatively, other participants felt guilty for the CEDV. Rachel stated that she "felt guilty because I made [my mother] stay in that relationship, and it hurt her mentally, physically, and emotionally."

Perceptions of and Interactions with Police

All ten participants discussed not only their perceptions and interactions with the police but also their community and family's perceptions and interactions with the police. Community and family perceptions, in turn, influenced individual perceptions and experiences with the police. For some participants, their community, familial, and individual level perceptions of police aligned. For others, they differed based on the power, privilege, and opportunity structures linked to their social identities, impacting their familial or individual experiences with police. For example, when participants and familial perceptions differed from their communities' perceptions, they spoke about how their community and local police viewed their families negatively, which influenced their interactions with police. These factors influenced how participants experienced and perceived the legal systems in general and when they interacted with the police due to CEDV or non-CEDV-related incidents. Community, familial, and individual perceptions of police influenced catalysts for police involvement and police response. All of these factors are fluid in how they influence each other, for example, police perceptions of families inform the way they treat families, thus informing the way families perceive and experience the police and vice versa. With this being said, community, familial, and individual

level perceptions are described as if they are distinct for the sake of clarity. However, it is important to note that these happen simultaneously as the participants discuss their decisions and engagements with the police. It is impossible to disentangle the individual from their family and community, and vice versa, because they all influence each other.

Community Perceptions of and Interactions with the Police

Communities' perceptions of police were influenced by interconnected community cultural norms and values, including conservatism, individualism, "family problems as private family matters," and the type of community (e.g., rural versus suburbia). Informal relationships with the police also informed perceptions, particularly positive perceptions of the police. The majority of participants grew up in predominantly White rural or suburban communities, with a few raised in immigrant enclaves and one participant splitting time between a predominately White suburban and urban community, as described by the participant. The community's proximity to Whiteness was present in all the interviews, including when seven participants described positive community perceptions of policing that connected with their own racialized and ethnic identities. Of the remaining three, one participant described mixed perceptions within the community described there being a positive perception in one but negative in another community they resided in. And Mei was unsure of her community's perceptions as her parents were first-generation immigrants who were disconnected from their larger community. Keiana described being raised in two different communities with differing perceptions of the police:

> My parents were divorced, so I grew up going back and forth between homes, and on my dad's side, it was very "in the hood." (*laughter*). And my mom lived in a more [wealthy, predominately White] suburban area. So, it was drastically different. In my mom's [community], we relied on the police for safety, but I know in my dad's neighborhood, he

> was very avoidant of the police. He did not really trust the police, and most of the people in that neighborhood don't trust the police as well.

Conservatism and its impact on community perceptions of policing were present throughout all interviews but were most apparent for participants who were raised in predominately White suburban and rural communities. These communities viewed policing as an institution that would “serve and protect.” Rachel, who grew up in a predominantly White, suburban community, said, "We lived in a wealthier suburb, so it was good. I didn't view them as bad; I knew they were there to help and everything." Alyssa explained that her predominately White, small, southern town is "very, very conservative” and elaborated on this connection to policing, “The police are basically the holy grail in my community. People will fight over buying them food at restaurants. They don't have to pay when they go basically anywhere." Similarly, Lena described her community: "We love the police in my town. It was a, you know, small Southern town. Everyone knew all the police, and all their kids went to my school, almost all of them."

Building informal relationships with police was highly influential on immigrant communities and their perceptions of police. Luis recalled how the local police put on community events that fostered trust:

> The station would have a lot of programs for youth in the community. It was called FOP, Fraternal Order of Police. I think most people were trusting of the police for helping instead of harming because, it's like a free something state [sanctuary city] where immigrants can come here without risk of ICE intervening. So, the police were really trusting because they would have a lot of caretaking programs for children in the summer and during the school year events, things like that. . .There was a Spanish police officer

> director type of person. He was pretty predominant on Facebook and in the community, and I still see him around downtown sometimes, and he still remembers me, and he remembers my family and things like that. So, they were pretty trusting, I would say.

Echoing Luis' description of his community, Lily (Asian American woman, suburban community) said:

> The adults in our community definitely feel like the police are a source of support and comfort like I don't think any of the adults would hesitate to go to the police if they needed help, regardless of if they have documentation or not. . .So, they, because they have positive relationships with law enforcement through their businesses, they don't have any discomfort going to them, and I would say that applies to an extent to us youngers.

Suburban and rural communities shared similar cultures as it relates to police perception. Within predominantly White, rural and wealthy, suburban communities, taboo topics such as DV were viewed as family business by both the families and community, including the police. Thus, there was often no further criminalization despite various illegal public activities in some families (e.g., drug use and driving under the influence). This emphasizes the inherent privilege in Whiteness, even in impoverished communities or families. Despite rural and suburban communities sharing similarities, there were some recognizable themes found within each community. For example, a culture of rural Whiteness appeared distinct, particularly in small southern towns, such that, in addition to viewing the police as "helpers" and community heroes, a cultural value of individualism and "family problems as private family matters" led to a lax police response to criminal activity. The culture of rural Whiteness was also informed by

criminal activity specific to DV and substance misuse being pervasive and commonplace in the community. Carley explained:

> I feel like it is very common for police in that town to get called for physical altercations like domestic violence or drugs, and stuff like that is just pretty common. So, they kind of were not really phased by it.

Carley further described how a combination of normalcy of DV in her community coupled with White privilege influenced how the police and her father interacted:

> They would just come in the house, and they would be like, “You're going to jail,” and it was usually my dad, and he was always like, “I'm not going nowhere” and trying to argue, and they were just like “Okay get in the handcuffs, let's go” so it wasn't a super big deal, they were usually like okay this happens like 500 times a day, I don't care anymore. . . It was not super helpful. They came a couple of times and arrested my dad, and they never said anything, they were just like, “Get in the car, buddy.”

Additionally, among predominantly White rural and suburban communities, there was a shared culture of secrecy that aided in protecting violent partners, as they were far less likely to face legal consequences or be examined further by other legal institutions (e.g., child welfare). This secrecy culture informed help-seeking decisions. For example, despite Carley and Alyssa being from a small rural community, there was very little support from family, friends, neighbors, or other formal support systems. Their families also actively rejected seeking help, leaving them to fend for themselves. Alyssa described her experience, "In this kind of a rural setting, everyone in this area kind of has that mindset of what happens in this house, stays in this house, ya know, that’s family business. Even the police – that’s family business.” Similarly, Rachel described the secrecy within her community and how her family did not want the police

involved for fear of how their family would be perceived by their predominantly White, wealthy suburban community, “I didn’t want the police outside my door, handcuffing my dad. . . We didn’t want that to happen. We didn’t want divorced parents.” Individualism and secrecy worked together to reify conservative, traditional values that manifested in stigma around divorce: “All of our friends growing up didn't have divorced parents."

Privileges associated with being viewed as “model minorities” and being closer to Whiteness also influenced immigrant enclave communities’ relationships with police. Lily, a woman from an Asian immigrant family, reflected on how her community’s racialized and ethnic identities gave them the privileges when building relationships with police:

> It is like a privilege that we have in our community. And I also think, because we're all Asian, and I feel like there's a racial component to it as well, like, I don't think we would have the same relationship if we were a network of Hispanic immigrants or network of Black Americans. For the most part, I do know, while also being cognizant that I'm able to do that because of the relationships cultivated by people in my community and also because I'm not perceived by them to be like, it's because of my race and my gender, I guess, and the way that I present myself and how I'm able to comfortably navigate the system.

Despite Luis and Lily's communities perceiving the police positively, they recognized their positionality and the proximity to Whiteness that plays a role in their ability to interact with police in a mutually respectful and comfortable manner.

For some participants (n = 3), despite their communities viewing the police positively, their individual perceptions were negative. Lily said:

> But, I think me and my sister will say 'ACAB' to each other, like, you know, ‘all cops are bad.’ Sometimes it's a joke, but also, we're more cognizant of the damage. If we didn't have this relationship with local law enforcement, it would be very different.

Lily’s example is emblematic of how many participants recognized how their privileges and access to power, sometimes due to being racialized as White, influenced their perceptions of police and subsequent police interactions. Similarly, Luis, a man from a Hispanic immigrant family, explained, "I always grew up trusting the police in that area but always knew there were problems elsewhere," recognizing that his community experiences with police may not be the shared experience. Katherine (White woman, rural community) reflected on her privilege as a White woman:

> Admittedly, as much as I may not like the police, and as much as I may not like [child welfare], we were taken care of with a lot of grace and a lot of respect. We weren't talked down to. We were not spoken to differently, but I feel like if I was of, you know, Hispanic origin or I was Black or anything else like that, then I think we would have faced something very, very different.

Family Perceptions of and Interactions with the Police

Sometimes participants described their family perceptions as including their extended families and multigenerational lineages, whereas others spoke just of their parents’ perceptions of the police. In addition to community and family cultural values about policing, non-DV-related familial relationships and interactions with local police and interconnected institutions associated with conservative ideologies (e.g., military) influenced family-level perceptions of police. The majority of participants described their families' perceptions of police as positive (n = 7), with some participants experiencing negative familial perceptions and some participants

experiencing mixed familial perceptions of the police. For the participants who grew up in families with positive perceptions, most were from immigrant families (*n* = 3), lower-income White families living in the rural south (*n* = 2), and White, wealthy suburban families (*n* = 2). Participants' families' perceptions aligned with their community perceptions, with a few exceptions. However, for some participants, their personal perceptions differed from their community and family.

