Battered Women's Protective Strategies

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With contributions from Andrea Bible

When exploring battered women's protective strategies, the first question to ask is, "Protection from what?" Protection from further violence is a natural and obvious answer to this question, but it is not the only answer. Many other domains of a woman's life are also threatened by battering: her financial stability, the well-being and safety of her children, her social status and the degree to which she is subjected to a stigmatized identity, her psychological health and sense of self-worth, and her hopes and dreams for the course of her life. These are just a few of the areas that are routinely threatened by a woman's abusive partner. Indeed, the threats to these domains may in some cases be greater than the threats of injury or physical pain.

Victims are never responsible for the battering perpetrated against them, but, just as people cope and respond to other negative events, victims must also cope and respond to battering. Few people recognize that women are often attempting to cope with numerous threats posed by battering, not just the threat of bodily harm. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to protect oneself from all of these harms simultaneously, or even to spread the risks more or less equally across these domains. Rather, acts that protect against one form of harm often exacerbate other harms. In particular, the unintended consequences of leaving for battered women and their children, especially leaving abruptly in an emergency context, are under-acknowledged by many scholars and advocates (Davies, 2009). It is perhaps natural to assume that escaping violence as quickly as possible is an obvious choice for any victim. The reality, however, can be much bleaker.

Some women are so destitute, both financially and socially, that leaving, especially in a short time frame, may be worse than staying. According to Hamby and Gray-Little (2007):

> The dangers of staying with a violent partner may be less than the dangers of living on the streets. The pain of an occasional beating may be less than the pain of losing custody of one's children to a violent parent (p. 28-5).

Many in the general public, and even advocates and scholars with extensive experience in the field of partner violence, may find it difficult to accept that conditions of poverty and social isolation exist for so many women. Nonetheless, assumptions that leaving is always better or safer than staying have meant that people do not always recognize the wide array of protective strategies that victims use. There are many strategies in addition to leaving the abuser or staying in a shelter. One goal of this review is to broaden the definitions of both *what* women are trying to protect and *how* they are trying to protect it. Although many of these protective strategies are already known to advocates and have been previously documented in the research, there is still a disconnect between women's lived realities in comparison with both the public stereotypes about battered women and the types of services offered to support them. It is hoped that this document will be a step towards expanding both perceptions and services.

A Holistic Approach

"…battered women are the strongest women. And nobody will ever change my mind with that. We've had to learn to how to survive" (Melinda, quoted in Davis, 2002, p. 1254).

To fully understand battered women's experiences, a holistic perspective is required. This perspective expands the meaning of "protective strategies," and raises awareness of the many obstacles that victims confront. Although it is true that there are many more services and legal protections available to victims today than there were 30 or 40 years ago, it is still equally true that most women face substantial constraints in accessing services or using other protective strategies (Davies, Lyon, & Monti-Catania, 1998; Justice & Courage Oversight Panel, 2008). Hamby (2008) organized these constraints into five categories: batterer's behavior, financial obstacles, institutional obstacles, social obstacles, and personal values that complicate women's choices. Batterer's attempts to maintain power and control over their victims manifest themselves in many ways, such as threats to kill the victim if she leaves or attempts to make other changes in their relationship (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Contrary to the widespread assumption that leaving is the best way to increase safety, there is ample evidence that much violence is initiated or worsens after separation as the batterer redoubles efforts to maintain control (Mahoney, 1991; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998, 2000).

Not all constraints are due to the batterer, however (Davies et al., 1998; Hamby, 2008). There are financial obstacles, such as insufficient funds to rent an apartment or home, lack of health care for oneself or one's children, or the ability to take time off work to address the effects of the abuse. Financial constraints can limit other coping efforts such as seeking counseling. There are also institutional obstacles, such as limited shelter stays that do not allow sufficient time to set up a new home and job, requirements of multiple court appearances for women who do not have access to childcare or transportation, and the dearth of civil attorneys for low-income women. Many services are primarily organized around helping women leave, and if they do not wish to leave they may find few relevant institutional services (Davies, 2008). There are also social obstacles, such as objections by the victim's or perpetrator's families to divorce or terminate the relationship. Members of some cultural groups or communities may experience pressure not to disclose the violence at all. Further, institutional and social obstacles are often exacerbated for certain groups, including immigrant women, elders, youth, pregnant women, lesbian and bisexual women, gay men, transgender people, people of color, women with disabilities, and other groups who may have special needs, complicated legal issues, or other considerations that are not always addressed by standard services.

