

**Intimate Partner Violence among African American Women: A Qualitative Study of Their  
Recognition of Abuse and Their Help-seeking Attitude**

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### **Abstract**

Intimate Partner Violence has been considered the most persistent human right violation worldwide in which its effect is prominent in women. The health consequences of intimate partner violence are extensive having both physical and psychological effects on victims especially in African American women whose percentage is higher than other ethnic groups despite their willingness to report cases of abuse. Presently, a high percentage of African American women lose their lives to domestic violence at the verge of leaving their relationships depicts their perseverance or delayed report. Therefore, understanding their help-seeking attitude will enhance further studies on their needs. The participants will be 6 African American women in District of Columbia, U.S. Their needs will be measured based on their willingness to stay in help-seeking programs. Hypothetical vignettes will be used in this study to investigate the recognition of IPV and attitudes toward seeking help. In addition, the study will examine the effects of socio-economic status, employment, income level and children on their length of stay in domestic violence institute. The propositions in this study are that the participants will be more likely to perceive physical and sexual violence as abuse than emotional and verbal violence, participants will indicate that they would be more likely to seek help from informal helpers than formal sources, regardless of the type of Intimate Partner Violence. It was also proposed that Socio-economic factors such as employment, income level and children are significant predictors of length of stay in domestic violence institute. The present study is using a qualitative method approach to investigate African American women's recognition of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), and their attitudes toward seeking help from informal sources (family and friends), formal sources (counseling services, domestic violence services, and criminal justice services). The data analysis will be a qualitative three level coding strategy to analyze and evaluate a mix of predetermined and emergent data. The analysis of participant's data generated responses that were grouped into themes and evaluated for correlation and to obtain the essence of the phenomena. African American women identify physical and sexual abuse more than emotional and verbal abuse and are aware of all types of help. However, they are willing to seek informal help on less severe cases of abuse. It was suggested that service providers should create more awareness on verbal and emotional abuse and that administrators should identify barriers women encounter and seek necessary solutions.

*Keywords:* African American Women, intimate partner violence, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Socio-economic status, Empowerment program.

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## Table of Contents

	Page
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Statement of the Problem .....	8
Objective .....	8
Research Questions .....	8
<i>Research question one</i> .....	9
<i>Research question two a</i> .....	9
<i>Research question two b</i> .....	9
<i>Research question three</i> .....	9
Design .....	9
Participants.....	9
Assumptions and Limitations .....	10
<b>Theory.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<i>Basic/ Psychological needs</i> .....	13
<i>Security Needs</i> .....	13
<i>Belongingness</i> .....	13
<i>Esteem Needs</i> .....	13
<i>Self-actualizing Needs</i> .....	14
Barriers to Seeking Help .....	15
Delayed Disclosure of IPV .....	16
Theoretical Construct.....	17
<i>Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of Needs</i> .....	17
<i>Barriers to Seeking Help</i> .....	17
<i>Delayed Disclosure of IPV</i> .....	17
<b>Analysis .....</b>	<b>19</b>
Analysis Strategy .....	20
<i>Scenarios for analysis</i> .....	21
Participants.....	23
Data Analysis and Coding.....	24
<i>Descriptive Coding</i> .....	24
<i>Phenomenological reduction and thematic coding</i> .....	28
<i>Triangulation</i> .....	32

<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>34</b>
Research Questions .....	35
<i>Research question one</i> .....	35
<i>Research question two</i> .....	35
<i>Research question three</i> .....	36
Conclusions.....	37
Recommendations.....	38
<i>Implications</i> .....	39
Summary .....	39
<b>References .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>45</b>
Appendix A: Recruitment Letter.....	45
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form .....	46
Appendix C: Questionnaire .....	48
Appendix D: Debriefing form: .....	52

### List of Tables

	Page
Table 3. <i>Participant 3 descriptive coding</i> .....	26
Table 4. <i>Participant 4 descriptive coding</i> .....	26
Table 5. <i>Participant 5 descriptive coding</i> .....	27
Table 6. <i>Participant 6 descriptive coding</i> .....	27
Table 7. <i>Theme coding - perception of the help -1</i> .....	29
Table 8. <i>Theme coding - perception of the help -2</i> .....	29
Table 9. <i>Theme coding - perception of the help -3</i> .....	29
Table 10. <i>Theme coding - abuse is/are more recognized</i> .....	30
Table 11. <i>Theme coding - factors/ barriers</i> .....	30
Table 12. <i>Theme coding - recommendations</i> .....	31

### List of Figures

	Page
<i>Figure 1. Maslow's needs model. Source (Chapman, 2009-2012)</i> .....	14
<i>Figure 2. The theoretical model for delayed disclosure of IPV among African American women</i> .....	18

## Introduction

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual, emotional or psychological harm as well as controlling behaviors. Over 12 million people are victims of Intimate Partner Violence yearly. IPV has been considered the most persistent human right violation worldwide in which its effect is prominent in women (Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottmoeller, 2002). The percentage of distribution being 77% for females between the ages of 18 and 24 years, 76% for females of age 25 to 34 years and 81% of females of age 35 to 49. In America, African American women experience intimate partner violence at rates higher than other ethnic groups accounting for a disproportionate number of homicides (Caetano, Nelson, & Cunradi, 2005). According to Bureau of Justice (2001), they experience intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than that of Caucasian females, and about 2.5 times the rate of women of other ethnicities.

African American Women accounted for 22% of the intimate partner homicide victims and 29% of all female victims of intimate partner homicide (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005). These set of individuals were stated to be less likely than white women to use social services, battered women's programs, or go to the hospital because of domestic violence (Bureau of Justice, 2001). While some argued that African American women report intimate partner violence than other ethnic groups but usually in a life threatening state (Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994). However, the proportional increase in rate of intimate partner violence report and homicide victims in these group when compared to women of other ethnicities is an indication that they are compelled to satisfy a higher level of need (survival) when the lower one (physiological) is yet to be met. In addition, research indicates that demographic influence such as socio-economic status, children and others can be a contributing factor for the high rate of violence in African American women (Humphrey & Thiara, 2003) and the inability of self-reported victims to sustain needs makes them return to their abusive partners (Martison, 2001). Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory will be adopted in this research to confirm if meeting women's need is a key factor to eradicating IPV. This theory postulates that humans' motivation are needs oriented and once met, the motivation for such need reduces (Maslow, 1943). In this context, these needs will be analyzed from the experiences of self-reported individuals in empowerment programs. Therefore, this study's findings can be used to deduce the attitude behind silent victims and be used to find out if self-reported victims needs are met in the course of the program and its longevity. The needs will be measured through the barriers that might hinder these women from staying long in the programs.

This will also attract researchers to concentrate studies on these group of women, assist Clinicians discover factors facilitating or impeding seeking help or counseling as such information could be used for recruiting and working on more effective recruiting strategies and foster more

effective strategies. Also this will help domestic violence centers understand areas on which to work in improving the programs set aside for affected victims.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The health consequences of intimate partner violence are extensive having both physical and psychological effects on victims especially in African American women whose percentage is higher than other ethnic groups despite their willingness to report cases of abuse. This abuse usually have an adverse effect on the mental well-being of the abused victims making them more susceptible to mental illness and deaths than those without episodes of it (Lee, Sanders-Thompson, & Mechanic, 2002). Research on IPV in this ethnicity has been under-examined (Coley & Beckett, 1988; Gary, Campbell & Serlin, 1998; Koss, et al., 1994). In the early years, studies found that not all cases of domestic violence are being reported but African American women are more likely to report violence to police than other ethnic groups (Sullivan & Rumpitz, 1994). However, a high percentage of African American women lose their lives to domestic violence at the verge of leaving their relationships (Bell & Mattis, 2000). This depicts their perseverance or silence all along. Another study suggested that the increasing rate of violence in this group is as a result of underreporting violence or delaying report due to some underlying barriers which are believed to be revolved round the basic needs (Martison, 2001).

### **Objective**

In this study, the investigation is centered on discovering the basis of underreporting IPV by analyzing factors surrounding African American Women's report of IPV. Their perception of IPV, recognition of abuse types and their help-seeking attitude in Intimate Partner Violence was examined. Understanding the help-seeking attitudes in African American women is complex, but will inform future studies on the needs of victims. A comprehensive study of the recognition of domestic violence, their help seeking attitude and their unique ways of enduring IPV through empirical analysis will be undertaken in the research.

### **Research Questions**

The theory and research questions used in this study was informed by a particular limitation in past studies. This was the inappropriate comparisons of African American women to the Caucasian women (Campbell, et al., 2000) and lack of examination of contextual variables increases African American women's vulnerability to intimate partner violence and subsequent consequences. As a result, knowledge on help-seeking attitudes for IPV is limited in this population. It is therefore imperative to determine the knowledge of IPV in self-reported African American women in United States considering the following: 1) The Participant's understanding/recognition of domestic violence acts (sexual,



physical, verbal and emotional abuse). 2) Participants knowledge of formal services (counselling services, domestic violence services and criminal justice services i.e. police and legal services) on domestic violence in the community and willingness to seek help i.e. either formal or informal (family and friends) services. 3) Barriers in accessing these services and supports (effects of culture, religion, stigma and on help seeking intent). Self-reported victims were used in this study to equip and improve programs slated by service providers to eradicate vulnerability and subsequent consequences in abused victims and those at risk of abuse.

### **Research question one**

What act of domestic violence is more recognized by African American women?

Participants will be more likely to recognize vignettes depicting physical and sexual violence as an act of abuse than emotional and verbal violence vignettes.

### **Research question two a**

What type of help for domestic violence are African American women aware of?

### **Research question two b**

What type of help are African American women more likely to seek?

African American women are aware of formal services. African American women are more willing to seek informal help than formal ones.

### **Research question three**

What factors hinder African American women from reporting domestic violence?

African American women attributes of low socioeconomic conditions (income) and fear are more a barrier to assessing services and help seeking intent than religious belief.