For some participants, police were explicitly discussed in their families, as they had regular interactions with or threats to call the police. Whereas for others, there were not open or explicit discussions of the police but the lack of discussion was often interpreted as positive familial perceptions of the police, or underlying assumptions that the police were there to help. Mallory said, "I mean, I guess better, more good than bad. I never had like fears of the cops or anything. It wasn't something, honestly, I ever really thought about. . . My parents didn't really talk about the cops." This example reiterates how community, family, and individual level perceptions inform one another and how inherent White privilege also influences participants' ability to view institutions such as the legal systems positively despite it never being discussed in their family or having much interaction with the legal systems.

Additionally, family perceptions of policing were filtered through conservative ideologies or cultural values. Their prior interactions and conservative ideology rooted in White supremacy influenced this perception of police, including their family members' prior or current careers, with a few family members serving in the military. Mallory and Katherine’s fathers were military veterans, which informed their fathers’ positive views of the police, or as Katherine explained, the view that police were “a necessary evil.” In contrast, her non-veteran mother viewed the police negatively due to previous negative interactions unrelated to DV. Mei, who did

not have a sense of the broader community perception of policing, described how her Chinese immigrant parents' positive perceptions of police in China influenced their perceptions of the U.S. police:

> [My parents] really like the police, like they're pretty conservative people, so they're like, "Oh, if we get rid of the police, who will protect our communities and stuff like that." Police in China are pretty good people for the most part, and they actually help people like they brought people groceries during COVID and stuff like that. Like they are actually public service.

Previous non-DV-related interactions with police were a key influential factor in families' positive and negative perceptions of police and the police's perceptions of the families. The police's perceptions of the community and family (e.g., model minority myth, drug addiction, poverty) informed how police perceived and interacted with families. When responding to DV and non-DV-related calls, family's socioeconomic status, racialized identities, gender identity of the perpetrating adult, and whether adults had a history of substance misuse and overdose, influenced how police interacted with the families, and in turn, how families perceived the police. Families who lived in poverty or had parents with addictions described how the police viewed their family negatively and treated them poorly when arriving at their house for a 911 call, despite participants recognizing their inherent White privilege. Lena recalled:

> If we were in a situation where we were a different race, you know, it'd be even worse than it was already. I mean, the police already looked at us like White trash. I could not imagine how it would be if we were a different color because it's a small southern town. Those cops are racist as shit. And they're sexist, too. I mean, because I could tell when it was with my dad and stuff, there was a lot more, "He needs help," but with my mom, it's

> like, “Oh, she's batshit crazy!” you know, “She’s just a kooky little bitch.” It's just like she's still kooky, but my father needs help.

Not only does Lena's example emphasize the societal power structures associated with how police view those living in poverty, but it also shows the importance of recognizing the inherent sexism embedded within these power structures. In this instance, White privilege and sexism intersected to yield different experiences for Lena’s mother and father.

Prior experiences with the police for non-DV related calls, specifically how the police perceived and responded to families in distress, was a key influential factor on familial perceptions of police. Lena, for example, had experienced parental overdoses leading to police involvement; police often dismissed these situations. Lena felt that the police viewed her family negatively due to addiction and poverty in addition to sexism. Lena recalled a time when she called 911 because her mother overdosed:

> The police were kind of like, you know, “Oh, you're a dumbass. This is your fault,” not to me, but to her [mother]. You know they're just not sympathetic. I would like freak out, and they'd be like, “She's okay, calm down,” they're telling me just calm down, and they tell me she's okay, which is kind of comforting, but at the same time, they seemed annoyed that I was freaking out over my mom dying.

These non-DV related police interactions influenced family perceptions of police related to DV, as substance misuse and DV-related emergencies were often interconnected.

Alternatively, community cultural norms, especially in rural communities, that viewed DV (and substance misuse and addiction) as a “private family affair” and seemingly ordinary, coupled with White privilege, influenced family perceptions of and interactions with police. Despite some families having frequent run-ins with the police due to DV or drug use,

their families viewed the police positively because offending parents were regularly able to avoid being arrested or getting in legal trouble. This lack of police intervention was generally viewed by families, especially the adults, as positive. Alyssa explained how the local police would just threaten or allow her parents to get off without additional legal consequences despite the violence and other illegal activity (e.g., drugs) occurring:

> There were a few times when the police did have to threaten an arrest because either my parents were still going at each other or one of them would kind of turn on the police, which in today's society, that's automatic, like someone's getting tased. But back then, it was more so just “don't make me” and threats. And so usually, it would stop the situation, but if it ended in an arrest, it would be one parent following the police car to bail out the other. (laughter). So, [police involvement] was worthless.

In these examples, community cultural norms are evident along with privilege associated with Whiteness. Specifically, Alyssa's parents would resist arrest, face multiple run-ins with police both due to DV and other illegal activity, and dealing with drug and alcohol misuse, but were typically let off easy or given multiple opportunities to follow police instruction with little to no legal (or other) repercussions. Though Alyssa’s community and family perceived the police as primarily good, the culture of secrecy in her rural community influenced her own perception of police:

> I do not care for the police, if I am completely honest, because my experiences with them have not done much for me. . . I had family members in the police department, so oftentimes, it was, “We're not talking to [the kids]” because one of the family members was there. So, it was a way to keep the kids out of it; pretend the kids aren't here, and you don't have to get other people [child welfare] involved. They wouldn't really interact with

> us, and if they did, it wasn't really nice it was more so like we were over exaggerating, as we were crying about our parents beating the crap out of each other.

In addition to more conservative ideologies, immigrant families predominantly viewed the police positively due to their non-DV-related personal relationships they build with the local police in addition to the immigrant families' proximity to Whiteness. Luis described how the police-built relationships with not just the larger community but also with his family, contributing to positive family and individual perceptions of their local police. Prior interactions rooted in the shared community via community gatherings, patronizing family restaurants, and hosting police-sponsored community events fostered positive perceptions that extended to other related involvement. Luis and Lily's families owned restaurants that were regularly patronized by police officers, creating a strong interpersonal bond that influenced CEDV-related police involvement. Luis stated, "My dad knew a good bit of police officers that would come to eat at the restaurant." Similarly, Lily said:

> I would say, unique to my situation, a lot of us are undocumented, like in our extended family, but we have a very close relationship with law enforcement here just because we've cultivated one because they're common patrons at our businesses. I would say this does not apply to many other immigrant networks, but I know we have a close relationship with law enforcement and don't feel afraid.

Lily went on to describe how although her father was undocumented, they were not fearful of the police because of other community members' positive experiences with local police:

> When it comes to the legal system, and my family's' immigration status, my father was actually facing deportation, I don't exactly know what he got caught for and then they figured out that he was undocumented, and they were going to ship him home. I don't

> have the same amount of I would say, discomfort with the legal system because of my parents' status as much as like other people that I've seen who have undocumented relatives. I don't think it played as much of a role in all of that as much as like for other people, because, for example, a lady that used to work with us, both her and her husband are undocumented, but she has no problem like she had no problem going to the police when he was acting up, and then ultimately they got an annulment and everything, and so we were never afraid.

The community, familial, and individual perceptions of police all informed each other, thus informing experiences with police and vice versa (see Table 1). Participants' childhood experiences with police varied on a spectrum from positive to negative due to several factors such as catalysts for contacting police, prior police interactions and police responses to calls for help. The following section examines how the participants experienced the police, including their own interactions with police and what they wished the police would have done to better support them and their families.

Catalysts for Police Involvement and Participants' Experiences with the Police

As a reminder, six participants had direct police involvement, whereas others did not, or the police were used as a threat to de-escalate or stop the violence. The catalyst for police involvement or calling the police included escalating or injurious DV incidents, when violence reached particular threshold such that neighbors, friends, or family members called the police upon hearing violence or loud fighting, or in the context of divorce and post-separation conflict around custody. For example, Keiana's parents often disregarded or broke their custody agreement leading to police involvement due to allegations of kidnapping. She described, "My dad would take me, even if it wasn't his time, or he would try and keep me longer, and so my

Table 1

Police Interactions and Perceptions

Participant	Racialized &/or Ethnic Identity	Community Perceptions	Familial Perceptions	Individual Perceptions	Police Involvement
P1; Carley	White	Positive; small, rural, southern community	Positive	Negative	X
P2; Alyssa	White	Positive; small, rural, southern community	Positive	Negative	X
P3; Rachel	White	Positive; wealthy suburb	Positive	Positive	
P4; Mallory	White	Mixed; suburb	Positive	Positive	
P5; Mei	Asian-American	Unknown; family not connected with suburban community	Positive	Mixed	
P6; Luis	Hispanic	Positive; immigrant enclave in urban community	Positive	Positive	
P7; Keiana	Black	Father – negative; urban community Mother – positive; suburban community	Father – negative Mother – Positive	Mixed	X
P8; Katherine	White	Positive; small, rural, southern community	Father – Positive Mother - Negative	Mixed	X
P9; Lena	White	Positive; small, rural, southern community	Negative	Negative	X
P10; Lily	Asian-American	Positive; immigrant enclave in suburban community	Positive	Positive	X

mom would call the police and try to intervene to get me." Lastly, in some scenarios, the victim of abuse contacted emergency services for protection.

Three participants contacted the police themselves at least once during their childhood. Carley described how the DV between her parents would get so bad that she felt she had to contact the police to prevent serious injury or to receive medical assistance for injuries. She explicitly explained when her mother had gone unconscious due to violence from her father, which led her to contact the police. Similarly, Lena mentioned having to contact the police a few times during her childhood due to violence and abuse.