Finally, personal values, such as beliefs that divorce is wrong, can complicate women's choices as they simultaneously try to remain true to their ideals and protect themselves and their children (Hamby, 2008). The costs of giving up these values can be substantial, both psychologically and socially. For example, if their church or other organization rejects them for breaching its values, a victim might lose considerable social support and even a source of financial and in-kind assistance. Women face dozens of constraints as they strategize about what to do.

Protective Strategies: Understanding What We Know and Don't Know

To the extent that any data on pro-active, protective behaviors are offered at all, the existing research literature has the most to say on strategies women use to protect themselves and their children against physical violence. The lack of research on other strategies battered women use by no means implies they are less frequent or less important — just less studied.

It is important to note, too, that in some cases I have interpreted published data differently than the

original authors. Specifically, sometimes behaviors that are interpreted as dysfunctional or passive by the original researchers are considered here to be protective of other goals or needs. For example, choosing not to disclose abuse is often interpreted as denial or some other cognitive distortion. Concealing abuse, or other strategies to dis-identify with victimization, however, can just as easily be seen as impression management strategies that are efforts to minimize the social stigma of being publicly identified as a victim or to minimize the shame that would come to the family for revealing a family secret. Such impression management strategies, or efforts to control others' perceptions of oneself, are common among those with potentially concealable stigmatizing conditions (Goffman, 1963; Herek & Capitanio, 1996).

Oftentimes, researchers describe the strategies most clearly connected to leaving and terminating a relationship as the most protective or best coping strategies. Yet, they typically give little consideration to whether the use of these strategies may actually increase physical risk via separation violence rather than protect women against physical harm (Mahoney, 1991). For example, in the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS), 22% of women victimized by a former spouse reported that the violence occurred after the relationship ended. In fact, in 4% of cases the violence only *began* after the relationship ended. The pattern for stalking was even more dramatic: 43% of stalking victims were stalked only after terminating a relationship (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Leaving is almost always held up as the gold standard of good coping despite considerable evidence that terminating a relationship is not always a successful strategy for ending abuse.

Finally, the other major limitation of the research on coping and protective strategies is that it usually focuses only on battered women who go to battered women's shelters. In many cases, these are the women with the fewest resources or who are in the worst circumstances. Many women leave abusive, maltreating partners without ever visiting a shelter, speaking with an anti-domestic violence advocate,

or disclosing the violence to a civil or criminal court. We know very little about them or their protective strategies. Nonetheless, and despite the limitations of the research, there is substantial evidence that women engage in all kinds of protective strategies and seek many types of help as they attempt to improve their situations, whether they remain in or leave their relationships. The evidence for several specific strategies is presented below.

Specific Protective Strategies

Immediate Situational Strategies

Although much of the literature focuses on long-term protective strategies, a few studies have looked at protective responses in the immediate context of a physical or sexual assault. The first coping responses often occur during or just after an assault. Leaving the house or escaping the scene of the assault was reported by 19% of women in one study (Magen, Conroy, Hess, Panciera, & Simon, 2001). In a randomly drawn community sample, Hamby and Gray-Little (1997) found that immediate self-protective strategies, such as leaving the situation, getting someone's help, or calling the police, were reported by 20% of women. One nationally representative sample found that 16% ran to another room, 8% left the house, and 6% called someone other than the police (Kaufman Kantor & Straus, 1990). Women also try to avoid potentially violent situations: 63% in a study by Yoshihama (2002). Although some authors consider avoidance a passive, poor coping strategy, women's own ratings showed that avoiding violent situations was often an effective protective strategy.

Hitting back is another immediate situational strategy. Although virtually any response can lead to an escalation of the batterer's violence, hitting back may be riskier than most. It may also create legal problems for women, including leading to assault charges against them or damaging their positions in a custody contest. However, some women do choose this strategy: 12% in one nationally representative sample (Kaufman Kantor & Straus, 1990). Although the severity of the violence perpetrated

against them and the physical environment can constrain victims' ability to flee or engage in other immediate responses, it is clear that many women respond protectively in the moment that violence occurs.