## **Design**

Each participant was asked to fill out a questionnaire containing demographic details and vignettes. The information required in the demographic section are age, marital status, number of children, employment and income level while the vignettes will comprise of four scenarios portraying physical, emotional, sexual, and verbal abusive behaviors. Participants were asked to answer questions based on their understanding of each scenario and asked to place themselves in each and write short notes on what will be done. There will be an interactive section on the questionnaires answered afterwards. The information obtained from this section was audio taped and short notes were taken by me to ensure pseudonyms used for each participant aligns with their speech. The reason

an oral and written approach was adopted in this research was to give enough room for the participants to express their feelings and thoughts. Some participants might feel safer putting some information in writing rather than discussing it, especially since their identity will not be disclosed and some more comfortable discussing and sharing their views with others. Providing several opportunities allowed victims more time and opportunity to think about their answers, recall events, and at times build up trust to speak with the interviewer. The duration of the interview was a maximum of one hour, to prevent participants from becoming weary. The information from this study will be safely kept in a safe with lock and keys where no one aside myself and my supervisor can have access to. This information will be specifically used for this research project.

### **Participants**

This study targets a focus group of 6 African American Women that are victims of intimate partner violence. These participants are expected to be residents of United States of at least 18 years and be able to identify themselves as African Americans. The target group was chosen because women belonging to this ethnicity have a high percentage of reported cases of intimate partner violence, and homicides compared to other groups (Callie & Sarah, 2000; 2001). The age limit chosen due to a high susceptibility to domestic violence at this age (Callie & Sarah, 2000). Participants were recruited from empowerment programs in domestic violence Institutes in District of Columbia, which was chosen based on the high amount of empowerment centers and population of African American families in the city (United States Census Bureau, 2007). Domestic violence Institutes situated in DC were visited to notify counselors of my intention to investigate help seeking attitudes of the proposed population.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

It is imperative to note that this study focus on help-seeking attitudes, not actual help-seeking behaviors in self-reported victims. As such, there might be differed opinions between these groups and the unreported victims. However, help-seeking attitudes have been cited as a significant predictor of actual help-seeking behaviors. In addition, given the use of hypothetical vignettes to portray IPV, some participants may have adopted a distancing stance (e.g., "It would never happen to me"). Despite these limitations, the rationale for using qualitative approach is to gain a full details of events, and also (a) reduce problems related to construct validity (e.g., terms such as domestic violence and intimate partner violence might not have the same meanings across cultures), (b) alleviate potential participant discomfort in disclosing personal experiences, and (c) explore the general attitudes and beliefs about sensitive topics that participants might otherwise find difficult to discuss in other types of study ( Finch, 1987). Also, considering the sensitivity and the potential risk the participants and

researcher may encounter in the course of the research it will be difficult sampling participants outside domestic violence settings for maximum comfort and confidentiality.

## **Theory**

Society's lack of understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence is one of the greatest obstacle victims' face. Studies reviewed in this chapter suggests that demographic influence such as socio-economic status, children and a host of others could be a contributing factor for prolonged report of domestic violence by African American women and also that they report domestic violence in a life threatening state (Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994). This implies they might be constrained to satisfy a higher level of need (Survival) in Maslow's model before a lower one (Basic needs). This conveys the importance of survival and safety to women in domestic violence. Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of needs states that humans are motivated by unsatisfied needs and once these needs are met the motivation for them reduces (Maslow, 1943). Maslow was able to group needs into five different groups (i.e Basic needs, Survival or Safety needs, Social needs, Esteem Needs, Self-actualization) in the stated order based on human drive (Maslow, 1943). Since these needs are measurable and with fewer variables, it will be related to the barriers that could hinder these group of women from reporting IPV timely.

This chapter will be a focused study on how these needs relate to women encountering Intimate Partner Violence. This chapter is a review of the theory that will be adopted in this study and how each construct relates to factors hindering African American women's report.

### **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

This is a theory of motivation proposed by a well-known psychologist Abraham Maslow in 1943. The Hierarchy of Needs involve the pattern of human motivation by which an individual move through, from the most basic and fundamental drive up to the secondary needs at the top level. African American women are more liable not to report domestic violence or seek support once these needs are not met e.g low socio-economic status (Humphrey & Thiara, 2003). However, they are forced to do so at a life threatening stage (Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994). Could the prolonged report of domestic violence in African American women be as a result of their needs not been met? How does Maslow's theory of hierarchy apply to African American women's prolonged report of domestic violence? The theory further emphasized that while the hierarchy of needs seems to be a simple going-up-the-ladder concept, circumstances might make an individual get motivated to satisfy the needs on the upper layers of the hierarchy before those on the lower layers. This can be linked to African American Women prolonged delay to report Violence. There are five different levels in Maslow's hierarchy of needs:

### **Basic/ Psychological needs**

These include the most basic needs that are vital to survival, such as the need for water, air, food, shelter and sleep. Maslow (1943) believed that these needs are the most basic and instinctive needs in the hierarchy because all needs become secondary until these physiological needs are met. This can be applied to IPV victims especially those in socio-economically deprived situations; women are more vulnerable to staying in a violent relationship just to obtain their basic needs (Martison, 2001).

### **Security Needs**

These include the needs for safety and security. Security needs are important for survival, but they are not as demanding as the physiological needs. Examples of security needs include a desire for steady employment, health care, safe neighborhood and shelter from the environment. A woman's inaction may in fact be the result of a calculated assessment about how to protect herself and her children (Maslow, 1943). Their perceived passive response might be a strategy to ensure their safety and that of their offspring (Heise et al., 1999). Also, studies stated that women experience higher fear than men when they experience domestic violence owing to the fact that women are more injured in domestic violence (Barnett, Lee & Thelen, 1997) which may also be attributed to their fear of reporting violence to avert reoccurrence of such.

### **Belongingness**

These include needs for belonging, love, and affection. Maslow described these needs as less basic than physiological and security needs. Relationships such as friendships, romantic attachments and families help fulfill this need for companionship and acceptance, as involvement in social, community, or religious groups (Maslow, 1943). The silence of African American women can further be emancipated by a colorblind approach research, which confirmed the disproportionate treatment of women of colors (Bograd, 1999). African American women's response to violence and abusive behavior may be influenced by their chronic experiences of racism, and the social contexts in which they live. African American women's level of accessibility or understanding of community program, shelter provision and justice system compared to other races might be an additional reason for their reluctance to seek **formal** services (Humphreys & Thiara, 2003).

### **Esteem Needs**

After the first three needs have been satisfied, esteem needs become increasingly important. These include the need for things that reflect on self-esteem, personal worth, social recognition, and accomplishment. Although, self-esteem alone cannot combat domestic violence (Maslow, 1943). However, a woman with high self-esteem can be affected by domestic violence but a woman with

better self-image will be more empowered to leave an abusive relationship. African American women striving to be self-reliant after an episode of abuse may overcome IPV once these needs are met (Eleanor & Jill, 2011).

### **Self-actualizing Needs**

This is the highest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Self-actualizing people are self-aware, concerned with personal growth, less concerned with the opinions of others, and interested fulfilling their potential. This stage depicts the full recovery from domestic violence. Here, victims become self-dependent and self-actualized. This can only be achieved once all other level of needs have been satisfied (Maslow, 1943).

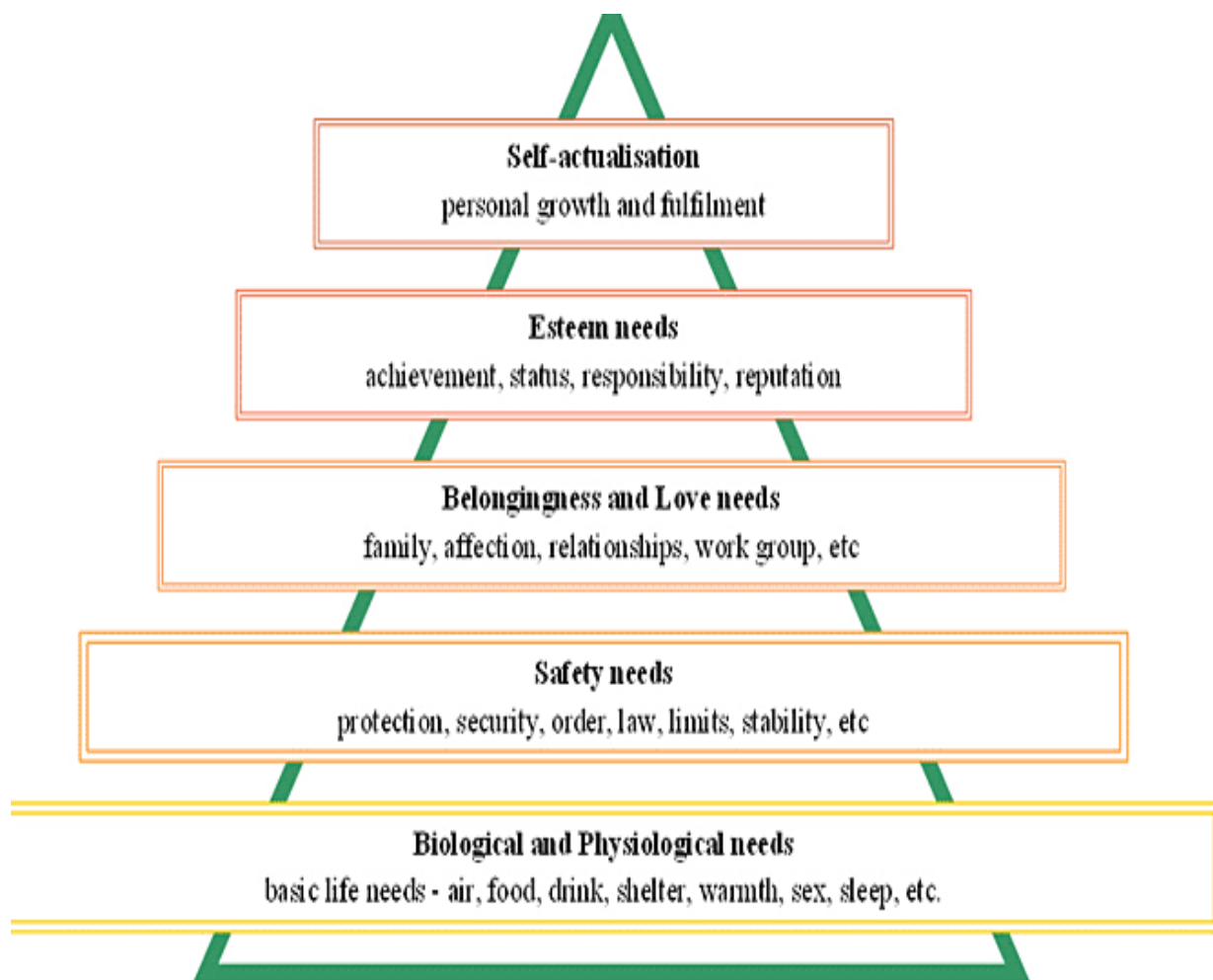


Figure 1. Maslow's needs model. Source (Chapman, 2009-2012).