Before detailing the participants' police experience, I briefly discuss the reasons some participants and their families never contacted the police for help when DV occurred. Cultural norms, fear of the systems not working as intended, and societal norms of DV influenced participants who viewed the police positively but did not utilize the systems for help. Despite his community and family being very trusting of the local police, Luis explained how culture and underlying fear of the systems impacted his willingness to contact the police for help during incidents of DV:

> I think it is both of those [immigration status, worried the systems wouldn't work the way they should] and a cultural perspective because it's like you don't need outside help in that kind of situation, and so you just kind of figure it out on your own.

Mallory described how her father viewed DV and how societal norms of violence and abuse were a barrier to help-seeking due to DV when her stepmother was physically violent towards him:

> I feel like he just thinks she's a girl. Like she would leave marks and stuff but nothing like, give him a bloody nose or anything like that. So, I think that he would just think,

> “Oh, she's not really, it's not enough to call the cops” or like my dad kind of used the cops as, “Oh, you're doing something wrong, you're breaking the law”, I don't know how to describe it, but not like that. He wouldn't be like “Oh, she's abusing me, I need to call the cops.” I feel like he just, in a sense, he didn't take it seriously. And he still doesn't take it seriously, that's not okay at all. Like, he doesn't really realize it, I guess.

Societal norms of violence and abuse are tied directly to masculinity and individualism, specifically in that they are both rooted in conservatism and White supremacy. Thus, masculinity informs perceptions of who can be considered an abusive partner and men’s willingness to seek help when they are victims of abuse. And individualism reinforces the idea that violence and abuse are considered to be family business, furthering a lack of legal help-seeking.

Prior Experiences with Police Informing Future Help-Seeking

Often, participants had police involvement due to DV, as well as other non-DV-related reasons. Families' prior experiences with the police informed their future help-seeking decisions and trust in the police to help when they needed it, particularly in future DV-related calls. Carley described how her mother received a DUI and how the police treated her (age 12) and her mother:

> He was just like, “Your moms going to jail.” And I was like, “What, what is happening?” And he said, “I don't know, I'm taking you home,” and I was just like, “What is happening?!” And he just took me to the house and dropped me off and was like, “Bye!” So, it wasn't super helpful.

Alternatively, some participants had positive experiences with the police and felt the police listened to them as children, informing their future help-seeking decisions. Lena explained a situation when she called the police due to DV:

> I don't know if they knew what was going on, I feel like they only arrested him to cool it off for the day, like if my mom called or was talking about it, they probably wouldn't have [arrested him], but I feel like it was because I was a little eight-year-old they probably thought there was more to it.

CEDV-Related Police Interactions

Two key factors lead to either positive or negative interactions with police, these include (not) acknowledging children when arriving for DV-related calls and police (not) providing adequate responses and support to the victim, family, and children at the scene, including telling the children that the violence or police involvement was not their fault.

Most participants described feeling like they the police did not adequately acknowledge or engage with them as children. Keiana stated, “they wouldn’t [interact with me] because I would be in my room.” The participants who did perceive their interactions with the police as positive described how a key factor was the police acknowledging them as children at the scene. Carley who recalled many negative experiences, shared a time where she felt acknowledged by the police and its impact on her in that moment:

> I feel like probably if I had to pick a most helpful – it would be the one guy that did come into my room the first time I remember them coming and just like talking to me because that did feel kind of like, okay, there is somebody here, and it's not me, and I am not crazy, and I see there are other people witnessing this. So, like him just coming and talking to me was helpful. I mean, even though he didn't even really have anything of substance to say, it was just nice to know that somebody else was there.

Keiana experienced both acknowledgement and no acknowledgment by police, noting that acknowledgement led to a more positive experience with police: “I remember a call specifically

regarding safety of the child, and they would check on me and make sure that I'm safe. . . the most unhelpful was them just coming and going and ignoring everything."

Similarly, acknowledging children at the scene was widely discussed as a way that police could have provided positive support for children. Participants spoke directly about how they wished the police would have responded to them, specifically noting that children just want to be acknowledged and supported. Many participants spoke about the focus being on the parents rather than supporting and helping children and the effect this can have on children. Mallory described:

> I just feel like it is all about the parents, that may have just been my experience, but I feel like I wish somebody could have talked to me about what it was doing to me. I feel like I kind of grew up to hate, not hate but be bitter in a sense, and if I knew some of the things that I do now and have done and been working on and stuff is because of what I have been through. I wish I knew that or had somebody as a kid talk to me and said, "you don't deserve this" because I feel like a lot of kids think they deserve this, and then eventually it's like, "oh, this [the DV, police involvement] is because of me or something."

Additionally, ensuring children were able to recognize the violence and abuse was not their fault was discussed frequently. Carley explained:

> I wish that [legal systems] would just understand what children need. Especially when they are really young kids in their super developmental years. I don't know, I just feel like if there was more of that [child psychology training/trauma-informed care], even just a little bit more, enough to go in and talk to a child and say, "hey this isn't your fault, this is what is going on, we are here to help you," just something instead of just ignoring.

Similarly, participants discussed their intersecting identities and accompanying relations to societal power, as a factor in how they were treated by police, alluding to the need to acknowledge and talk to children in these scenarios. Katherine spoke about classism as it relates to police response:

> And you know, just talk with the kid, or just be a better support system, because most of the time they're just not good support systems. Especially, like a big thing is when [families] look more low class, too. I feel like, you know, no one cares as much.

Police providing, or not providing, adequate responses including support and resources to the children and families was crucial in how participants perceived their interactions with the police. Participants who were not provided additional support and resources perceived their interactions with police as particularly negative. Alyssa described, "They were more of a nuisance because it's like they're not really going to help, and they're going to make things worse, they are just going to be here, and then they are going to leave." Proper police response, support, and resources directly impacted the way participants experienced and perceived the police.

Alternatively, those that were provided with additional support and resources, such as follow-up calls or visits and explanations of what will happen next perceived their interactions with police as particularly positive. Keiana described a time when the police provided her and her family with additional support, “I guess the most helpful was them trying to get me away from that situation.” In this scenario, the police drove Keiana from her father’s house, where DV was occurring, back to her mother’s house and away from the DV. Similarly, Alyssa described a positive response from non-local police in comparison to a poor police response with her local police. The non-local police responded in a way that provided additional support by removing her father and following DV protocols:

> They handled the situation better than the local cops had; my dad was treated like you should treat people in these circumstances. He was immediately handcuffed, read his rights, taken to jail, sat down, talked to. The police also would not allow her [mother] to bail him out. They said no, you cannot, it's a conflict you cannot drive in the same vehicle together. You can't be around each other for so many hours and if my brother had not went to get my dad out, he would've had to wait those hours in jail. And so, they actually handled it better [than the local police], I think. And when my brother did bail him out, they did end up having to drive home, the police watched, in separate vehicles.

Some participants described how although they viewed the police positively, in their actual experiences they could not identify anything as being particularly helpful or unhelpful, though did described the impact of being provided additional resources. Lily mentioned: "Honestly, I can't really judge the quality, because in the end I guess I did get the resources I needed. I don't think anything stands out as being exceptionally helpful, but also exceptionally unhelpful like it got the job done."

Giving children a choice or allowing children to speak about the situation was frequently discussed with participants as a way to better support families and children. Keiana described a situation regarding custody:

> [I wished] that they relied more on the child's choice, even though I was very young I could have come to the decision of what I wanted rather than them going through my parents because obviously, they're [parents] going to be favoring themselves. Maybe ask the child what is going on. Even though I would have been scared to tell the truth, I think that if they pulled us aside and asked us and said, "Your parents won't get in trouble, they'll be fine, we'll make sure that everything is okay," that would get our side.

Similarly, Katherine described how sympathy of the situation, particularly with her parents who were addicts, would make a difference in her perception of the police:

> I wish they wouldn't be so negative about the parents. I wish they were just a little more understanding, like, I understand, you're going to be upset because you're wasting your time on an addict and stuff, but it's like just be more empathetic or sympathetic with the situation.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Guided by intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991), this study examined the young adults who were CEDV and their perceptions and experiences of the police and policing. In particular, this study focused on how young adults' social identities are tied to power structures and inform their perceptions and experiences. Consistent with Holden's (2003) taxonomy of CEDV, participants witnessed, overheard, intervened, and experienced the aftermath of violence that ranged in severity and frequency and encompassed physical violence and non-physical abuse. Most of the participants had police involvement due to DV-related and non-DV-related incidents. Participants' community and familial perceptions of police and prior interactions with police largely informed their willingness to seek legal help (McNeely & Grothoff, 2016; Nordberg et al., 2016; Shlafer et al., 2013). Conservative ideologies, individualism, and type of community (e.g., rural, suburban) were key factors that informed participants' perceptions and experiences. In line with the current literature, participants with DV-related contact perceived their experiences, ranging from always to negative to a mixture of positive and negative and also solely positive depending on their expectations for police involvement and the outcome of the police involvement (Elliffe & Holt, 2019; Jouriles et al., 2017; Kahovec & Haselschwerdt, 2022). Nearly all participants involved with the police reported at least one encounter to be negative or anxiety-provoking (Hamby et al., 2015; Kahovec & Haselschwerdt, 2022; Överlien & Aas, 2016; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012). In the following sections, I center intersectionality theory to unpack and situate community, family, and individual perceptions and experiences with the police depending on the participants' social locations and relationships to systems of power. I then situate CEDV and experiences and recommendations for the police from the youth

perspective in the broader CEDV literature, as well as a brief discussion of alternatives to policing. Additionally, the implications of the findings are woven throughout the discussion.