Protecting Children, Family, Friends, and Pets

Oftentimes, the welfare of others is foremost on a victim's mind. Victims' specific concerns about others are better documented than the specific strategies used to address these concerns. Sometimes protecting others manifests as immediate situational strategies. For example, in one small study of 17 battered women with children, 65% described removing the children from the scene of the violence by moving away from them or putting them in their bedrooms (Haight, Shim, Linn, & Swinford, 2007). Other steps are longer term. Haight et al. (2007) found that almost half of the sample (47%) spoke of reassuring their children and emphasizing to them that the fighting was not the children's fault. Some mothers, ranging from 16% to 24% in two studies, try to teach their children to make nonviolent choices in their own relationships (Haight et al., 2007; Levendosky, Lynch, & Graham-Bermann, 2000).

The desire to protect others sometimes limits the choice of coping strategies. Across several studies of threats to pets, 26% of women reported that they delayed terminating their relationship because of batterers' threats to kill or harm their companion animals if they left (Hamby, 2008). This is a good example of a situation where no single protective strategy can minimize all risks simultaneously. Although the data available focus on children and pets, it is likely that victims try to protect all loved ones who are threatened.

Using "Classic" Legal and Anti-Domestic Violence Services

Calling the police. Substantial numbers of women call the police in order to obtain protection from their batterer, especially women who are victims of the most severe battering. As with any single strategy, calling the police may have limited

effectiveness in preventing future violence and may create other problems. When victims call the police they may expose the batterer to violence from the police, as well as face retaliatory violence from the batterer or the possibility that they themselves may be arrested (Hirschel & Buzawa, 2002; Martin, 1997; Ritchie, 2006). Law enforcement involvement can also be risky for women who may be worried about involvement from child protective services or immigration enforcement.

Studies of women who have had contact with shelters or social services indicate that between 32% and 78% have also called the police (Bui, 2003; Magen et al., 2001; Rounsaville, 1978; Rusbult & Martz, 1995). In the National Crime Victimization Survey, 53% of women reported their intimate partner victimizations to police between 1993 and 1998 (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). In other nationally representative community surveys rates of reporting to the police are lower, most likely because the typical violence reported in such surveys is minor and infrequent. NVAWS found that 21% of female victims contacted the police (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Furthermore, 27% of all victimizations were reported, but not always by the victim (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Although the rates of reporting are lower in community surveys, more severe forms of violence are more likely to be reported to the police. In one survey, Kaufman Kantor and Straus (1990) found that women who sustained severe violence were four times more likely to call the police than women who sustained minor violence (14% vs. 3%). However, not all groups are equally likely to turn to police. For example, using data from Houston, Texas, Bui (2003) estimates that Vietnamese immigrants are five times less likely to call the police than other ethnic groups in Houston. Fears of problems with immigration authorities (whether victims are documented or not) and fears of racial or ethnic discrimination by law enforcement may prevent some victims from contacting police or other authorities (Bui, 2003).

Obtaining a restraining order/order of protection. NVAWS found that 17% of victimized women attained a temporary restraining order. Obtaining a protection order is often more common among women who have engaged in other forms of help-seeking (Dutton, Ammar, Orloff, & Terrell, 2007; Strube & Barbour, 1984). However, numerous problems exist regarding restraining orders that may affect their use by victims. In the NVAWS, for example, 51% of the women who obtained orders said their partner violated their restraining order (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). In a sample of immigrant women, 37% felt an order of protection would increase their danger (Dutton et al., 2007). Other problems include lack of legal representation in civil protection order hearings for low-income women and limited enforcement of protection orders in some jurisdictions. Further, despite the full faith and credit provisions of the Violence Against Women Act, which should ensure that orders issued by all states and tribal jurisdictions are respected throughout the country, enforcement of protection orders across jurisdictional lines can be problematic.