### **Barriers to Seeking Help**

Domestic Violence was previously addressed and perceived as minority issues where victims were portrayed as women of color (Martinson, 2001; Weis, 2001; Bograd, 1999). According to Lee, Sanders, Thompson and Mechanic (2002), there is a minimal difference in reported experiences of victims of domestic violence especially between white and African American Women. However, these perceived differences have been attributed to how each case was treated and resources availability. African American women's response to violence and abusive behavior may be influenced by the chronic experiences of racism, and the social contexts in which they live (Lee et al., 2002). Blacks having a high sensitivity towards unfair treatment will definitely put racial issues ahead of sex based ones. In several situations have therapists been found putting racial differences ahead of treatment, Caucasian women are given audience and preferential treatments compared to other races (Bograd, 1999). This evolves into a poor relationship between African American women and service providers resulting in their reduced level of accessibility, understanding of community program, shelter provision and mistrust of justice system (Humphreys & Thiara, 2003).

In Addition, African American women are more likely to report domestic violence to police than other races but this is mostly at life threatening states in the relationship (Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994). Their reluctance to report to the police at an early stage of violence in the relationship was overlooked in this study; it might also be due to previous racist or other negative experiences. The notion of how policemen handle cases of violence among the Whites and African Americans in an uneven way gives them the perception reporting will cause more harm than good to their partners. African American women dread finding themselves secluded from their community for reporting abuse as they are seen as contributors to criminalization of African-American men (Martinson, 2001).

Many African American Women living below the poverty level are sole providers of the house and might also have many children in their care. Therefore, a considerable amount of attention should be given to these women. Economic status is another major constraint African American Women face in reporting violence. Low socioeconomic African American women were significantly more likely to suffer emotionally and materially for several months after separation from the abuser. Economic instability might be a reason an abused victim deliberates staying or leaving an abusive relationship (Humphrey & Thiara, 2003). African American women who are unable to sustain themselves and/or their children prefer not to report, delay reporting, or return to abuser (Martison, 2001).

Fear is another barrier abused victim encounter in reporting violence. Most abused women are not sure of service provider's confidentiality. Abused women are mainly concerned with the adverse effect of their information been divulged to the public (Rodriquez, Bauer, Flores-Ortiz & Szkupinski-

Quiroga, 1998), this can result into further violence by the abuser. Also, fear of their stories not been believed by service providers and relatives can as well make domestic violence victims refrain from disclosure.

Statistically, African American women make up 70% of black congregation (White, 1985). Their religious beliefs on the doctrines of forgiveness and fear of rejection from the church may also contribute to their stay in the abusive relationship.

### **Delayed Disclosure of IPV**

The above stated barriers could be linked to a delayed disclosure of IPV. However, delayed Disclosure could also emanate from a stage in cycle through which Intimate Partner Violence occurs. Women vulnerability and resilient nature is an additional reason they are being seduced by their partner after an episode of violence. Walker (1979) classified the stages in which domestic violence tends to occur in three stages: tension building, violence, and seduction, which occur in a cyclic pattern as victims report IPV. *Tension building* is a shift in partner's communication from mutual to compromising or indirectly expressed in some cases through actions. *Violence* is the peak of withheld anger and in this situation the partner finds it difficult to contain their anger anymore, taking it out on the victim. The abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse, which ironically both parties feel a sense of relief once tension has been released. In few cases, has the abusive partner seen the act as uncalled for, and sought corrective measures such as getting marriage counselors to help break the cycle of repeated occurrence (Walker, 1979). In most cases, IPV is usually accompanied by *seduction*, which is the remorseful attitude of the abuser and acts to win the victim's heart back. This change in behavior is believed by the abused partner and enables the reoccurrence of violence.

There is an additional reason African women are reluctant to seek mental services. African American women's perception of the need to be strong and persevering under stress could also be one of the reasons they avoid mental services (Bell & Mattis, 2000). Their ability to manage pain makes it easy to ignore or neglect it. However, the consequences of delayed report outweighs its advantage. The stress combined with the stigma abused women face both culturally and in society can impair their mental health (Lee *et al.*, 2002). Although United States Legislators now address the discriminatory concerns of domestic violence among minorities, little has been said concerning the needs of these victims (Bograd, 1999). This is a major aspect of this study.

### **Theoretical Construct**

In this section, I describe the theoretical construct she will use to investigate the research hypothesis, and creates a theoretical framework to show the link between the construct for delayed report of IPV in African American women.



### **Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of Needs**

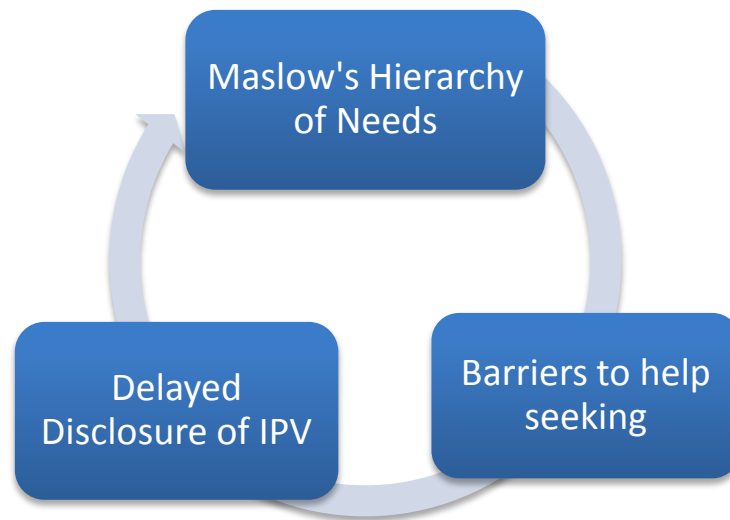
This theory outlined the order of human's needs from the most basic to secondary. Maslow (1943) analyzed the optimistic potential of humans in reaching a level of self-actualization. This optimistic potential is driven by the motivation to satisfy needs classified in the model and until these needs are met the motivation increases. These needs are in correlation with the above stated barriers hindering timely report of intimate partner violence in abused victims. Maslow believed self-actualized individuals have better insight for realities, self-acceptance, independence and environmental awareness (Maslow, 1943).

### **Barriers to Seeking Help**

Barriers are natural or man-made obstacles preventing the accomplishment or actualization of goals. In psychology, barriers in communication can be emotional, behavioral or general mental obstacles observed in individuals. These barriers prevent progress or growth of an ultimate objective (Karen, 2016). Therefore, barrier in this context are obstacles hindering seeking assistance from others to satisfy needs. The inability to overcome these barriers due to unsatisfied needs can delay help-seeking. Humans have a positive potential towards self-actualization and shows a high amount of optimism in achieving these needs (Maslow, 1943).

### **Delayed Disclosure of IPV**

Delayed disclosure Of IPV are withheld facts or secret information about an abusive relationship by the abused victim. Women found in this situation often do not disclose these facts timely due to both known and unknown fear of the outcome (Rodriquez *et al.*, 1998). Also, some are captivated by the remorseful attitude of the abusive partner at the seduction stage of IPV (Walker, 1979). These withheld secrets prevent overcoming barriers and achieving needs. Intimate partner violence disclosure in this study revolves round these interrelated constructs. An oversight of any of these constructs could lead to abused victims holding back life threatening information and as well prevent them from achieving certain objectives (Martison, 2001).



*Figure 2.* The theoretical model for delayed disclosure of IPV among African American women.

## Analysis

In this chapter, I describe the approach and analytic strategy used in this study to examine the applicability of Maslow's hierarchy of needs on the types of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). A phenomenological approach was chosen in this study based on the framework of the existentialist philosopher, Merleau-Ponty (1999), who sought to understand human being in its universal structure and at the same time in its concrete experience of living. The body was one of the most important themes in his philosophy, the direct experience of the body in the lived world, beneath the concepts, understood as the only one capable of giving meaning and significance. That is from the body, every experience and all knowledge of the world are possible by means of perception. This phenomenon reveals a woman as a being in the world, victimized by domestic violence with numerous existential meanings, which are made explicit in each perspective of the experience and the perception of the abused woman. Thus, the abuse is expressed by the visible, by what is learned with the eyes and through the senses (Merleau-Ponty, 1999).

Through phenomenology one studies the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity. This approach has a long history in several social research disciplines including psychology, sociology and social work. It emphasizes a focus on people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world. Thereby, giving an understanding of how the world appears to others.

To obtain a basic underlying structure and meanings of the experiences I used hypothetical vignettes to obtain perceptions of women about the four types of IPV focused on in this research. According to WHO (1999), researching violence against women is one of the most sensitive research. The vignettes were used in this study to avert most of the barriers encountered in obtaining information from the participants through direct question interview and other qualitative approaches. Vignettes are short scenarios in written or pictorial form, intended to elicit responses to typical scenarios (Hill, 1997) and is used in psychological and sociological experiments to present hypothetical situations, to which research participants respond thereby revealing their perceptions, values, social norms or impressions of events (Heise, 2010). The vignettes used in this study comprised of four scenarios on the IPV focused on in this study, which are physical, sexual, emotional and verbal. In phenomenology, this is called *epoche* a Greek word meaning refraining from judgment (Merriam, 2009). The perception of the participant is the primary method of data collection in this study. The participants were asked to express their understanding and views on different scenarios in written and discussions.