The Interconnection of Oppressive Ideologies, Discrimination, and Privileges in How Communities, Families, and Individuals Perceived and Interacted with the Police

An intersectional approach requires analysis of the ways in which individuals are rooted in and are impacted by systems of oppression, including racism, classism, and sexism, and how they intersect to create unique lived experiences of complex privilege and/or disadvantage depending on a person, family, or community's proximity to power and socially constructed dominant groups (Collins, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991). Experiences of classism and sexism influenced police interactions and responses, thus, informing community, familial, and individual perceptions of police. However, there are complex ways in which ideologies such as White supremacy and patriarchy manifest into racism and sexism, providing intricacies in experiences. To understand and address these manifestations, it is crucial to address and dismantle the larger beliefs, structures, and systems that perpetuate the manifestations (i.e., White supremacy, patriarchy). White supremacy and patriarchy influence how some groups benefit from the system while others are harmed. In some cases, other groups have complex experiences in that they benefit from some parts of the systems while simultaneously being harmed by others (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, although some participants spoke of how police viewed their family with disdain and disgust due to their impoverishment, while simultaneously speaking about how their proximity to Whiteness resulted in a more positive response from police when compared with others, emphasizing the inherent White privilege associated with the use of legal systems.

Patriarchy, and its manifestation in this study in the form of sexism and hegemonic masculinity, influenced how communities, families, and individuals experience and perceive the

police. For example, I identified a rural male culture within the rural communities described in my study. Rural male culture emphasizes how violent men are often protected by the “ol’ boys network,” meaning that police often protect men due to friendship or other factors, such as patriarchal societal norms specific to rural communities. Informal relationships with police also influenced participants, families, and communities from immigrant enclaves. They described positive perceptions of police due to the informal relationships they built (e.g., police as local patrons to their businesses) with the local police officers in addition to their proximity to Whiteness. Similarly, Whiteness also played a role in rural communities and police response, as police officers would not use force on White men being arrested in rural communities, unlike the documented history through the present time of police violence and brutality towards BIPoC individuals and families (Richie, 2012). DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2009) explain how rural communities share a patriarchal community norm, where hidden crimes occur and are often hushed and sometimes ignored. This was the shared experience of participants from rural communities, as the police would either protect the father due to the "ol' boys network" or allow hidden crimes to occur.

Consistent with the current literature, participants living in rural communities described a culture of individualism or viewing “family problems as private family matters," where the community members, including police officers, viewed things like DV as a family issue, therefore not providing proper responses to DV calls. DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2009) describe how rural communities are often willing to act on behalf of the “common good.” DeKeseredy and Schwartz’s (2009) description of cultures within rural communities ties directly to experiences described by the participants in this study, specifically, ignoring children at the

scene or calling other family members to come to remove children from the scene to prevent other agency involvement (e.g., child welfare).

Immigration status and cultural norms from more collectivist-oriented communities, as evidenced by our Asian American and Hispanic participants, complicated the rural narrative around family problems and help-seeking. None of the first or second-generation immigrant participants or their families involved the police in DV incidents. Immigrant families often have additional fears of contact with legal systems due to their immigration status, the immigration status of extended family members, as well as cultural norms around help-seeking beyond the family or close community (Robinson et al., 2021; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Fear of deportation influences immigrant families' willingness to contact legal systems for help (Green et al., 2023), as was seen in this study when immigrant participants spoke about how their parent's citizenship status was a reason for not contacting the police. Cultural values such as commitment to the family and values of masculine pride have been identified as barriers to help-seeking for Hispanic women (Powers & Bleeker, 2023). Similarly, Luis described how his family viewed DV as something that did not need outside help and something that they could solve on their own, as being rooted in their cultural perspectives.

Consistent with the literature, participants described being treated poorly by police due to the intersections of classism and sexism. In particular, these experiences touch on the historical use of legal systems that have maintained gendered and racialized control, which helps to continue the narrative and notion of White supremacy and patriarchy systemically integrated into our legal systems, such as the police (Haley, 2016). Structural inequalities contributing to classism, racism, and sexism affected the response provided by police and the resources or additional support given to participants and their families experiencing DV (Nnawulezi et al.,

2022). In this study, participants whose families were living in poverty or experiencing parental addiction recalled lax police responses, degradation of their mothers, were not treated as parents or families in need of support but rather ridicule and disdain, and thus, were not provided additional resources or support. These negative police experiences affect individuals and families in the moment and inform their future help-seeking decisions and trust in the legal systems (Jouriles et al., 2017; McNeely & Grothoff, 2016; Shlafer et al., 2013). Participants in the current study described how their prior experiences with the police, especially the particularly positive or negative interactions, informed their future help-seeking decisions.

Youth Perceptions of, Interactions with, and Recommendations for Law Enforcement

Two key themes influenced CEDV-related police perceptions and interactions. Acknowledging or not acknowledging children when the police arrive for a DV call and providing a "proper" police response based on the youth's desired outcome, as well as providing support and resources to the child(ren) and family, were crucial factors in making a police interaction positive versus negative for CEDV. Proper police response acknowledged children at the scene, providing them with comfort and support and informing them of what would happen to their parents and families (Överlien & Aas, 2016). Acknowledgment was the dominant theme among participants when asked how they wished police responded to them and their families.

Children report the need for police to provide a proper police response based on the desired outcome, including providing support and resources to the family and child(ren) when receiving a call for DV (Hamby et al., 2015; Millar et al., 2021; Stover et al., 2010). For participants in the current study, this looked like speaking to the children and asking them what they needed, providing the family and child(ren) with information on what will happen next, follow-ups by the police, or other resources (e.g., resources for addiction). Beyond resources,

children want to feel supported by the legal system (Richardson-Foster et al., 2012; Swanston et al., 2014; Swerin et al., 2018). Support can look a variety of ways, including how participants described support which included talking to the children to see what they need, including children's recount of the situation in how police decide legal consequences (e.g., custody, arrests), and having empathy for the situations and helping provide help for other issues that play into DV (e.g., addiction, alcoholism; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012).

Consistent with existing literature (Överlien & Aas, 2016; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012; Swanston et al., 2014), in most DV- and non-DV-related interactions, the young adults in this study were not being acknowledged, heard, or believed by police when they arrived. Further, the police did not engage with them developmentally appropriately. These experiences informed their future help-seeking decisions and trust in the legal system. Due to a lack of acknowledgment and a combination of other experiences, such as preconceived notions of the police (e.g., familial or cultural influence, past experiences) or having a general mistrust of legal systems given how these systems have historically and contemporarily harmed individuals, families, and communities, especially those with less proximity to White privilege or who experience discrimination at multiple intersectional axes (Jouriles et al., 2017; McNeely & Grothoff, 2016; Shlafer et al., 2013), negative police experiences were more common than positive. These findings, even for participants with greater privilege than others, are consistent with the literature on ways in which young people are discriminated against by the police based on their racialized identity, immigration status, class, and gender (Nordberg et al., 2016).

Researchers should continue to work towards making CEDV voices heard, particularly in a meaningful way that recognizes the child's developmental stage, emotional needs, and cognitive abilities. Researchers can use intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological lens

to enhance the complexity of CEDV and legal system interactions—viewing them as rooted in larger sociocultural and sociohistorical contexts. Unpacking how White supremacy and patriarchy, for example, are embedded in larger structural and societal contexts with implications for how communities, families, and individuals experience CEDV and help-seeking is essential. Specifically, an intersectional focus can provide insight into how social identities inform participants' perceptions and experiences by uncovering power, privilege, and opportunity structures (Romero, 2017).

Participants in this study and the current literature (Millar et al., 2021; Överlien & Aas, 2016) describe how the police did not seem equipped to talk to children when arriving at a DV call. Similarly, police officers reported uncertainty and feeling overwhelmed when interacting with children at the scene for DV (Millar et al., 2018; Överlien & Aas, 2016). Despite youth reporting that acknowledgment, validation, and support is the most helpful response from police, they do not often report this as their actual experiences (Millar et al., 2018; Överlien & Aas, 2016). Youth exposed to DV describe how officers having empathy for their situation helps to make them feel seen, heard, and cared for (Miller et al., 2018). The narratives of CEDV and police responding to CEDV, coupled with the impact that a positive police interaction can have on CEDV, police training should include training specific to interacting with children (Ko et al., 2008). Training that provides officers with enough comfort to "offer reassurance and information and to acknowledge children's involvement in the experienced of domestic violence" (Richardson-Foster et al., 2012, p. 232) would be beneficial.

Beyond individual-level responses, police typically serve as the gatekeepers to additional resources for families experiencing DV and other adversity (e.g., addiction). For example, many programs require proof of police interaction before accessing other services, such as personal

protection orders, DV counseling, and addiction support, among others (Cannon et al., 2016). This can put some folks, such as families and communities with lower DV police reporting or for whom the police is not a viable or safe resource, in particularly difficult situations, creating additional barriers to resources. Thus, this study highlights the importance of recognizing some of the structural barriers that individuals and families face when help-seeking through the legal systems, particularly how those barriers can result in families in resource and service gaps for entire communities.