Going to a domestic violence shelter. Access to shelters is not as universal as sometimes thought. Fewer than half of U.S. counties have shelters, and those shelters that exist are often full. A national survey on shelter services found that, in a single day, there were more than 4,000 unmet requests for shelter or transitional housing (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2008). In addition to issues regarding access, some shelters have policies that exclude boys over age 13 (or younger) or exclude women who are actively using drugs or alcohol to cope with the effects of the abuse. Other shelter policies may require residents to participate in interventions, such as parent training. Although such policies are generally meant to protect and assist shelter residents, they effectively exclude many victims in need of shelter. Often operating with very limited resources, shelters may struggle to offer culturally relevant services, particularly to battered women who are the most marginalized, such as immigrants, women of color, women with disabilities,

lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender survivors of domestic violence, and battered women charged with crimes.

In one nationally representative community survey, 4% of women who left their partner went to a safe house or homeless shelter (author's analysis of archived data from Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Another study found that 10% of domestic violence victims sought help from a shelter (Cattaneo & DeLoveh, 2008). A recent study of 3,410 shelter residents in eight states found that, after time in shelter, 92% felt more hopeful about the future, 91% knew more about their options and ways to plan for their safety, and 85% knew more about community resources – outcomes associated with longer-term safety and well-being (Lyon, Lane, & Menard, 2008). Although not used by all victims, emergency shelters serve as an important protective strategy, especially for the most severely abused women and those with the fewest financial and social resources.

Utilizing other domestic violence program services. Although shelter is the service most closely identified with anti-domestic violence programs, most programs offer a variety of services, usually at no cost. Existing data suggests that the most commonly utilized domestic violence-related services include providing information about domestic violence and referrals to other organizations (North Carolina Council for Women, 2007). Indeed, these services are provided more than 10 times as often as shelter. Transportation, court accompaniment, and counseling are also provided more frequently than shelter.

Some racial groups utilize program services more often than others. In North Carolina, which keeps one of the largest databases on domestic violence services, three racial groups comprised larger portions of clients served than they do of the total North Carolina population: African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians. Two groups were somewhat underrepresented in comparison to their numbers in the population: Whites and Asian Americans. It is possible that racial and ethnic differences in service utilization are due to lower income indi-

viduals being overrepresented in some U.S. minority groups. Research demonstrates that lower income women are more likely to use shelters than women with higher income (Cattaneo & DeLoveh, 2008), and may also be more likely to seek help with transportation and other services.

Data suggests that a variety of program services are used by large numbers of victims. However, interpreting service data is complex because some of these services are provided to women while they are in shelter. Shelter "service" can comprise as much as a 90-day stay, while other services take place over much briefer periods of time. Further, not every anti-domestic violence program has the resources to offer shelter, and shelter might be used more if it were more widely available. Finally, as these data come from programs, not victims, one cannot determine what percentage of victims use these various services as part of their coping strategies.

Reaching Out for Social Support

Most women seek social support by disclosing their experiences of abuse to family members, friends, neighbors, and/or co-workers. Social support may provide women with needed validation, another perspective on the situation, support around safety planning, assistance with holding the abusive partner accountable, and a counterbalance to the batterer's minimization, denial, and blame. Social support may also result in tangible offers of help, including places to stay, financial assistance, or places to store belongings in case of emergency. Like most protective strategies, though, seeking social support does entail risks, as women might instead encounter fear, rejection, and stigma.

Despite these risks, most battered women do seek social support. Three studies found the rate of confiding in a friend or family member to be over 90% (Goodkind, Gillum, Bybee, & Sullivan, 2003; Levendosky et al., 2004; Rounsaville, 1978). Another study found that 74% sought help from at least one friend and 47% sought help from family (Yoshihama, 2002). In another study, approximately two-thirds sought support from their own family, while over 40% sought help from friends (Strube &

Barbour, 1984). In a sample of Vietnamese immigrants, 62% talked with relatives, friends, or religious leaders (Bui, 2003). Although the total number of people confided in is not often measured, Goodkind et al. (2003) reported that more than half of their sample (56%) talked to both family and friends. Social support can be emotional support and also more direct support. According to one nationally representative survey, 68% of women who leave their partners go stay with family members or friends (author's analysis of archived data from Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