The study setting was a domestic violence Institute in Washington, DC. The study subjects voluntarily participated in the study, and signed an Informed Consent Form. An interview was the primary instrument for data collection. Initial questions were asked regarding socio-demographic conditions, followed by the guiding questions: "Tell me about your perception on the stated scenarios of victims of domestic violence", "Tell me how you feel it could be better handled by placing yourself in each scenario" also, "Tell me what help you would have sought and "what factors could hinder those". In phenomenological research, the interview is used to explore experiences, narrated in depth, in order to understand the phenomenon being studied (van Manen, 1990). The synthesis of reality enabled revealing the fact lived by the experience narrated in the perception of victims of domestic violence. The interviews were scheduled in advance through flyers distribution, performed at the center, recorded with permission from the victims, and lasted an average of 60 minutes. The study was formally presented using ethical guidelines. The study participants were informed about the purpose of the study, its confidentiality, and that they could cease to participate at any time without detriment.

The participants of this study were six women who had been victims of domestic violence at some point in their life. These women were guaranteed confidentiality of information and anonymity by being identified with the letter "A" followed by the sequential number of the interview. The number of participants was considered adequate since there was a recurrence of information, while considering unique information taken into account in the search for the essence of the phenomenon in each of the interviews, conferring data saturation (Fontanella, Luchesi, Saidel, Ricas, Turato & Melo, 2011).

### **Analysis Strategy**

In this section, I describe a stepwise procedure that will be adopted in the analysis of data obtained from the study. Following the interview section, data obtained from the interview transcript will be analyzed by the researcher in an enclosed area to enhance maximum privacy. The data analysis will be a mix of predetermined and emergent coding scheme data. The key constructs used to develop the questions such as Abuse recognition, Stigma, Religion, Income, Children, Help recognition and perception with the addition of emergent codes obtained from the study will be used for the data interpretation.

The three steps of phenomenological analysis; description, reduction and phenomenological understanding will be adopted respectively. Assessing patterns of IPV among participants in this study involves a three step process. The first step of data analysis is the *description*. This is the exposure of the lived phenomenon through language, and takes the form of a text waiting for analysis, interpretation and understanding (Merleau-Ponty, 1999). This is to bring out the structure of the

experience being studied. Prior to the description, the interview section was read to become acquainted with the lived experience of the participants.

The second step is *reduction*. This is when the essential parts of the description of the subject studied are selected by means of imaginative variation. The researcher imagines each part of the description as being present or absent in the experience, until it is reduced to the essentials for the existence of the conscious experience. The reduction aims to determine and select parts of the description considered essential (Merleau-Ponty, 1999)

The *phenomenological understanding* is the third step of analytic strategy that will be adopted. This occurs simultaneously to interpretation. It is the moment that aims to obtain the essential meaning in the description and reduction. The researcher assumes the result of the reduction as a set of units of meaning that are shown to be important, pointing also to the subject's experience, to the consciousness that the subject has of the phenomenon (Merleau-Ponty, 1999). The findings from these data will be compared to the hypothesis generated for this study and to generate an inference made on the study for peer review.

### **Scenarios for analysis**

The six participants were asked to share their perceptions, type of help to seek, and possible outcome on the following scenarios as proxies to discussing their own personal experiences, which might be less threatening, and safer:

#### ***Physical abuse***

Ana, a full house wife with three children is a victim of physical abuse. "Alex has always been a sweet man and showed no signs of brutality from the onset of our relationship, he used to be very quiet and caring until he recently lost his job. Episode of trivial arguments now emanate into a physical attack in which most times I get hit with objects he could lay his hands on or his fist. Been brought up in a spiritual home where divorce is seriously frowned at, I couldn't take any step further than to seek advice from my relatives who have always encouraged me to pray and persevere. However, my silence seem to be fueling Alex anger and unveiling the devil in him. Recently, I had this scar, (points to the dark spot close to her right eyes) from a recent argument we had. He won't even acknowledge the presence of the kids (she bursts in tears). I really love him and I hope my prayers and patience will change his heart."

#### ***Verbal abuse***

Grace is a college graduate recently moved into a rented apartment with her spouse. "Alfred's high regards for women and enduring attitude got me attracted to him," she said. "He is neat to a fault,

however I am on the average when it comes to neatness. This has always been the bone of contention between us. We lived together for 1 year, ironing out differences that usually doesn't last the day. Few months back, I noticed the usual complaints on things being wrong has grown into altercations which involves insulting my upbringing and hurtful statements that brings back hurt when recalled. Although, he has never made any attempt of attack but been raised by a single parent where my dad physically abused my mum before they divorced, I won't allow a repeat of such. Had to call the corps on him one faithful night at the middle of a hot argument. No man can dictate my life to me, especially when we haven't been legally bonded."

### ***Sexual abuse***

"Sex has always been an enjoyable moment for us till I lost the urge after the birth of our first child. I can go two weeks without the thought of it but considering my partners crave for it we agreed on twice a week. However, my mate is not satisfied, he recently threatened to leave the relationship since I wasn't meeting up with his sexual desires. Austin has never failed in delivering his responsibilities as a man, even though we are yet to make our vows. On many occasions, I forcefully had to give in to his sexual desires. Although I sought medical assistance on my disinterest but was told to give it time. I feel excruciating pain whenever I mate with my partner accompanied with an unpleasant feeling of being lured. I really want to keep my relationship but my wellbeing matters, most importantly we have a child together. I don't want my child growing up without his father. I am really confused!!!"

### ***Emotional abuse***

Mary, a senior manager of a top Organization was a victim of emotional abuse. This had been ongoing for the past few years coupled with stress from work. Although her colleagues at work noticed instances of her attention drifting from work and her lack of enthusiasm to go home after a long day at work. Even though she was a senior manager that can delegate duties, she's always the last to leave office. Her secretary also stated instances when she get startled by sudden noises and instances of phone conversations with her supposed spouse which usually doesn't end well. She seem withdrawn from people, overly aggressive but dedicated to work. She recalled being given a nickname of 'Obsessive Compulsive Disorder' (OCD) because she was extra careful on how things are done even outside office work. Her secretary found her cold body on a Monday afternoon in her room after all effort to revive her was futile. "My boss wasn't looking too bright on Friday, would have asked but I overheard her exchanging words with her spouse on the phone earlier that afternoon and cancelled our earlier scheduled meeting". My boss must have died in her sleep the secretary stuttered.

## Participants

In this section, I offer a synopsis or brief bio of each participant to show their eligibility as participants and to present them as more fully human.

**A1** is an African American woman of 25-34 years of age who has been involved in an abusive relationship in the past 2 years. She works at a grocery store. She experienced all types of violence, which made her believe abuse was a normal encounter in intimate relationships until she voiced out. She also stated that reporting and seeking formal help has been helpful and has built her self-esteem to a level she never expected. She hopes to gain full independence once she is able to gather some money and stability.

**A2** is an African American woman of 25-34 years of age and is currently employed in an organization. She is also a victim of an abusive relationship. She is new to the institute. Her partner whom she had spent 10 years with became physically abusive when she got pregnant. She believed every situation could be changed but had to seek help when the battering would not stop. From her responses to the questions especially the one related to her experience, it is apparent she is still aggrieved and yet to recover from the incident. She hopes to stay in the institute until she regains her strength, gets a job and a permanent home.

**A3** is an African American woman of 25-34 years of age and currently working at a store. She discovered her partner was a controlling man few months after moving in with him. According to her, she felt her love and endurance could save the relationship. This made her return to her abuser and back to the center a few months after. She also endured because she did not want her partner to be convicted but had to leave when her life was at stake. She has learned a lot from the institute, and is willing to start a new life outside the institute once she gets an apartment of her own.

**A4** is an African American woman of 35-44 years of age. She is not working at the moment, but hopes to start in few months. She is a victim of both emotional and physical abuse. According to her, her constant hunt for knowledge and truth made her a victim of IPV. She had a controlling partner who is against seeking knowledge outside what he tells her. She stated that people and circumstances around them were reasons for her delayed report. She hopes to leave the institute once she gets a good job and an apartment that guarantees her safety. She is also willing to further her education.

**A5** is an African American woman of 25-34 years of age and is newly employed at a store. Her partner physically, mentally, and emotionally abused her. She endured violence to allow her children enjoy a happy upbringing their father lacked. Her partner had a rough background and as a result became insecure. This lasted for five years with a restraint on going out with her kids and failure of her

plans to leave until recently. She hopes to leave once she gains her independence and a safe apartment that does not bring back her anxiety.

**A6** is an African American woman of 25-34 years of age, is a student, and works at a store. She had an obsessive partner. He was constantly monitoring her movement and physically abusive. She left the relationship when the sense of safety and security with her partner was lost. She believes speaking to people with the same experience helps relieve the emotional burden. She is saving up to leave the institute. She enjoys her freedom.

### **Data Analysis and Coding**

In this section, I discuss how I applied the stepwise procedure that was used to analyze data obtained from the interview section.

First, using data from interview transcripts, I used *descriptive analysis* to evaluate perceptions of participants on each scenario studied to generate patterns/ themes used in the second level of analysis. Second, to explore Intersections of participant's perceptions I re-examined these patterns to distinguish the recognition of abuse, help seeking perception and barriers encountered amongst participants using reduction and also categorized similar patterns that arose into thematic schemes to explore similarities and differences across each participant's experience using *thematic coding*. In the first two level of analysis, codes were generated. Third, the data obtained from the first two level of analysis was used to understand and interpret each phenomenon using *triangulation*. The comparison of deductions from each phenomenon was further carried out to generate the essence of the study.

### **Descriptive Coding**

Descriptive coding is a technique that generates themes or categories within each data set. Codes were applied to each data set to break down the description in to discrete parts so as to closely examine them and compare them for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Each scenario studied entails specific themes for couple's behavior. These are Physical, Verbal, Sexual, and Emotional Abuse. The responses of each participants on each scenario were read and the audio recordings listened to severally to fully discover their perception of scenarios with their experience. Their lived phenomenon was exposed through language interpretation and understanding. In this level, I described each participant's response to a scenario under a theme. The description includes a combination of data retrieved from the scenarios, taped experiences and field notes in the interview section. The descriptions were interpretation of participant's perceptions and not word for word transcriptions.