Historically, though more recently in the larger societal discourse, alternatives to policing and transformative systems have been discussed as alternatives to policing in the context of family violence, with implications for legal system response to CEDV. Alternatives to policing can include responses from mental health professionals, community-based accountability strategies, and efforts to reduces situations for police violence to occur, for example (Ritchie, 2017). As it pertains to CEDV, it could be beneficial to explore alternative options such as having teams of professionals that include social workers or other mental health specialists responding to CEDV. Further, deconstructing and reexamining the "mandatory arrest" policies could also aid in reducing potentially dangerous interactions with police. This could provide a stronger effort to center youth and their family's needs while shifting attention to structural issues (e.g., racism in housing policies) and tangentially related social challenges (e.g., addiction, alcoholism) while simultaneously reducing the risk of additional harm caused by law the police.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study should be understood in the context of several limitations. First, there is substantially less DV research in rural contexts (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009), creating a unique strength of this study as my sample consists of participants residing in predominantly

rural or suburban communities. However, a limitation of this study is that the study's sample only included one participant who lived part-time in an urban context, so I was unable to provide a complete comparative narrative on the role of community type despite this feeling like a significant factor for perceptions and experiences. The emphasis on rurality and suburbia was a finding that I identified after data collection had ended. Due to time constraints, I was unable to theoretically sample youth from urban contexts to further saturate findings around the role of community type. Additionally, the study aimed to recruit more Black participants, given the depth of literature on how Black men and women negatively experience police involvement in DV and non-DV contexts. Though my recruitment sample yielded fewer Black participants than anticipated, the sample is comprised of notable diversity regarding race, socioeconomic status, geographical location (e.g., rural, suburban, immigrant communities), and involvement with the legal systems. Similarly, due to the time constraints of developing the study, the original goal was to examine multiple legal systems, including the police, child welfare, and court systems. Due to the amount of data collected, it was only feasible to examine the police perceptions and interactions in this study; however, this provides opportunities for future directions utilizing this data and future studies. Additionally, I did not ask participants about alternative forms of policing or their perspective on abolition, therefore future studies should include questions or prompts about alternatives to police involvement to tap into youth's lived experiences and creativity in navigating this issue moving forward.

Further, based on participants' self-identified responses, I categorized them as being from rural, urban, and suburban contexts, however, I do not objectively know whether participants were from rural, urban, or suburban contexts. Finally, despite notable diversity within this sample, all participants were college-attending and primarily female-identified, limiting the

transferability of our findings to non-college-attending, male-identified young adults. Although generalizability is not the purpose of qualitative research, this study may be limited by its lack of gender symmetry as the current literature finds varying results as it relates to legal system interactions, particularly when considering intersecting identities (e.g., Black men, Asian men, and women; Graham et al., 2020; Richie, 2012).

Future Directions

The findings of this study highlight the complexities of CEDV and legal systems' perceptions and interactions, specifically with the police. The current study focused on the ways DV-exposed youth perceived and experienced the police, with particular attention to how their intersecting identities situated within societal power structures informed their perceptions of and experiences with the police. Future studies should consider examining CEDV through an intersectional lens as it provides more depth to understanding youth's experiences and how their interactions inform their perceptions of police. Additionally, CEDV described various ways their social identities influenced how police treated them, perceived their families, and in turn, informed their perceptions of police and vice versa. Beyond using intersectionality as a theory, integrating intersectionality as a method would benefit future CEDV studies. For example, researchers should consider using explicit questions about the perceived societal views and roles in their communities and families related to DV and help-seeking. Similarly, it could be beneficial to consider asking participants about their identities and how the connections to social power structures influenced their experiences with DV and the legal systems. By including questions like those stated above, researchers can gain a more robust understanding of the intersecting experiences and needs of CEDV and their families.

Tied closely to the use of intersectionality is the influence of sociocultural and sociohistorical factors on perceptions of and interactions with the police. Researchers should examine the individual, sociocultural, and sociohistorical factors when examining CEDV and their families, including race, class, family connections with the legal systems, and societal and cultural norms around DV and help-seeking. Future research should examine these experiences within the broader contexts described among a sample with more diverse racialized identities, particularly those individuals and families with legal system involvement, to gain a stronger sense of within and between group experiences. Additionally, examining the experiences with other legal systems (e.g., child welfare, court systems) could be beneficial to understanding the broader context of experiences and perceptions of multiple legal systems related to DV and help-seeking.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine DV-exposed youth and their experiences with and perceptions of police, particularly focusing on what informs their perceptions of police and how their social identities, tied to power structures, inform their perceptions and experiences. Participants experienced positive, negative, and mixed perceptions of and experiences with the police, informing their community, family, and individual-level perceptions of and experiences with the police. Using intersectionality theory, participants described conservative ideology, proximity to Whiteness, community cultural norms, and prior interactions with police as the primary themes informing their perceptions of and interactions with the police. These influencing factors then informed how youth with CEDV histories perceived and engaged with (or did not engage with) the police after their police encounters. In addition to how their

community and family perceived, interacted with, and discussed police, that further informed their perceptions and vice versa, as they all inform and influence each other simultaneously.

This study also highlighted the importance of utilizing an intersectional approach when examining CEDV, particularly with the legal systems. Recognizing the intersectional experiences of youth provides a deeper understanding of their community, family, and individual-level experiences and needs, specifically when they help seek via the legal systems. Utilizing intersectionality as a theory and methodology aided in a deeper understanding of sociohistorical and sociocultural factors that inform communities, families, and individuals, such as the cultural context of immigrant families or those living in poverty utilizing the legal systems. This also provides insight into the societal norms embedded in communities that inform families and individuals. These findings suggest the need to acknowledge, hear, and believe children when police are called for DV. In addition to recognizing the manifestations of patriarchy, classist ideologies, and White supremacy as manifested in racism and xenophobia built into our systems, impacting community, family, and youth perceptions of and experiences with the legal system.

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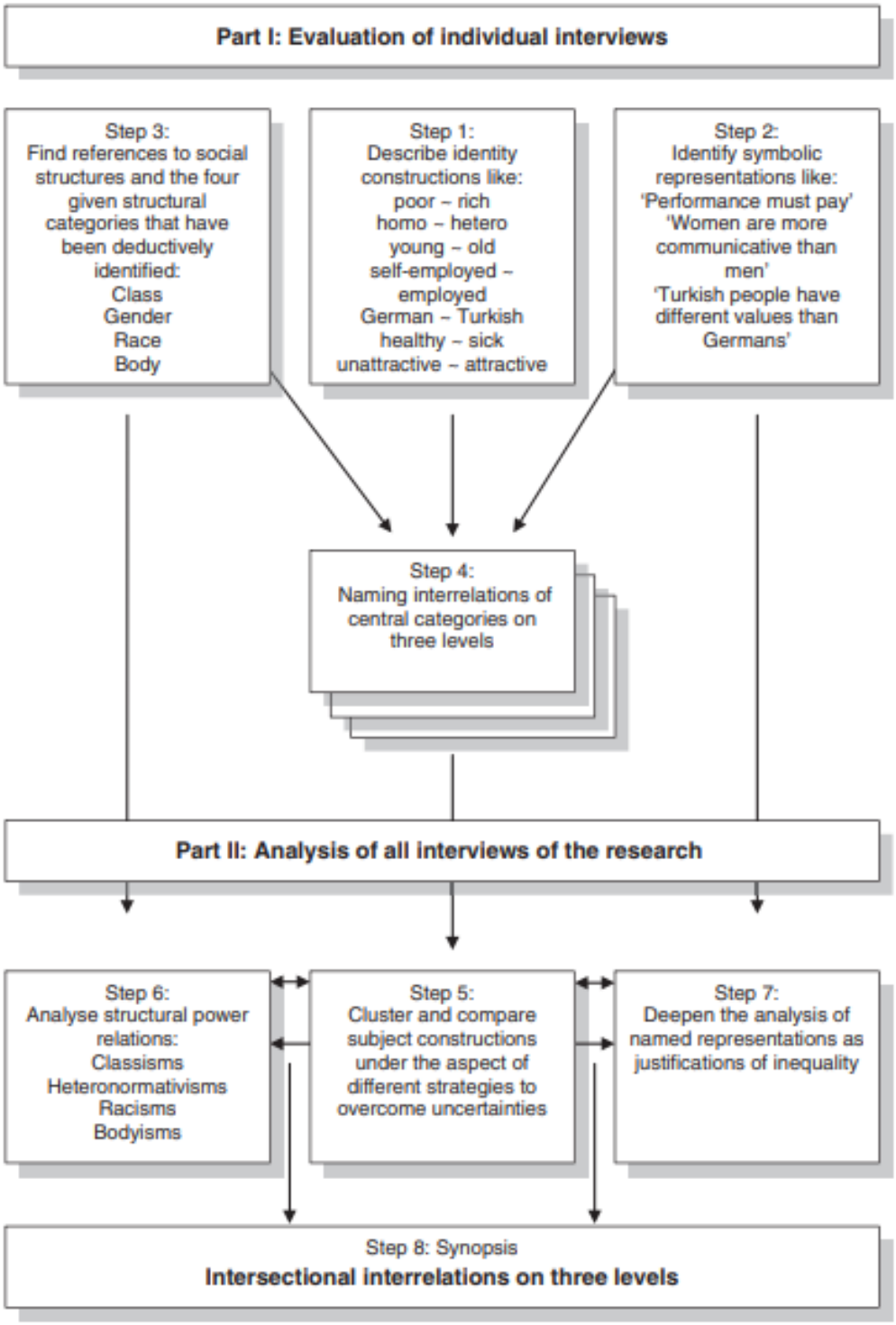
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Model of intersectional multilevel analysis



Appendix B: E-mail Scripts and Recruitment Flyer

For emailing other agencies/professionals & listservs:

Subject line:

Help spread word about a paid interview of youth exposed to domestic violence experiences

Email body:

Dear _____,

We are conducting a study on the experiences of young adult exposed to domestic violence while they were growing up with an emphasis on better understanding their involvement with legal systems (e.g., police, child welfare, court systems) related to the domestic violence We are targeting our recruitment efforts to Tennessee but will also accept participants from neighboring states (e.g., Alabama, Georgia).