Turning to Spiritual and Religious Resources

One of the great disservices to many victims of domestic violence is the frequent categorization of prayer and other spiritual strategies as "passive" or "avoidant" coping. Prayer, and other spiritual ceremonies and resources, may be a great source of strength for women from many cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Hamby & Gray-Little, 2007). Hage (2006) found that faith in God was important to the coping of 90% of the battered women in her sample. Similarly, El-Khoury et al. (2004) found that 88% used prayer to find strength and guidance, and 27% talked to a member of the clergy about their abuse. Spiritual practices are often reported more frequently by women of color, including African American women (El-Khoury et al., 2004) and Muslim women (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001, 2003). Culturally specific spiritual practices may play an important role in the process of healing and protection, as exemplified by the statement of this American Indian woman from the Seattle area:

> …That helped me a lot, … smudging [ritual purifying with the smoke of sacred herbs such as sage] and just doing a lot of different things about being strong and protecting myself, you know. The Native person can teach me how to protect myself in a Native way, like smudging, and not cutting my hair, and just leaving it on the ground so someone can stomp on it! And you know, just things like that, little things. And the music, pow

wow music was a big healing for my heart and made my heart strong again (Senturia, Sullivan, Cixke, & Shiu-Thorton, 2000, pp. 114-115).

Some women, however, report that their partners use scripture to enhance power and control over them, or that the rules of some organized religions hamper their efforts to protect themselves (Hage, 2006; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001, 2003). More needs to be done to craft ways of simultaneously supporting women's spirituality and right to safety.

Use of Traditional Health, Mental Health, and Social Services

Fairly large numbers of women seek help from psychologists, social workers, physicians, drug and alcohol abuse treatment providers, community health centers, and other health and social service providers. Some significant impediments to the use of these services exist, including financial costs, concerns about confidentiality, and access to providers with training in domestic violence. Still, they are used fairly frequently. Several studies found the percentage of battered women who sought counseling to be from 9-30% (El-Khoury et al., 2004; Magen et al., 2001; Saunders, 1994). Saunders (1994) also found that 21% of battered women participated in a 12-step program. Another study found that 35% sought the help of a physician or nurse (Magen et al., 2001). Conjoint couples counseling is also sought by some women. Although considered controversial by some, there is emerging evidence that conjoint couples counseling can be safely pursued when minor, noninjurious forms of domestic violence have been perpetrated (O'Leary, Heyman, & Neidig, 1999; Stith, Rosen, McCollum, & Thomsen, 2004). There may be ethnic or cultural differences in the use of these services. For example, one study found European American women were more likely to seek mental health counseling than African American women (El-Khoury et al., 2004). When culturally appropriate, these providers can offer another forum for talking about multiple risks

and working out solutions, and can also help address the emotional after-effects of trauma.

Terminating the Relationship

Ending the relationship, by attempting to break up, move out, or divorce, is almost always designed to be a protective strategy. Relationship termination is measured in a number of different ways. Flynn (1990) reported that 37% of her sample ended their relationship in one-month or less following the first episode of violence. Magen et al. (2001) reported that 32% ended the relationship "immediately." Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns, and Shortt (1996) followed 45 batterers and their spouses over a two-year period and found that 38% divorced or separated during that time. Griffing et al. (2005) found that 66% separated but later returned to the batterer at least once, demonstrating both how many would like to leave and also the extent of the obstacles many confront in ending the relationship. However, as discussed, it is important to recognize that leaving can entail significant risks, especially to women with the most aggressive or emotionally unstable partners. These risks may include homicide, separation violence, and loss of custody of children.

Invisible Strategies

The following list of invisible strategies may seem like a pretty long list of protective strategies, and in some respects it is—more than a dozen specific strategies have been studied. Yet what is also striking about the research on protective strategies is what is missing, particularly from quantitative research on victims of domestic violence. For example, there is virtually no quantitative research on a wide range of strategies, including how many women:

- open bank accounts and start saving money, which is probably one of the most important strategies for increasing the number of viable options a victim can pursue, ranging from filing for divorce to contesting custody to securing living arrangements.