Table 1. *Participant 1 descriptive coding.*

Participant A1	Description	Coding
Physical Abuse	This is the most recognized type of abuse. The help sought by Ana might help save her relationship. If she can communicate with her partner and seek private counselling from religious leaders.	Recognition: "Abuse highly dangerous". Recommendation: Non-disclosure to relations, Compromise with partner, Secure stability.
Verbal Abuse	Grace is not enduring enough because her past experience has created a limit to her level of endurance .Couple should seek counselling if both parties are willing.	Perception: low endurance. Recommendation: "counselling"
Sexual Abuse	From her experience she believed seeking religious, psychological and sexual counselling by the woman will save their relationship. Being prayerful will enhance her partner's understanding of her feelings. Sexual abuse is dreadful	Recognition: "Dreadful" Recommendation: "counselling", "being prayerful".
Emotional Abuse	Mary's death was suicide. She should have sought advice relatives or close friends	Recommendation: "seek advice from close friends or relatives"

Table 2. *Participant 2 descriptive coding.*

Participant A2	Description	Coding
Physical Abuse	Talking to family members is not helpful since they won't support her leaving. Her advice is to talk things out with partner for the stability of the children and herself. Physical abuse is highly dangerous.	Recognition: "Abuse highly dangerous". Recommendation: "Non-disclosure to relations", "Compromise with partner", "Secure stability".
Verbal Abuse	Grace was not enduring enough. Although she is strong for fighting being continuously hurt but she should have stayed to see if things will turn around.	Perception: "Low endurance" Recommendation: "Persevere"
Sexual Abuse	She should have found another way to please him or it will emanate into physical violence.	Perception: sexual abuse emanate to other abuse Recommendation : "Compromise"
Emotional Abuse	Her death was due to fear, she should have left when she was not safe in the relationship anymore	Recommendation: "flee for safety"

Table 1. *Participant 3 descriptive coding.*

Participant A3	Description	Coding
Physical Abuse	She did not seek the right help. Prayer and perseverance is more effective at the start of a relationship. "We always have the feeling they will change". Although low income and high religious belief can be a barrier. She should leave if it continues. This is a prominent abuse.	Recognition: "Prominent abuse" Perception: "they will change", Barrier: "Low income", "religious belief" Recommendation: "leave if it continues".
Verbal Abuse	She didn't make the right decision, I would rather ask for space to rethink going back to the relationship.	Perception: Not a wise decision Recommendation: Separation
Sexual Abuse	This situation will emanate to physical and verbal abuse if not addressed. She should communicate with her partner and seek help.	Perception: "sexual abuse emanate to other abuse" Recommendation: Communication
Emotional Abuse	She died from work and relationship stress. She should have taken a vacation, rested and meet with new people.	Perception: "died from stress" Recommendation: Take time out

Table 2. *Participant 4 descriptive coding.*

Participant A4	Description	Coding
Physical Abuse	Ana's husband needs much more than prayers and patience. Family counselling is advised. Some abusive partners manipulate their wives with religious belief. Income and children can be used as a control measure to prevent the wife from leaving abusive relationship	Perception: Action taken not enough Barrier: "Low income", "religious belief", "children". Recommendation: counselling
Verbal Abuse	Grace was enduring enough, verbal abuse has a lasting effect compared to physical. "Wounds heal, feelings do not". Children could only be a major factor here but not religion and income.	Recognition: "Abuse with lasting effect" Perception: "enduring"
Sexual Abuse	The outcome could be good or otherwise. She might end up regaining her sexual desire and the relationship improve. Most men don't understand the hormonal changes in pregnant women.	Recommendation: Endure
Emotional Abuse	Mary's death could have been from her spouse. She could have survived the situation if people around her were supportive.	Recommendation: Get support.

Table 3. *Participant 5 descriptive coding.*

Participant A5	Description	Coding
Physical Abuse	I believe Ana took the right step seeking God's guidance is definitely helpful and would also advise seeking formal assistance such as the police. However, fear of abuser re-attacking could prevent one from reporting. Violence should not be allowed especially when children are involved. It is a life threatening.	Perception: Wise decision Recognition: "Life threatening" Barrier: fear Recommendation: Police
Verbal Abuse	Grace took the right step. I would have done the same. Abuse should not be tolerated, every woman should set their standards high.	Perception: "Made a wise decision" Recommendation: Abuse intolerance
Sexual Abuse	Sexual abuse is the dreadful experience one should not wish for. It makes the abused worthless. "I tried talking to my partner but it didn't work". She should end the relationship for her safety.	Recognition: "Dreadful" Recommendation: "End relationship"
Emotional Abuse	Emotional abuse could be more damaging than physical. She must have died due to stress. She should have left the relationship early enough.	Recognition: " More damaging than physical" Recommendation: Flee.

Table 4. *Participant 6 descriptive coding.*

Participant A6	Description	Coding
Physical Abuse	She needs to seek more types of help such as formal help such as meeting with a case worker. Speaking to people who can help out with situations like this or share same experience is advised.	Perception: Take more action Recommendation: "Formal help", "speak to people".
Verbal Abuse	Grace was not enduring enough she should have tried a different means of help seeking.	Perception: "Not Enduring" Recommendation: "Seek a different type of help"
Sexual Abuse	The abuse will continue because he is not going to change. Seeking counselling and therapy will help if talking to the partner about your feelings does not work.	Recognition: A continuous abuse. Perception: " He won't change" Recommendation: Compromise, counselling, therapy
Emotional Abuse	Her death was due to her inability to speak up. Speaking about it would have helped while working on leaving the relationship.	Perception: Silence kills. Recommendation: share problems

The phenomenological approach used was able to unveil unexpressed experiences with their abusive partner and relationships with others. The participants entwined in their statements violence experienced with the phenomena being studied. From the coding technique used, a precise description and correlation of ideas from the participants was observed. Most of the participants stated some barriers such as children, low income, religious belief, fear and stability hinders one from reporting violence but are forced to when the situation is overbearing. In addition, some suggested

compromising with their abusive partner (especially in the verbal and sexual abuse scenario) before making a decision on their safety.

Also, most of the participants knew the types of help to seek but would rather start from a trivial level by reporting to close friends and relations. This was also attributed to the above mentioned barriers. Some further stated the difficulties encountered getting the police to believe their story. They also do not get help without evidence to offer as proof. It was also apparent that most of the participants recognized physical and sexual abuse as more of an abuse than others. Also from interrogation, it was deduced that their length of stay at the institute is dependent on unmet needs and safety.

### **Phenomenological reduction and thematic coding**

In this section, I analyzed the description of participant's responses above to further reduce into essential parts of the scenario studied and are selected by means of imaginative variation. I pictured each part of the description as being present or absent in their personal experiences, then reduced to the essentials themes using questions asked. Themes are recurring patterns of meaning throughout the text for the existence of the conscious experience (Braun, Virginia & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is also related to phenomenology in that it focuses on the human experience subjectively (Guest & Mac Queen, 2012). This approach emphasizes the participants' perceptions, feelings and experiences as the paramount object of study.

The criteria for themes in each analysis of types of IPV includes four tenets: 1) Perception of Help sought. 2) Recognition of Abuse 3) Barriers 4) Recommendations. My aim was to determine and select parts of the description considered essential from the previous analysis and then find correlation of perceptions from each participant. The purpose of the thematic analysis was two-fold. First, the thematic approach was a method for distinguishing similarities and differences of the tenets stated above. To express their perspectives, the analysis included direct quotes and paraphrased statements from the participant transcripts.

Second, I examined the themes for how Maslow's theory describes the report of IPV in affected victims through the following questions; 1) Could the prolonged report of domestic violence in African American women be as a result of their needs have not been met? 2) How does Maslow's theory of hierarchy apply to African American women's prolonged report of domestic violence?

I was able to reflect on codes previously generated and derived more meanings to them. This is to allow easy comparison each participant's idea.

- 1) What is your "perception of the help" sought in each Scenario?

Table 5. *Theme coding - perception of the help -1.*

Participants	Physical Abuse: Description	Thematic code
A1	The help sought by Ana might help save her relationship	Prayer and patience is helpful
A2	N/A	N/A
A3	"We always have the feeling they will change"	Enduring is helpful
A4	"Action taken not enough, prayer and patience only works at early stage of relationship"	Prayer and patience not helpful enough
A5	"I believe Ana took the right step seeking God's guidance is definitely helpful"	Prayer is helpful
A6	She needs to seek more types of help	Prayer and patience not enough

Table 6. *Theme coding - perception of the help -2*

Participants	Verbal Abuse: Description	Thematic code
A1	Grace is not enduring enough	Endurance is helpful
A2	Grace is not enduring enough	Endurance is helpful
A3	She didn't make the right decision	Calling the cops was not necessary
A4	Grace was enduring enough, "verbal abuse is long lasting"	Calling the cops was necessary
A5	Grace took the right step. "I would have done the same"	Calling the cops was necessary
A6	Grace was not enduring enough	Endurance is helpful

Table 7. *Theme coding - perception of the help -3*

Participants	Sexual Abuse: Description	Thematic code
A1	N/A	N/A
A2	It will emanate into other types of abuse if not addressed	Inaction worsens case
A3	This situation will emanate to physical and verbal abuse if not addressed	Inaction worsens case
A4	The outcome could be good or otherwise	Indecisive
A5	N/A	N/A
A6	The abuse will continue because he is not going to change	Abuse continues

2) Which of these types of “abuse is/are more recognized” as more violent?

Table 8. *Theme coding - abuse is/are more recognized.*

Participants	Description	Thematic code
A1	“Physical abuse is the most recognized type of abuse” ,“Sexual abuse is dreadful”	Physical and Sexual Abuse
A2	N/A	N/A
A3	“Physical Abuse is a prominent abuse”	Physical Abuse
A4	“Verbal abuse has a lasting effect”	Verbal Abuse
A5	“Physical Abuse is life threatening”, “sexual abuse is dreadful” “Emotional abuse could be more damaging than physical”	Physical abuse, sexual abuse ,emotional abuse
A6	Sexual abuse is continuous	Sexual Abuse

3) What other ways would you have threatened each scenario considering these “factors/ barriers”? Children, income, religion, stigma, others.