Who is our project team? Our team is comprised of two university researchers, including Amie Kahovec, M.S. and Dr. Megan Haselschwerdt from the Department of Child and Family Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

What are we asking for? We are asking for your assistance in spreading word about this paid study participation opportunity study to your clients or individuals who come through your agency/organization. We have attached Institutional Review Board-approved social media/website and email listserv scripts, as well as a flyer to post in reception areas. We ask that you please help in sharing about our study so interested individuals (your clients and individuals who receive messages on your various formal and informal organization listservs) can consider participating.

What does participation entail? Young adults who meet the study eligibility criteria will participate in 1–2-hour long interview (via zoom or in-person depending on what they prefer). At the end of the interview, participants will receive compensation. Participants will be given local and state resources, as well.

Thank you again for your time in reading this email and your willingness to consider helping us spread word about this important project and study participation opportunity. We greatly appreciate your consideration of helping us spread word about this important project!

Sincerely,

Amie Kahovec, M.S.
Doctoral Candidate, Child and Family Studies
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

For emailing Colleges & Universities:

Subject line:

Help spread word about a paid interview of youth exposed to domestic violence experiences

Email body:

Dear _____,

We are conducting a study on the experiences of young adult exposed to domestic violence while they were growing up with an emphasis on better understanding their involvement with legal systems (e.g., police, child welfare, court systems) related to the domestic violence We are targeting our recruitment efforts to Tennessee but will also accept participants from neighboring states (e.g., Alabama, Georgia).

Who is our project team? Our team is comprised of two university researchers, including Amie Kahovec, M.S. (University of Tennessee, Knoxville) and Dr. Megan Haselschwerdt (University of Tennessee, Knoxville).

What are we asking for? We are asking for your assistance in spreading word about this paid study participation opportunity study to your students. We have attached Institutional Review Board-approved social media/website and email listserv scripts, as well as fliers to attach. We ask that you please help in sharing about our study so interested students can consider participating.

What does participation entail? Young adults who meet the study eligibility criteria will participate in 1–2-hour long interview (via zoom or in-person depending on what they prefer). At the end of the interview, participants will receive compensation. Participants will be given local and state resources, as well.

We greatly appreciate your consideration of helping us spread word about this important project!

Thank you again for your time in reading this email and your willingness to consider helping us spread word about this important project and study participation opportunity. We greatly appreciate your consideration of helping us spread word about this important project!

Sincerely,

Amie Kahovec, M.S.
Doctoral Candidate, Child and Family Studies
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Enrollment Email:

Hi XXX,

Thank you for completing our brief survey to see if you qualify for the Young Adults Life Experiences study! Based on your responses, we would like to invite you to participate. Here are a few details about the study:

- Participants are asked to meet with me in-person or Zoom, for a 1–2-hour interview.
- Participants are paid $25 in the form of an electronic gift card for their participation in the interview.

Please email us to let us know if you are interested in enrolling in the study or not. In your response, please let us know your availability for the next week including days and times that would work for you. If this next week won't work for you, please let me know and we can schedule in the future. Please also indicate if you would prefer to meet in-person or via Zoom. The interview takes 1-2 hours to complete, so please keep that in mind for scheduling.

I will reach you with a follow-up email in about a week if we do not hear from you, just to make sure that I've answered any questions that you might have.

In your response, please also let me know if you're comfortable with me emailing you the study consent form. The consent form, unlike this email, does state the topic of the interview, so I would only want to send it to you if your email account is private and not accessed by a family member or other people. If you prefer I not send the consent form via email, I can share it with you before we do the interview or I can read it to you over the phone.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Amie Kahovec
akahovec@vols.utk.edu
Lead Researcher, Young Adults Life Experiences Project
Child and Family Studies, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Enrollment Text:

Hi XXX,

Thank you for completing our brief survey to see if you qualify for the Young Adults Life Experiences study! Based on your responses, we would like to invite you to participate. Here are a few details about the study:

- Participants are asked to meet with me in-person or Zoom, for a 1–2-hour interview.
- Participants are paid $25 in the form of an electronic gift card for their participation in the interview.

Please text us to let us know if you are interested in enrolling in the study or not. In your response, please let us know your availability for the next week including days and times that would work for you. If this next week won't work for you, please let me know and we can schedule in the future. Please also indicate if you would prefer to meet in-person or via Zoom. The interview takes 1-2 hours to complete, so please keep that in mind for scheduling.

In your response, please also let me know if you're comfortable with me texting or emailing you the study consent form. The consent form, unlike this text message, does state the topic of the interview, so I would only want to send it to you if your phone or email account is private and not accessed by a family member or other people. If you prefer I not send the consent form via text message or email, I can share it with you before we do the interview or I can read it to you over the phone.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Amie Kahovec
akahovec@vols.utk.edu
Lead Researcher, Young Adults Life Experiences Project
Child and Family Studies, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Follow-up reminder week-of interview and 48 hours before:

Hi XXX,

Thank you again for enrolling in our study! Please remember that we are scheduled to meet [in-person or Zoom] this week on [day, date] at [time, time zone]. [If Zoom], here is the link for our meeting: XXX [If in-person], we will meet XXX.

We recommend finding a private and comfortable space to be in while you participate in our interview, as we will be discussing family and other personal topics. You may also want to use headphones if you have them.

Feel free to reach out to us at any time with questions or concerns,

Amie Kahovec
akahovec@vols.utk.edu
Lead Researcher, Young Adults Life Experiences Project
Child and Family Studies, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Follow-up reminder day-of:

Hi XXX,

Thank you again for enrolling in our study! Please remember that we are scheduled to meet today [phone or Zoom]. [If Zoom] Here is the link for our meeting: XXX. [If in-person] here is the location of our meeting.

We recommend finding a private and comfortable space to be in while you participate in our interview, as we will be discussing family and other personal topics. You may also want to use headphones if you have them.

I look forward to meeting you soon!

Feel free to reach out to us at any time with any questions or concerns,

Amie Kahovec
akahovec@vols.utk.edu
Lead Researcher, Young Adults Life Experiences Project
Child and Family Studies, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Thank you/payment message:

Hi XXX,

Thank you for your participation in this study! Here is a link to receive your electronic gift card for completing your interview: XXX.

Feel free to reach out to us with any questions or concerns,

Amie Kahovec
akahovec@vols.utk.edu
Lead Researcher, Young Adults Life Experiences Project
Child and Family Studies, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY ON YOUNG ADULTS!

Researchers at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville are conducting a study on young adults exposed to family violence while they were growing up. Participants total commitment includes completing a one-time survey and a 90-minute interview about your lived experiences.

Participants will receive a $25 gift card for participating in the interview.

Are you open to sharing your experiences?
If so, please scan the QR code below to take a short survey to see if you are eligible.

To participate you must be between the ages of 18-25 years old.

All information will be kept confidential

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville Institutional Review Board has approved this flyer.
If you have any other questions about the study, please contact Amie Kahovec, M.S. (akahovec@vols.utk.edu).

Appendix C: Informed Consent to Participate

Research Study Title: Young Adults Life Experiences Project

Researchers: Dr. Megan Haselschwerdt, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Principal

Investigator

Amie Kahovec, M.S., University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Co-PI

Purpose of Study
You are invited to participate in a study focused on the experiences of young adults who were exposed to abuse in their families while they were growing up and any involvement they may have had with legal systems (police, child welfare, court professionals) in response to the abuse.

Procedure
Your participation will entail one interview session for 1-2 hours. The meeting will be held either in-person or via Zoom. I will ask you some questions about your experiences growing up, specifically about abusive behaviors between your parents/caregivers, overall family dynamics, and your experiences with various legal systems due to the abusive behaviors. There will be also some questions about your experiences of abuse and how you managed your experience within your community and what factors influenced your seeking help decisions.

You do not have to join this or any study. Your participation is voluntary. If you do join, and later change your mind, you may quit at any time. If you refuse to join or end your participation early, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. In exchange for participating, you will receive a compensation of a $25 gift card.

Confidentiality
All information we collect will be kept private (confidential). Only project staff will have access to your interview. All documents with your name will be kept locked up in a safe place that is password protected and secure. Your interview will only be identified with a pseudonym, not your real name. We will describe the results of the study without using names or other identifying information. With your permission, we will audio record the meeting. We will transcribe the audio recording and remove all identifying information from the transcripts. Audio recordings will be destroyed within two years of the completion of all interviews. If you do not give permission to audio record, I will only take notes.

We are committed to protecting your privacy. The only time we have to breach your confidentiality is if you discuss ongoing child abuse (we are required by law to report child abuse), or if you discuss thinking about or wanting to hurt or kill yourself or someone else.

Risks
There is the possibility that responding to some questions may cause you to experience some distress. If you become distressed or uncomfortable, you can take a break, skip any questions you do not wish to answer, or you may end participation at any time without penalty. Additionally, there is a risk of other people finding out about the topic of this study, which could be harmful. To reduce this risk, we will only contact participants about the study using vague, non-abuse-related terms except when emailing the consent forms ahead of the interview time, with their permission. Additionally, I will share instructions for clearing participants browsers, and meet for the interviews at a safe and private time and location.

Benefits
While there are minimal direct benefits to you for participating in the study, gathered information will contribute to the knowledge of professionals in the field who are working with individuals with similar experiences. What we learn from you will help us to better understand the experiences of young adults who were exposed to abuse in their families and their interactions with legal systems (police, child welfare, court professionals).

What will happen with the information collected for this study? Information collected for this study will be published and possibly presented at scientific meetings or for methodological instruction. Your name and any other identifiable information will be altered so that you cannot be identified as a participant in the study.