- return to school to increase their job skills and gain all of the other benefits of an education.
- file for custody of their children, or seek supervised visits for their children when they visit their father.
- relocate to get away from a stalker.
- coach their children on how to escape during a violent episode or take steps to minimize their children's time with the batterer.
- successfully work with their partners, with or without the assistance of advocates or therapists, to make their relationship safe.
- examine all of their constraints and options and make a calculated decision that staying is the safest thing to do at that moment.

Advocates and others who work regularly with battered women know that women take all of these actions. Indeed, advocates help women with many of them. However, while there are some references to these actions in qualitative interviews of victims, we know very little about how common they are.

Another feature of victim's coping that is often invisible is the shear number of different strategies that victims try. Hamby and Gray-Little (1997) found in their community sample that the average number of protective strategies increased as the level of violence progressed from minor to more severe. We need to learn much more about how many different ways victims typically try to address the problem of violence and other forms of abuse.

Different Approaches to Protection

The above examples illustrate the wide array of choices available to victims trying to protect themselves and their loved ones. Hamby and Gray-Little (2007) have proposed a model for understanding different ways of coping with the problems created by battering. It represents a continuum of approaches that victims might adopt, and how these approaches can involve multiple strategies, not just leaving the relationship. It is based on a model from

the world of finance. One of the key advantages offered by this financial model is that the full range of coping strategies are de-stigmatized—no one strategy is automatically deemed superior for every person. This provides a concrete analogy for how we might reframe our perceptions of victim's coping strategies.

The Conservative Strategy

In finance, a conservative strategy is one that emphasizes low-risk investments, often promising guaranteed returns, such as savings accounts or certificates of deposit. The conservative strategy minimizes or even virtually eliminates the risk of loss. In exchange for this low risk, however, investors accept a relatively low rate of return on their investments.

The conservative strategy is a better descriptor for strategies used by many women who might otherwise be labeled passive. People who take a conservative approach to coping tend to focus on minimizing the risk of further losses in many areas. Examples of such risks are the loss of financial well-being, housing, or custody of their children. They also may be trying to reduce the risk of separation violence, stalking, or harm to animals if they try more active coping strategies. Thus, conservative "copers" may be more likely to choose ways of addressing the violence, such as discussing it with their partners or seeking counseling, which do not involve leaving the relationship or making other large changes in their situation.

Conservative copers may also try to minimize the risk of stigma by using information management. Although this may appear to be minimization or denial, there is an enormous difference between a conscious effort to avoid stigma and a cognitive distortion. Terms like "minimization" and "denial" suggest that the woman herself does not fully recognize her own victimization, which Hamby and Gray-Little (1997) have found to be rare.

In the financial world, personal characteristics, such as low net worth, are associated with a greater tendency to use a conservative strategy (Embrey & Fox, 1997). Such findings provide another parallel

to the situation of battered women, who may be seen as passive copers but only when others fail to consider their context, such as a lack of financial resources. Leaving takes considerable economic and social resources. Thousands of dollars are required, for example, to secure and furnish a new home and file for divorce. Likewise, it is difficult to make major life changes without social support. Women without these resources may adopt a conservative strategy because they don't have the resources to choose other strategies, or because they stand to lose the few resources they do possess if their strategies do not work as planned.

The Venture Strategy

At the other end of the continuum is the "venture" strategy. In the investing world, this strategy is frequently referred to as an "aggressive" strategy, but we have avoided this term because we do not want to imply that women's use of violence is the only, or even a necessary, element of this approach. The term "venture" is designed to capture the higher element of risk that is the central component of this strategy. Confronting the perpetrator and leaving, especially in the midst of a crisis, are examples of what are, statistically, high-risk strategies (Davies, 2009). Some of these risks pertain directly to increased risks of further violence and stalking following separation, both of which are well documented (e.g., Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Leaving is also associated with threats by the batterer to harm children, pets, and victims' family members (Hamby, 2008). Some victims face other significant and even life-threatening risks, such as the risk of deportation for some immigrants (Hamby, 2008). Because many battered women face a daunting array of such risks, an over-emphasis on venture strategies may be dangerous, but this depends on individual circumstances.