Table 9. *Theme coding - factors/ barriers.*

Participants	Description	Thematic code
A1	N/A	N/A
A2	N/A	N/A
A3	“Although low income and high religious belief can be a barrier”	Low income, religious belief
A4	“Some abusive partners manipulate their wives with religious belief”, “Income and children can be used as a control measure”	Low income, religious belief and children
A5	Fear of abuser re-attacking could prevent one from reporting.	Fear
A6	N/A	N/A

4) What would you have done (recommendation) better if placed in the scenarios?

In this case, it was expected that participants will choose between seeking formal help (Legal and social services), informal help (family and friends) or not report violence (compromise, endure, flee for safety).

Table 10. *Theme coding - recommendations.*

Participants	Description	Thematic code
A1	Seek religious help, counselling, communicate with partner, talk to close friends/ relatives	Seek both formal and Informal help
A2	Non-disclosure to relations, Compromise with partner, Secure stability, persevere, flee for safety	Not report
A3	Communication, separation, vacation, flee	Not report
A4	Counselling, Endurance	Formal help, not report
A5	Police, end relationship, flee	Formal help, not report
A6	Counselling, therapy, speak to people, compromise	Formal help, Informal help, Not report.

During the above analysis, some comparative and differing perceptions were deduced from the data obtained. Four participants A1, A2, A3 and A5 recognized physical abuse as more dangerous than other types of abuse. However, their perceptions on how this scenario should be perceived differed. Participants A1 and A2 recommended praying to save the relationship but A2 further stated that the stability of the abused and children also depends on talking things out with partner. Participants A3 and A4 were in strong opposition to prayer resolving a prolonged violence, they believed this only works at the onset of violence. While A3 recommended leaving the relationship if the abuse does not cease, Participants A4 and A6 believed the situation could be redeemed if the right help (counselling) was sought. Participant A5 took an exception to their ideas, stating that involving legal authorities such as the police will be best option.

The verbal abuse scenario was not considered life threatening, as most participants believed the abused victim was not patient enough and should have taken her time to work things out with her partner. However, Participant A5 stated that this type of abuse has a lasting effect on the victim and should not be tolerated. Sexual abuse was recognized as a dreadful and continuous abuse by three of the participants A1, A3 and A6. While other participants, except A5, consented to finding ways to redeem the situation. Participant A5 stated ending the relationship as the best option. The emotional abuse scenario was also seen as a trivial type of abuse. Most of the participants, except A2 and A5, believed speaking out and seeking advice and getting support from both formal and informal source would have redeemed the situation. Aside their perceptions on each scenario, half of the participants admitted that some barriers could hinder early report of violence. These barriers were similar to previous findings from earlier studies, which are that income, children, fear of re-attack, stability and religious belief (Humphrey & Thiara, 2003; Rodriguez, *et al.*, 1998; White, 1985). However, from their experiences most of the participants admitted leaving their relationship at a life threatening stage disregarding needs, barriers, and embracing safety.

From the responses to themes used in this analysis and experiences of participants, it can be deduced that Maslow's theory of the Hierarchy of needs describes the delayed report of IPV. According to Maslow's theory, human's needs move from basic to secondary ones (Maslow, 1943). This was observed in participant's responses to barriers preventing report and recommendations. From their experiences, most of the participants prolonged the report of violence due to barriers such as fear, security and stability of the children as well as income to meet their basic needs. Also, when asked how long they are willing to stay at the institute, their responses was dependent on basic needs, as indicated by Maslow, which are shelter, security and income. Even though some of the participants are students, none mentioned being self-actualized. This infers that basic needs are more important to abused victims in their predicament.

### **Triangulation**

In this section, I used a method of triangulation to interpret and understand the phenomena analyzed above. This is the use of different methods, especially observation, focus groups and individual interviews, which form the major data collection strategies for much qualitative research (Wood, 2016). In qualitative research, the trustworthiness and validity of a study is usually questioned by positivists. . According to Merriam (2009), triangulation is a method-appropriate strategy of finding the credibility of qualitative analyses. This section attempts to confirm the credibility of this study through methodological triangulation. According to Guba, (1981) and Brewer & Hunter (1989), the use of different methods in concert compensates for their individual limitations and exploits their respective benefits. Considering this, other methods were adopted in this research; these are interviews with participants to explore their perspectives and personal experiences, and a focus group discussion where I took notes and made observations.

I brought together the understanding of the data obtained from the previous two levels of coding, and apply triangulation to further explain the attitudes and behaviors of those in the group under scrutiny, as well as to verify particular details that participants have supplied. Through the phenomenological approach, I was able to unveil unexpressed experiences with their abusive partner and relationships with others.

From the analysis and information gathered from the interviews, I observed that most participants related to each of the scenarios based on difficulties previously encountered and their reaction towards the abuse they experienced. Participant A2 had a strong opposition on seeking informal help such as confiding in family members. In her previous experience, she found it difficult to return to her parents, because they were not in support of her relationship from the onset, and would not hear her out. Also, participant A5 felt communicating with an abusive partner is not helpful because



it did not work out in her abusive relationship. Participants A3 and A6 also stated in response to one of the scenarios studied “he will not change”. When further probed, they stated that they waited and hoped their partner will change for good but the situation worsened. Some of the participants disagreed with reporting some cases of violence to the police because they do not intercede where there is no evidence against the accused.

Participants also responded to each scenario based on abuse recognition. Scenarios perceived as trivial received less recognition and were given fewer recommendations compared to those seen as dangerous and prominent. Four of the participants’ perceived physical abuse as the most prominent and life threatening abuse while sexual abuse was seen as a dreadful one. Most of the participants believed verbal and emotional abuse could be worked on if the right help was sought. Half of the participants reported in their responses to the scenarios and in the interviews, that they experienced barriers hindering them from reporting violence. Most of them admitted to a fear of being attacked again and of convicting their partner. Further love, income, security and religious belief prolonged their report of abuse. Participant’s awareness of help seeking types was also deduced from their responses, but their decision was dependent on the severity of the abuse. Participant’s length of stay in the center is dependent on getting the means to satisfy their basic needs. Their intention to leave the institute is driven by the motivation to satisfy their basic needs such as shelter, security, and steady income.

As I conducted the triangulation, I checked the levels of analysis to ensure no detail was left out and to also ensure the use of in-vivo language. From the comparison of the interviews and analytic levels, I was able to deduce that participants related to the scenarios based on conversance, severity, and long-term benefits from the situation.

## Discussion

In this chapter, I offer an overview of previous chapters and the results obtained at the end of the analysis. This is done to enable the interpretation and description of the significance of the findings in light of what was already known about the research problem being investigated, and to explain any new understanding or fresh insights about the problem after taking the findings into consideration.

The research problem under investigation is stated with methods of analysis. This will be subsequently followed by the results obtained from the study through responses to research questions. The meaning and importance of study, relation of findings to earlier researches and limitations will also be expressed. Lastly, conclusions, implications and recommendations for future studies will be discussed.

African American women experience intimate partner violence at rates higher than other ethnic groups accounting for a disproportionate number of homicides (Caetano, Nelson, & Cunradi, 2005) with 22% of the intimate partner homicide victims and 29% of all female victims of intimate partner homicide (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005). It was however suggested that the increasing rate of violence in this group is as a result of underreporting violence or delaying report due to some underlying barriers which are believed to revolve round the basic needs (Martison, 2001).

According to Maslow's theoretical framework (1943), an individual's motivation for a need are from the most basic and fundamental drive up to the secondary needs at the top level. Therefore, once a need is satisfied the motivation for such need reduces. However, it was observed that African American women are forced to satisfy a higher level of need than the lower at some certain stages of violence (Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994).

It is also appalling that with the extensiveness of the health consequences of intimate partner violence and the increasing homicidal rate in African American women, research on IPV in this ethnicity has been under-examined (Coley & Beckett, 1988; Gary, Campbell & Serlin, 1998; Koss, *et al.*, 1994). It is therefore imperative to understand the basis of underreporting of IPV by analyzing factors surrounding African American Women's report of IPV such as their recognition of abuse types and help seeking attitude.

Phenomenology has the task of uncovering phenomena implicit in the intentional relationships that a human being lives with others in their daily life, the study participants entwined in their statements moments of violence experienced with meanings associated with the phenomenon of domestic violence scenarios being studied. The participants of the study were six young and mature adult women between 18 and 57 years, most of whom were in a stable relationship and one divorced. Three women had more than 12 years of schooling. Five of the participants declared working at a store

where two earned between minimum wages, and one declared no monthly income because she is presently not working. All participants are African American women.

As regards the nature of the abuser, all the women were assaulted by an intimate partner and are all with children. Consistent with other studies, these features fit the profile of female victims of violence in United States. They were young educated women who were married or in a stable relationship. The attackers were predominantly male and the victim's intimate partner. Most victims suffered from repeated acts of violence. From data analysis, the demonstration of violence and women's perception of this phenomenon emerge, which appear in the meanings expressed and themed: 1) Perception of Help sought. 2) Recognition of Abuse 3) Barriers 4) Recommendations.

### **Research Questions**

In this section, I discuss the findings of the analysis and the literature to determine a response to the research questions.

#### **Research question one**

What act of domestic violence is more recognized by African American women?

As proposed, most of the participants recognized physical abuse and sexually abuse. Few considered emotional and verbal abuse.

Participant A1 "Physical abuse is the most recognized type of abuse" "Sexual abuse is dreadful"

Participant A2 "Physical abuse is highly dangerous"

Participant A3 "Physical abuse is a prominent abuse"

Participant A5 "Sexual abuse is the dreadful experience one should not wish for"  
"sexual abuse is dreadful"

This result is consistent with previous findings that showed African American women tend to downplay the violence they experienced unless the abuse is severe (Greenfield, Rand, Craven, Klaus, Perkins, *et al.*, 1998). This act can be linked to delayed disclosure of violence construct in the theoretical framework. African American women are perceived to be strong and persevering under stress (Bell & Mattis, 2000). However, emotional abuse is the most pervasive form of relational maltreatment and as harmful as physical abuse but often goes unrecognized (Karakurt & Silver, 2013).