Questions You May Have About the Study
This consent form explains the study. Please read it carefully. Ask questions about anything you do not understand. If you do not have questions now, you may ask later. If you have questions, you can contact Dr. Megan Haselschwerdt by email at mhasel@utk.edu or Amie Kahovec by email at akahovec@vols.utk.edu.

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
1534 White Avenue
Blount Hall, Room 408
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
Phone: 865-974-7697
Email: utkirb@utk.edu

Giving Consent Your consent to participate in this study means that you understand the information given to you about the study and in this consent form and you have been given a copy of the consent form. Your consent means that you agree to join the study and give

permission to Amie Kahovec to perform the procedures referred to; report study findings to scientific bodies and funding agencies; and to publish and present the findings in professional settings.

By giving oral consent, meaning out loud and not in writing, you are indicating that you understood what you have read and/or heard and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

Do you agree to participate in the study?

Audio recordings will be destroyed once the study is complete, do I have your permission to audio record the interview?

Appendix D: Eligibility Screener

Introduction:

Thank you for your interest in our study about young adults lived experiences. This survey contains questions to assess if you are eligible for participating in this study. Please answer the following questions honestly and to the best of your ability. We expect this survey to take 2-5 minutes. Once the survey is complete, you will be asked to provide your contact information so if you're eligible, we can invite you to participate in a 1–2-hour interview.

If you have any questions about this survey or anything else pertaining to this study, please contact the researcher, Amie Kahovec (akahovec@vols.utk.edu).

Main Eligibility Questions:

Q1: Are you between the ages of 18-25?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

If not 18, survey participant will be taken to the end of the survey and provided a resource document and PDF on how to clear their browser.

Q2: This study is about the experiences of young adults who were exposed to abusive acts from one parent or caregiver towards another while they were growing up. While you were growing up did you ever see, hear or later learn about a parent/caregiver push or shove with force, slap, punch, kick, or beat up your other parent/caregiver with something that could hurt?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

If no exposure to violence, survey participant will be taken to the end of the survey and will be provided with a PDF on how to clear their browser.

Q3: Which of the following individual(s) pushed or shoved with force, slapped, punched, kicked, or beat up the other parent/caregiver individual in your family?

- ○ Father or father-like figure (1)
- ○ Mother or mother-like figure (2)
- ○ Both did this at least once (3)

○ None of the above fit my experiences (4)

If "none of the above fit my experience" is selected, survey participant will be taken to the end of the survey and provided a resource document and PDF on how to clear their browser.

Q3: How often did you or your family interact with or contact the police, child welfare services, or other legal systems or professionals about the abusive acts in the last question?

○ Frequently

○ Occasionally

○ Rarely

○ Never

Other Demographic Questions:

The next few questions will help us understand where you are from and who you are so we can include young adults with different experiences in this study. There are no right or wrong answers.

Q5: Which city/town and state(s) did you live in while you were growing up? _____

Q6: Which of the following statements applied to you or your family while you were growing up through the present time? *Check all that apply.*

○ My family owned a home most or all of my life.

○ My family rented a home most or all of my life.

○ I don't know if my family owned or rented a home while I was growing up.

○ My family regularly lived in other family members or friend's homes, or in shelters most or all of my life.

○ My family received reduced or free school lunches, cash assistance (e.g., TANF), food assistance (e.g., food stamps), health care (e.g., TennCare, Medicaid) assistance, childcare assistance/subsidies, or housing assistance (e.g., section 8 housing) at some point during my life.

○ My family pays/paid for my college/university/community college tuition and fees.

Q7: What is your race or ethnicity? *Check all that apply.*

○ Black or African American (1)

○ Hispanic or Latina/o/x (2)

○ American Indian or Alaska Native (3)

○ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (4)

○ Asian or Asian American (5)

○ White (6)

○ Not listed – please specify (7)

Thank you for your responses, please indicate the best way to contact you to schedule an interview. *Please check all preferred contact methods.*

○ (Text) Cell phone: _____

○ (Call) Cell phone or other phone number: _____

○ (Email) Email address: _____

○ I am not interested in participating in this study, so I am not leaving my contact information.

Survey participant will then be provided with a resource document and PDF on how to clear their browser.

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today. I really appreciate you talking to me about your experiences. The purpose of this interview is for me to learn more about the experiences of young adults who were exposed to abuse in their families and their interactions with legal systems (police, child welfare, court professionals). I expect the interview to last about 90 minutes. I may ask you to elaborate on some points in order to gain greater insight into your experiences but will try to just let you tell your story. If I pause or am quiet, I am not judging, I am simply listening. There are no right or wrong answers. These questions may trigger discomfort, so we can pause and take a break or stop at any time. And lastly, you do not have to share any information that is beyond your comfort. One thing I do want to highlight from the consent form is that I am a mandated reporter if you were to disclose ongoing or current abuse of a child under 18. Before we get started…

Did you get a chance to read over the consent form I sent to you via a survey link?

[If no, screen share or share survey link again for them to review]

Do you have any questions for me before we start?

Do I have your verbal consent to begin?

Okay, great. I would like to audio record our interview (if video is on, clarify there will be no video recording). All audio recordings will be deleted upon completion of the study. Do I have your permission to audio record?

A. Demographic/Background Information

We are going to begin with some demographic and background information pertaining to you, your family, and where you grew up.

Probe for the community they grew up in (wherever it fits best in the flow of conversation about their family and upbringing).

1. Could you tell me about who you are and where you come from? *Probe for age, highest level of education, where they grew up, what their upbringing was like, what they do now.*

    a. [If they do not say much about their family] Could you tell me about your family? Who is your family now and while you were growing up? *Probe for familial relationships, including focal maritally abusive partner and marital/relationship status, siblings (age & gender), parent(s) occupation and education level, race/ethnicity/nation of origin of family members.*
    b. *Probe for what their community was like*

2. Are there any extended family members or individuals (e.g., nanny, grandparent, cousin) who lived in your house while you were growing up that you didn't mention? [If yes] What was their relation to you and your family? *Probe for details of who they are, when they lived in the home, and for how long, their relation to other family members.*

3. In the eligibility screener you mentioned XX exposure, what I am finding is what is rare for one person is really different to another person could you tell me about how many times you and your family interacted with the legal systems?

B. **Violence, Abuse and Family Life**

In the eligibility screener you completed, you indicated that your X used abusive acts against another caregiver/parent. For the remainder of the questions in this document, I'm going to be asking more about your overall family dynamics, but more specifically about the dynamics you observed between your X and your other caregiver/parent as well as your relationship with X and overall family dynamics.

[Note to committee: I will clarify X from the survey and modify each interview protocol ahead of interviews so I can reference the correct parent/caregivers.]

1. How would you describe your family life 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, when abuse started.*
    - *Probe for parents' relationship, extended family, siblings.*

2. Some children describe the abusive acts or violence between their parents [use terms they have referred to parents/caregivers as] as occurring regularly or quite often, while others described it as less frequent or only occurring a few times. Can you tell me about how frequent there was violence occurring between your parents/caregivers?
    - *Probe for whether or not they were present or experienced the aftermath, or both*
    - *Probe for whether it was unilateral (one parent towards another only) or bidirectional (both engaged at times, if both, learn as to whether both initiated or if one responded in a retaliatory or for self-defensive purposes).*
    - *Probe for types of violence used (e.g., physical violence, manipulation).*

3. **If no legal system involvement:** What do you think would've happened if the police got involved? How would your family/neighbors/community have reacted?

4. Can you tell me about the first time you realized or learned that X used physical violence towards your other parent/caregiver?
    - *Probe for details of the incident, how they became aware of this, whether this was regularly occurring throughout childhood versus something that happened only during a certain period of time, how they/others responded to this incident versus how they responded other times.*

5. In addition to physical abuse, can you describe some of the other ways that your X

experienced abuse by your other caregiver/parent?

- *Probe with examples of emotional, sexual, financial, etc. abuse.*
- *Probe for possible controlling behaviors by asking to elaborate on examples of abuse.*

5a. [If participant does not mention control issues in the preceding questions, directly ask if such behaviors were present.] Would you describe X as controlling of your other caregiver/parent or not controlling? If yes, how so? Can you give me some examples? If no, why would you say X was not controlling?

5b. From your perspective, why was X abusive towards your other caregiver/parent 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. 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 the 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 the participant or siblings intervened in any ways; when they figured out that these behaviors were abusive.*

7. Some children and adolescents say that they have 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 what factors played into their decision to intervene; if they did intervene, did the ways in which they intervened change over time; what happened when they intervened.*

C. Violence, Abuse, and the Legal System

I am now going to ask you to tell me more about your experiences with the legal systems in the context of the family violence and abuse you described from the perspective of your community, your family, and your own thoughts, both while growing up and now.

In the eligibility screener you mentioned that your family interacts with or contacted the police, child welfare services, or other legal systems or professionals about the abusive acts. Could you clarify which of these systems you and your family encountered?