The Balanced Strategy

Many financial advisors recommend a strategy between these two extremes—a balanced strategy. In finance, a balanced strategy refers to the creation of a diversified portfolio of investments that represent varying degrees of risk. The recommended balance of low- and high-risk investments varies with an individual's personal situation. A young person, or someone with a lot of money, can afford to take greater risks than people approaching retirement age with modest assets. The balanced strategy probably characterizes most women who have been battered. The few studies that assess many types of responses to violence (Hamby & Gray-Little, 1997; Yoshihama, 2002) indicate that many women—perhaps two-thirds—are trying numerous responses to violence, including some that are typically labeled "active" and "passive." Instead of trying to characterize victim's coping as *either* active *or* passive, it would be better to recognize that a smart overall strategy might include elements of both. That is likely to be the best way to simultaneously minimize harms and maximize the potential for gains.

Conclusion

A lot of people look at the efforts of battered women and see a glass half empty—too few efforts, executed too late after the violence begins. The data, however, better support the view that most women are making many efforts to protect themselves and their children, and improve their situation, whether they remain in or leave their relationships. Not surprisingly, seeking social support is far and away the most common strategy and reported by the vast majority of respondents who are given the chance to describe active strategies. It makes sense that talking over the problem with someone else would be the first step towards deciding what other actions to take.

It likewise makes sense that battered women may vary in their approach to protective strategies. For example, a woman with good financial resources is probably more likely to move directly into another home or apartment, rather than staying in a shelter. The typical battered woman is constantly assessing her risk of danger and trying different protective strategies in response. As they see how different strategies work under varying conditions,

they continue to strategize and adapt. We need to know much more than we do about when and why women choose particular strategies, and much more about all of the various strategies that women do use. A balanced overall strategy that operates on several fronts—not just focusing on safety but also acknowledging all of the risks that women face—is almost certainly what most women do. In order to best help battered women maximize gains and minimize losses across all the domains of their lives, advocates, providers, and scholars all need to work harder to step back and see the full world in which the victim lives.

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In Brief:
Battered Women's Protective Strategies

When exploring battered women's protective strategies, the first question to ask is, "Protection from what?" Protection from further violence is one answer, but many domains of a woman's life are threatened by battering: her physical safety and financial stability, the well-being and safety of her children, her social status, her psychological health, and her hopes and dreams for her life. One goal of this review is to broaden perceptions of both *what* women are trying to protect and *how* they are trying to protect it.

A Wide Range of Strategies Despite Constraints

Most women face substantial constraints in accessing services or using other protective strategies, including: batterer's behavior and threats; financial constraints; institutional policies that can make it difficult to access help; social norms and pressure, as well as a lack of social support; and personal values which complicate women's choices. Nonetheless, there is substantial evidence that most victims use multiple protective strategies. Existing data suggest all of the following are frequently used: immediate situational strategies; protecting children, family, friends, and pets; calling the police; obtaining a restraining order/order of protection; going to a domestic violence shelter; utilizing other domestic violence program services such as court accompaniment and transportation; reaching out for social support; turning to spiritual and religious resources; using traditional health, mental health & social services; and terminating the relationship.

Invisible Strategies

What is also striking about the research on protective strategies is what is missing, particularly from quantitative research on victims of domestic violence. For example, there is virtually no quantitative research on a wide range of strategies, including how many women: open bank accounts and start saving money; return to school; file for custody of their children, or seek supervised visits for their children when they visit their father; relocate to get away from a stalker; coach their children on how to escape during a violent episode or take steps to minimize their children's time with the batterer; successfully work with their partners, with or without the assistance of advocates or therapists, to make their relationship safe; or examine all of their constraints and options and make a calculated decision that staying is the safest thing to do at that moment.

Conclusion

A lot of people look at the efforts of battered women and see a glass half empty—too few efforts, executed too late after the violence begins. The data, however, better support the view that most women make many efforts to protect themselves and their children, while also searching for ways to improve their situation despite tremendous barriers. Battered women may vary in their approach to protective strategies. Depending on their circumstances, some women will adopt strategies to minimize the risk of further losses. Others will attempt immediate confrontation or exit while many will choose a combination of strategies. In order to best help battered women maximize gains and minimize losses across all the domains of their lives, advocates, providers, and scholars all need to see the full world in which the victim lives.