#### **Research question two**

What type of help for domestic violence are African American women aware of and likely to seek?

As proposed, most of the participant's perception of the help-seeking attitude on each scenario, most participants showed awareness to help seeking types.

Participant A1 "seek religious, psychological counseling, advice from friends and relatives"- Seek both formal and Informal help.

Participant A6 "seek formal assistance such as the police, speak to relatives or compromise"- Seek formal help, Informal help or not to report violence

Participant A4 "Family counseling is advised and communicating with partner"- seek informal help" or "not to report violence"

However, regardless of the form of IPV, participants reported being more likely to seek counseling and domestic violence services and least willing to seek criminal justice services. The non-arrests of suspected abusers and a fear that police will exercise an abuse of power have contributed to African American women's reluctance to involve law enforcement (Nash & Tarrezz, 2005). This could be termed under barriers faced in reporting violence. African American women also dread finding themselves secluded from their community for reporting abuse as they are seen as contributors to criminalization of African-American men (Martinson, 2001).

Participants were equally willing to seek help from informal help or threat issues personally. Such results suggest that Battered African American women's reliance on family and friends provides for emotional and practical support, less likely to be re-abused, show less psychological distress and less likely to attempt suicide. (Kaslow *et al.*, 1998).

### **Research question three**

What factors hinder African American women from reporting domestic violence?

Participants identified income as a major factor hindering report of abuse. Contrary to proposition, participants identified religious belief than fear. It was also discovered that participants considered children as being a major barrier to reporting violence.

Participant A3 "low income and high religious belief can be a barrier" to reporting violence.

Participant A4 "Some abusive partners manipulate their wives with religious belief. "Income and children can be used as a control measure to prevent the wife from leaving abusive relationship"

Participant A5 "Fear of attack from abuser may also prevent report"

Economic instability might be a reason an abused victim deliberates staying or leaving an abusive relationship (Humphrey & Thiara, 2003). All participants from their shared experiences

attributed their persevering majorly to lack of income to sustain themselves. One of them further stated returning to an abusive relationship when she could not meet up with her needs. African American women who are unable to sustain themselves and/or their children prefer not to report, delay reporting, or return to abuser (Martison, 2001).

Culturally and historically, African American women have been looked to as the protectors of their family and community. Some women may feel because of their religious beliefs they must impart forgiveness for their abusers' behavior and endure the abuse due to religious doctrines. This belief makes them their partner's protectors and makes it more difficult for women to report their abuse or leave the abuser (White, 1985).

Most of the participants also claimed they delayed reporting because they were guiding against their children being raised through single parenting. Witnessing IPV can be considered a form of child maltreatment, yet there has been less research on emotional and behavioral outcomes with infants and toddlers whose mothers experience violence. The research that does exist suggests that IPV is associated with infant attachment (Zeanah *et al.*, 1999) on the emotions of the child because they are deprived from experiencing both parental love. According to Graham & Levendosky (1998), women who were experiencing more severe violence reported increased stress, which impacted internalizing and externalizing behavior in their school-aged children beyond the effects of the violence alone. It was also stated by the participants in their experience narration that Socio-economic factor such as income and safety needs are significant predictors to their length of stay in the institute.

## **Conclusions**

In this study, I set out to investigate the help seeking attitude, recognition of abuse and help seeking attitude of African American women in Intimate partner relationships. In order to research this, three questions were constructed. What act of domestic violence is more recognized by African American women? What type of help for domestic violence are African American women aware of and likely to seek? What factors hinder African American women from reporting domestic violence?

The main findings suggested the African American women participants were able to identify physical and sexual abuse more readily than emotional abuse because they perceive the former as more life threatening than the latter. The African American women participants were also aware of help seeking types but are more likely to seek counseling services and domestic violence services in severe situations than criminal justice services. The non-arrest, abuse of power by police and attack from abuser when released were their major reasons. The African American women participants expressed that seeking informal help for emotional and practical support in early stages of violence or threat issues personally by communicating with their partner.

Also, The African American women participants identified low income, religious belief and children as major factors hindering their report of abuse more than the fear of abusive partner. They emphasized that the inability to sustain themselves and the children and their religious doctrines delayed their report of violence. The women declared that securing their home to enhance children's stability was another limiting factor.

Participant's attitude and barriers hindering the report of violence are dependent on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. From interrogation, the participants stated that they will gain their independence once these basic needs are met; income, shelter and safety.

Comprehensive care should be centered on this ethnic group, but this is only possible if there is embracement, qualified listening, and follow-up for these victimized women and their abusers, thus, facilitating empowerment, and decreasing the occurrences and impact of the violence on the health and life of the women. Care for female victims of violence should involve inter-sectorial actions for comprehensive care, involving various sectors such as legal, health, family and non-governmental organizations in a humanized approach.

### **Recommendations**

There is a need to promote counseling and culturally relevant intervention strategies for household. Women should be encouraged to express their voice against any kind of psychological, physical and sexual abuse and most importantly embrace self-dependence. Using Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a guideline in domestic service programs will make women empowerment more effective. Women should also be assisted to secure good paying jobs that can afford them and children a living. Regular counseling and follow up on these women should be advocated to improve their socioeconomic status and instill positive attitude towards preventing domestic violence occurrence.

The lack of awareness of differential factors and impacts within communities of color can impede finding effective and lasting solutions. Studies should also examine how socioeconomic variables and status may serve as protective or risk factors for abuse perpetration and victimization of African American women by intimate partners. A lack of knowledge or limited understanding of the cultural context can diminish the effectiveness of the services provided, which is counter to what practitioners are trying to do. If practitioners do not understand the group that they are working with, they will be less likely to serve them effectively. Community-based studies should specifically examine contextual factors such as poverty, single parenthood, and histories of previous intimate partner violence in Intimate partner Violence in African American women.

Studies should also be focused on developing and validating culturally sensitive and relevant assessment tools for African American female victims (Bent- Goodley, 2001). Many of the tools used

have been evaluated primarily with Caucasian women as the focus of research with distinct cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and experiences from African American women.

### **Implications**

A major implication of these findings is the need for outreach efforts aimed at increasing awareness of emotional and verbal IPV. It is especially important for mental health service providers to underscore the negative consequences of emotional and verbal abuse (e.g. chronic fatigue, depression, and low self-esteem) although those forms of abuse might appear less violent and more subtle (Sackett & Saunders, 1999). Psycho-educational workshops may be avenues to share information such as definition, signs, and symptoms of emotional and verbal abuse with community members. Policymakers, state and local administrators should identify the barriers that women may encounter as they navigate the welfare system, and to make changes that will increase effectiveness of IPV intervention within the system, such as increasing numbers of domestic violence advocates in welfare agencies.

### **Summary**

Intimate Partner Violence has been considered the most persistent human right violation worldwide in which its effect is prominent in women. The health consequences of intimate partner violence are extensive having both physical and psychological effects on victims especially in African American women whose percentage is higher than other ethnic groups despite their willingness to report cases of abuse. Presently, a high percentage of African American women lose their lives to domestic violence at the verge of leaving their relationships (Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994). This is a result of their perseverance or the delayed report of IPV. Therefore, understanding their help-seeking attitude will enhance further studies on their needs. The theoretical frame-work used in this study relates Maslow's theory of hierarchical needs to barriers faced in reporting violence and delayed report of violence. According to Maslow (1943), humans' motivation is dependent on unmet needs. The motivation for these needs reduces once they are met.

Participants of this study were six African American women in District of Columbia, U.S. Their needs were measured based on their willingness to stay in help-seeking programs. Hypothetical vignettes were used in this study to investigate the recognition of IPV and attitudes toward seeking help. In addition, the study examined the effects of socio-economic status, income level and children on their length of stay in domestic violence institute. The propositions in this study are that the participants will be more likely to perceive physical and sexual violence as abuse than emotional and verbal violence, participants will indicate that they would be more likely to seek help from informal helpers than formal sources, regardless of the type of Intimate Partner Violence. It was also proposed

that Socio-economic factors such as employment, income level, and children are significant predictors to length of stay in the domestic violence institute. The present study used a qualitative method approach to investigate African American women's recognition of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), and their attitudes toward seeking help from informal sources (family and friends), formal sources (counseling services, domestic violence services, and criminal justice services). The data analysis strategy used was a qualitative three level coding (Descriptive coding, reduction & thematic coding and triangulation) to analyze and evaluate a mix of predetermined and emergent data.

The results generated from the study are: 1) Participants perceived physical and sexual violence as abuse more readily than emotional and verbal violence. 2) Participants are aware of help-seeking types, however they are more willing to seek counseling, domestic violence services and informal services with their least preference was for criminal justice services. 3) Participants identified income, religious belief, and children as a major factor hindering report of abuse. 4) Participants also stated income and safety as significant predictors to their length of stay at the domestic violence center.

The following recommendations were made to administrators, service providers and educators on effective strategies to adopt on IPV eradication

- 1) Promote counseling and culturally relevant intervention strategies for household and assist women to secure good paying jobs that can afford them and children an independent living.
- 2) Use Maslow's Hierarchy of needs model as a guideline for women empowerment.
- 3) Examine contextual factors such as poverty, single parenthood, and histories of previous intimate partner violence in African American women through community based studies.
- 4) Focus studies on developing and validating culturally sensitive and relevant assessment tools for African American female victims.
- 5) Mental health service providers should create outreach efforts aimed at increasing awareness of emotional and verbal IPV by emphasizing the negative consequences of emotional and verbal abuse.
- 6) Policymakers, state and local administrators should identify the barriers that women may encounter as they navigate the welfare system and seek necessary solutions.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

#### Request to recruit study participants

Good day Sir/Madam,

My name is Aishat Awodele, I am developing a research proposal for my Masters' research at Trinity Washington University titled Domestic Violence: Intimate Partner Violence in African American Women, their recognition of abuse and their help seeking attitude. I am requesting your permission to invite clients from your organization to participate in my study by taking a survey and an interview section which I intend doing within the confines of your organization.