Police:

8. In some communities, police are viewed as a source of support and comfort, whereas in other communities, police are viewed as sources of harm, how did your childhood community view the police?
    - *Probe for family or cultural influences, specific encounters they have had.*

9. **[If no police encounters]:** Can you tell me about why you think your family never encountered the police?
   - *Probe for family perceptions of police, role of racialized identities, unrelated histories with police, secrecy.*

10. **[SKIP if no police encounters]** Can you tell me about the first time the police became aware of the violence occurring between X and your other caregiver/parent?
    - *Probe for what events led up to the police becoming aware, how were the police notified, how police responded, who was present and how did they respond*
    - *Probe for if they were acknowledged by police or if they were told what would be happening next (e.g., dad being arrested), how they and their family members were treated by police,* ***focusing on participant and sibling experiences with the police****.*

    a. Can you tell me more about what happened after the police were called?
       - *Probe for if this was different than other times police were involved, if this was influential on whether or not they contacted police again.*

    b. How did you and your family perceive the police before the first interaction?

    c. How did you and your family perceive the police after the first interaction?

    d. How do you envision your experiences and perceptions of the interactions would have been different if you were of a different race or gender?
       - *Focus on relevant identifiers depending on the participant/family identities*

11. **[SKIP if no police encounters]** Following this incident, how often did the police become involved?
    a. *Probe for if it was always for the same reason, who notified the police, how they were treated by police, variations in experiences (i.e., some positive, some negative).*

12. When engaging with formal or legal systems for help, police are often the most common resource used by young adults. Can you tell me about any times <u>you</u> have contacted police?
    - *Probe for what led up to them calling, how police responded, if they were acknowledged when police arrived, and if they were given additional information or resources.*

13. You have already told me about some of the times that the police became involved due to the abuse happening at your home, now I'm wondering if your family or X had other interactions with the police that were unrelated to the violence against your other parent/caregiver?
    a. Probe for if there were any focal family members with a history with the police. Can provide examples such as probation, DUI's, deportation, or police calls to the home for reasons other than abuse.

14. **[SKIP if no police encounters]** Of the experiences you have had with the police, what did you find to be the most unhelpful response? The most helpful response?

- *Probe for what made those responses helpful or unhelpful, probe for some of the best practices from the literature*.
- *Probe for what they think would be a good response from police, how they wish things would have gone/what went good or bad when they engaged with police, if they felt like police were equipped to respond to children.*

Child Welfare and Court Systems: Next, I am going to ask you about child welfare services and court systems and any engagement or involvement you may have had with them. These questions may be similar to what I have asked you previously about police, but this time will be about your interactions with other people in the legal system.

15. In some communities, social service resources such as child welfare are viewed as a source of support and comfort, whereas in other communities, child welfare is viewed as a source of harm, and in others, people have complex feelings around child welfare – can you talk about your experiences with child welfare?
    - *Probe for family or cultural influences, specific encounters they have had.*

    a. [If not discussed] How does your experiences as X *(add in relevant identifiers depending on the participant/family identities)* influence you and your family's perceptions of child welfare?

16. **[SKIP if no child welfare encounters]** Some DV-exposed youth experience interagency involvement (i.e., both police and child welfare services respond to their DV exposure) while others only experience police or child welfare on their own. Can you tell me about your experiences with child welfare services?
    - *Probe for if they had experiences with interagency involvement, what came first – police or child welfare, how did child welfare become involve/who contacted them, how did they respond to participant, siblings, and parents.*

    a. Can you tell me more about what happened after child welfare became involved?
    - *Probe for if this was different than other times child welfare was involved, if this was influential on whether or not they engaged with child welfare again.*

    b. How did you and your family perceive child welfare before the first interaction?

    c. How did you and your family perceive the child welfare after the first interaction?

    d. [If not discussed] How do you envision your experiences and perceptions of the interactions would have been different if you were of a different race or gender?
    - *Focus on relevant identifiers depending on the participant/family identities*

17. **[SKIP if no child welfare encounters]** Of the experiences you have had with child welfare, what did you find to be the most unhelpful response? The most helpful response?
    - *Probe for what made those responses helpful or unhelpful, probe for some of the best practices from the literature*.
    - *Probe for what they think would be a good response from child welfare, how they*

wish things would have gone/what went good or bad when they engaged with child welfare, if they felt like child welfare was equipped to respond to children.

18. **[SKIP if no court encounter]** Can you tell me about any interactions with other court professionals (e.g., judges, interviewers, public defenders) within the context of the abusive behavior?
    - *Probe for if they had experiences with interagency involvement, what came first – police, child welfare, court; how did court systems become involved/who contacted them, how did they respond to participant, siblings, and parents.*

19. Can you tell me more about what happened after court systems became involved? *Probe for if this was different than other times court systems were involved, how family reacted*

20. How did you and your family perceive court systems before the first interaction?

21. How did you and your family perceive court systems after the first interaction?

22. [If not discussed] How do you envision your experiences and perceptions of the interactions would have been different if you were of a different race or gender? *Focus on relevant identifiers depending on the participant/family identities*

23. Aside from police, child welfare, and court systems that we have already talked about, have you or your family had any other interactions with professionals related to the abusive behavior?

D. Closing

I am going to ask just a few questions to wrap up our interview and be sure that you've had the chance to share all that you'd like to with me.

1. If there's one thing you wish you could change about the way police/child welfare/court systems engage with children and teens when they are called to the scene for domestic violence allegation, what do you wish would be changed?

2. If you could talk to the police officers or the child welfare staff you interacted with while you were growing up, what do you wish you could tell them about you and your family?

3. What advice would you give to other young adults who might have similar experiences to you? *Probe for advice for young adults with specific identifiers relevant to participant (e.g., race, gender)*

Those are all of the questions I have for you. Is there anything else you want to share with me about you and your family's experiences?

Do you have any questions or concerns for me? If not right now, please know that you can email or call if any questions arise 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 gift card, and referral list.

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 Young Adults Life Experiences 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.

Appendix F: Resource List

Location	Organization or Agency	Services Provided	Contact Information
Universities and colleges	Student Counseling Services on campus	Provides individual, couples and group therapy, crisis intervention and psychiatry consultation (in-person and via telehealth). Can provide additional resources specific to domestic violence and emergency planning. This is a free service to students.	Google "(university/college name) student counseling services" for your school's counseling center contact information.
Knoxville, TN	Helen Ross McNabb Family Crisis Center	Provides 24-hour helpline, emergency shelter and transitional housing, outreach and counseling services, resources and support to assist victims of domestic violence.	https://mcnabbcenter.org/victim-services/#domestic-violence (865) 637-8000
Knoxville, TN.	Knoxville Family Justice Center	Provides 24-hour helpline, assistance with safety planning, accessing court/legal services, counseling, support groups, language interpretations, access to shelters and housing, childcare, and elder-care services.	https://fjcknoxville.com/ 865-521-6336
Knoxville, TN.	YWCA Knoxville & The Tennessee Valley	Provides 24-hour helpline, court/legal advocacy, developing safety plans, local service referrals, and support groups in English, Spanish, and Arabic to women who have experienced domestic violence and female family members.	Bilingual (English/Spanish) Advocates: (865) 523-6126 Multilingual (English/French/Arabic/Spanish) Advocates: (865) 523-6126 Culturally Specific Advocates are available for immigrant, refugee, Latina, and African American populations: (865) 523-6126
East Tennessee (outside of Knoxville)	Frontier Health SAFE House	Provides 24-hour helpline, shelter and transitional housing for women and children, advocacy to victims of domestic violence or sexual assault, 24/7 coordination with sexual assault nurse examiners, 24/7 sexual assault advocacy on call to accompany victims to area hospitals, case management, assistance with safety planning and orders of protection, and transportation.	https://www.frontierhealth.org/directory/frontier-health-safe-house/ 844-578-7233
Middle Tennessee	Women are Safe, Inc.	Provides 24-hour helpline, shelter, court/legal advocacy, advocacy for children, support groups, safety planning, and community education to victims of domestic violence and their children.	https://www.womenaresafe.org 1-800-470-1117
Middle Tennessee	Morning Star Sanctuary (faith-based services)	Provides a crisis line, court advocacy, support groups, mentoring groups, emergency shelter, counseling services, and aids in receiving permanent and temporary orders of	https://morningstarsanctuary.com (615) 860-0003

		protection to families and children experiencing domestic violence.	
West Tennessee	YWCA Memphis	Provides 24-hour helpline, court/legal advocacy, developing safety plans, local service referrals, and support groups to women who have experienced domestic violence and female family members.	https://www.memphisywca.org/what-we-do/domestic-violence-shelter-and-services/ 1-901-725-4277
West Tennessee	Family Safety Center	Provides crisis hotline, safety planning, support groups, and assistance with TN Safe at Home Confidentiality Program (program to keep addresses private and off of public record for safety of victims of domestic violence and their children).	https://familysafetycenter.org (901) 800-6064
(State) Tennessee	Tennessee Coalition Against Domestic Violence	Does not provide direct services but does provide a map and directory of domestic violence organizations in Tennessee.	https://www.tncoalition.org/
National	National Child Abuse Hotline	Crisis counselors available 24/7	1-800-422-4453 www.childhelp.org
National	National Domestic Violence Hotline	A 24-hour crisis/referral line that connects you with resources in your own community.	1-800-799-(7233) SAFE www.ndvh.org

VITA

Amie Kahovec grew up in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois with her six siblings. She received her Bachelor of Science in 2018 from Northern Illinois University, double majoring in Human Development and Family Science, and Rehabilitation and Disability Services, with a minor in psychology. Amie then went on to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) to obtain her Master of Science in Child and Family Studies (CFS) in August of 2020. She continued on through the doctoral program in the CFS Department. Working closely with Dr. Megan Haselschwerdt, Amie continued to develop as a qualitative, critical researcher examining youth exposed to domestic violence (CEDV) and their help-seeking decisions and experiences. Amie also taught undergraduate courses and won a prestigious award, the Jessie Bernard Outstanding Research Proposal from a Feminist Perspective Award through the National Council on Family Relations, to fund her dissertation project. Upon graduating, Amie hopes to secure a position at a research institute to continue contributing to the field.