I would like you to email my letter of invitation to partake in the interview and survey, on my behalf, to your clients. My survey and interview does not ask for any personally identifying information, the study participant's identification will be completely anonymous.

I am not asking you to send the letter of invitation at this time. I must first obtain official approvals from my university and your organization. The intent of this email is to request your permission to invite clients from your organization to complete my survey. Once I have all of the appropriate permission letters, then I will forward to you the actual letter of invitation and ask you to email the letter on my behalf at that time.

If you are not the person in charge of approving this type of request I would very much appreciate if you would forward the name and contact information of the person I should communicate with. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you by phone if that would be helpful. In addition, I would be happy to provide any further information you may require in order to make a decision.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Aishat Awodele

3017654827

[awodelea@students.trinitydc.edu](mailto:awodelea@students.trinitydc.edu)

**Appendix B: Informed Consent Form**

Domestic Violence: Intimate Partner Violence in African American Women, Their Recognition of Abuse and Their Help-seeking Attitude.

My name is Aishat D. Awodele and I would like to invite you to participate in a research study examining the experiences of African American women in abusive relationships and their help-seeking attitude, which will add to the knowledge related to Intimate Partner Violence. The data collected in this study will help fulfill the requirements for a Master of Science in Administration of Public and Community Health at Trinity Washington University. I am under the supervision of my faculty advisor Dr. Kelley Wood.

**Participation Requires of You:** To participate in an interview and fill out a questionnaire which will take approximately 1 hour of your time. The interview will be audio-taped. You may stop the taping or ask that the tape be erased and it will be done. The findings may be used in professional presentations or be published in professional journals; however, your identity will be protected.

**Your Privacy:** Your participation in this study and your responses will be kept confidential. You may stop the taping or ask that the tape be erased and it will be done. Any reference to you will be by pseudonym, including any direct quotes from your responses. This document and any notes or recordings that might personally identify you as a participant in this study will be kept in a locked place that only the researcher will have access to. Only the researcher and the research supervisor might know who has participated in this study. Three years after the completion of this research study all personally identifying information will be destroyed.

**Risks to you:** There are five acknowledged risks generally associated with participation in research studies such as this one: Physical, psychological, social, economic, and legal. The researcher foresees minimal risk for those who choose to participate in this study. There is no planned use of deception involved in this study. There are no foreseen physical risks associated with this study; other risks might include the following:

You might experience anxiety, discomfort, or negative emotions as a result of responding to the questions asked of them in this research study. If you experience a negative reaction, you may choose to skip the question, to withdraw from the study, or you may contact my faculty advisor or the SPS Institutional Review Board, especially if your discomfort continues after the study. See the contact information on the page below.

You might experience social, economic, or legal implications if you share your responses or your participation in this study with others. If you choose to participate in this study, you are encouraged to keep your participation in this study and your responses confidential. The researcher will maintain your confidentiality throughout the study, and will destroy the records of your participation three years after the study is complete.

**Benefits to You:** There are not foreseen direct benefits to you regarding participation in this study beyond the general knowledge that you are assisting in furthering the knowledge related to this research topic, and assisting the researcher in completing the degree requirements. There is no compensation associated with participation in this study.

**Informed Consent Form, continued:**

Domestic Violence: Intimate Partner Violence in African American Women, Their Recognition of Abuse and Their Help-seeking Attitude.

I acknowledge that the researcher has explained my rights, the requirements of this study, and the potential risks involved in participating in this study. I understand there is no compensation for, or direct benefit of participating in this study. By signing below and providing my contact information I am indicating that I consent to participate in this study, that I am at least 18 years of age, and I am eligible to participate in this study.

I may withdraw from this study at any time by notifying the researcher by email. If I have any concerns regarding my participation in this research study I may contact the research supervisor, Dr. Kelley Wood, or the BGS Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees the ethical practice of research involving human participants conducted by students of the Trinity Washington University School of Business and Graduate Studies.

Signing this document acknowledges that I understand my rights as a participant, which have been explained to me prior to signing this document. I may ask for, and keep, a copy of this document for my own records.

Signed Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number, Email Address, or Postal Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your participation,

Aishat D. Awodele

MSA in Public and Community Health

Trinity Washington University

Email Address: [awodelea@students.trinitydc.edu](mailto:awodelea@students.trinitydc.edu)

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(202) 884-9227, or

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BGS Institutional Review Board Committee

(202) 884-9640, or

[BGS@trinitydc.edu](mailto:BGS@trinitydc.edu) with BGS IRB in the subject line.

**Appendix C: Questionnaire****SECTION 1**

Demographic Survey Question

1. What is your age range?

- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65 years or older

2. What ethnicity do you identify yourself as?

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Other

3. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? *If currently enrolled, highest degree received.*

- No schooling completed
- Nursery school to 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college credit, no degree
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate degree

4. What is your marital status?



- Single, never married
- Married or domestic partnership
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated

5. Are you currently employed?

- Employed for wages
- Self-employed
- Out of work and looking for work
- Out of work but not currently looking for work
- A homemaker
- A student
- Military
- Retired
- Unable to work

6. How many children do you have? .....

## **Section 2**

This section of the questionnaire are scenarios on Intimate Partner Violence. Each case outlines an abused victim's experience and her reaction towards it. Participants are required to read through each scenario and give unbiased responses to the follow-up questions.

### **Scenario A:**

Ana, a full house wife with 3 children is a victim of physical abuse. "Alex has always been a sweet man and showed no signs of brutality from the onset of our relationship, he used to be very quiet and caring until he recently lost his job. Episode of trivial arguments now emanate into a physical attack in which most times I get hit with objects he could lay his hands on or his fist. Been brought up in a spiritual home where divorce is seriously frowned at, I couldn't take any step

further than to seek advice from my relatives who have always encouraged me to pray and persevere. However, my silence seem to be fueling Alex anger and unveiling the devil in him. Recently, I had this scar, (points to the dark spot close to her right eyes) from a recent argument we had. He won't even acknowledge the presence of the kids (she bursts in tears). I really love him and I hope my prayers and patience will change his heart.

Q1. Do you think the help sought by the woman in this situation will resolve this issue?

Q2. What are the reasons for your above answer?

Q3. What other possible ways would you have treated each case, considering the following factors? Children, Income, Religion, Stigma, others (if any).

### **Scenario B:**

Grace a college graduate recently moved into a rented apartment with her spouse. Alfred's high regards for women and enduring attitude got me attracted to him, she said. He is neat to a fault, however I am on the average when it comes to neatness. This has always been the bone of contention between us. We lived together for 1 year, ironing out differences that usually doesn't last the day. Few months back, I noticed the usual complaints on things being wrong has grown into altercations which involves insulting my upbringing and hurtful statements that brings back hurt when recalled. Although, he has never made any attempt of attack but been raised by a single parent where my dad physically abused my mum before they divorced, I won't allow a repeat of such. Had to call the corps on him one faithful night at the middle of a hot argument. No man can dictate my life to me, especially when we haven't been legally bonded.

Q1. Do you feel Grace is not enduring enough?

Q2. What are the reasons for your above answer?

Q3. What other possible ways would you have treated each case, considering the following factors? Children, Income, Religion, Stigma, others (if any).

**Scenario C:**

Sex has always been an enjoyable moment for us till I lost the urge after the birth of our first child. I can go two weeks without the thought of it but considering my partners crave for it we agreed on twice a week. However, my mate is not satisfied, he recently threatened to leave the relationship since I wasn't meeting up with his sexual desires. Austin has never failed in delivering his responsibilities as a man, even though we are yet to make our vows. On many occasions, I forcefully had to give in to his sexual desires. Although I sought medical assistance on my disinterest but was told to give it time. I feel excruciating pain whenever I mate with my partner accompanied with an unpleasant feeling of being lured. I really want to keep my relationship but my wellbeing matters, most importantly we have a child together. I don't want my child growing up without his father. I am really confused!!!

Q1. What do you think will be the outcome of this scenario?

Q2. What are the reasons for your above response?

Q3. What other possible ways would you have treated each case, considering the following factors? Children, Income, Religion, Stigma, others (if any).

**Scenario D:**

Mary, a senior manager of a top Organization was a victim of emotional abuse. This had been ongoing for the past few years coupled with stress from work. Although her colleagues at work noticed instances of her attention drifting from work and her lack of enthusiasm to go home after a long day at work. Even though she was a senior manager that can delegate duties, she's always the last to leave office. Her secretary also stated instances when she get startled by sudden noises and instances of phone conversations with her supposed spouse which usually doesn't end well. She seem withdrawn from people, overly aggressive but dedicated to work. She recalled giving her a nickname of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) because she was extra careful on how things are done even outside office work. Her cold body was found on a Monday afternoon in her room after all effort to revive her was futile. "My boss wasn't looking too bright on Friday, would have asked but I overheard her exchanging words with her spouse on the phone earlier that afternoon and cancelled our earlier scheduled meeting". My boss must have died in her sleep the secretary stuttered.

Q1. Do you think the woman in this scenario died a natural death?

Q2. What is your opinion on the cause of her death?

Q3. If you were in her situation what would you have done better?

Q4. What other possible ways would you have treated each case, considering the following factors? Children, Income, Religion, Stigma, others (if any).

**Appendix D: Debriefing form:**Study of Intimate Partner Violence Recognition and Help-Seeking Attitudes

This study you have just completed was designed to investigate the needs of abused victims of domestic violence. In this study, the needs were assessed considering various scenarios and factors that can hinder getting the needs (help-seeking): These unmet needs often affect our decisions in abusive relationships. The framing questions and the hindsight questions use different working and context, or provide additional pieces of information to influence your choices. We are particularly interested in the relationship between these decision biases to see whether people who are susceptible to one are also susceptible to the other.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of the question with others. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact **Aishat Awodele** or my Supervisor **Dr. Kelley Wood** at **Woodke@trinitydc.edu (202-884-9227)**. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact me.