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CRIMINALIZATION OF SURVIVORS

Part II: Understanding Consequences and Barriers to Safety

Presented by
Jenny Eubanks, LSW & Bridgette Schossow Reinsmith, LPC

MEET YOUR PRESENTERS

Jenny Eubanks, LSW



Jenny Eubanks, LSW is an Outreach Advocate Contractor at Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh (WC&S) with 6 years of experience in direct service, IPV work. She runs the Court Ordered Support Group which is an alternative to traditional Battering Intervention, offered to survivors who have been arrested on domestic violence charges. Mrs. Eubanks is also part of WC&S' Wellness Team - providing non-resident support groups, community trainings, college student survivor collaboration, and general client support.

Bridgette Schossow Reinsmith, LPC



Bridgette Schossow Reinsmith, LPC is a Master's Level Clinician with nearly 20 years of experience in the mental health, addiction and offender treatment field. Bridgette has presented information on IPV, including IPV and impression management at conferences, to medical professionals and probation officers. She also served on multiple officer roles of the Metro Denver Domestic Violence Task Force. Mrs. Schossow Reinsmith currently serves as a Battering Intervention Program facilitator within Southwest Pennsylvania. Her focus is that of assisting the Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh in promoting social, judicial and criminal change in approaches toward IPV.

DISCLAIMERS

- Intimate Partner Violence - we will use IPV in place of Intimate Partner Violence. For definitions, please see the last few slides.

- Language - Language throughout may be gendered and hetero normative. We encourage you to reflect on how the harm of these policies, practices, and experiences may be exacerbated for survivors with intersectionality of identity.

- Content Warning - information covered may be triggering. We encourage you to take care of yourself and reach out for support as needed!

AGENDA

01. Defining the Problem

02. Weaponizing Systems

03. Consequences on Safety

04. Supporting Survivors

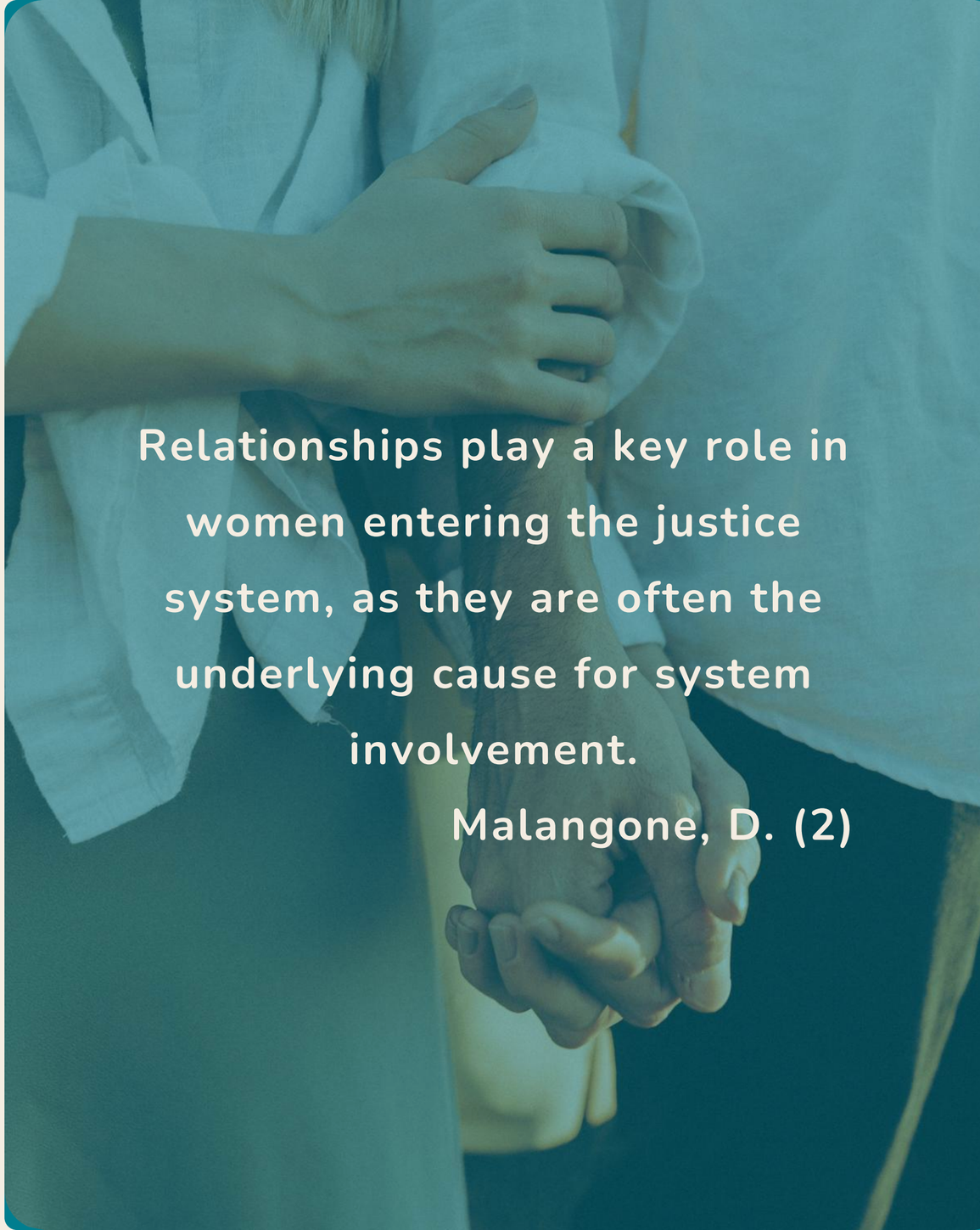
05. Q&A



DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Survivors may enter the criminal justice system through:

1. Coercive crime - manipulated or intimidated into criminal behaviors by their partner
2. Survival crime - economically motivated crimes OR coping/connection motivated crimes
3. **Criminalization of IPV - crimes committed in reaction to IPV experiences**



Relationships play a key role in women entering the justice system, as they are often the underlying cause for system involvement.

Malangone, D. (2)

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Victims of battering do many things to try to reduce, resist, cope with, and escape from violence. Protective and survival strategies vary by individual and often change over time. Static notions about who is a victim of battering—and the accompanying stereotypes they often produce—can have serious consequences for victim-defendants.

Osthoff, S., Sadusky, J., Chambers, A., & Cavero, Q. (4).

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Why not call the police?

- Retaliation
- Police violence
- Arrest of self or partner
- Eviction
- Cultural / community norms



DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Mandatory Arrest Laws - Police procedures and/or legislation require arrest when specific circumstances exist on an IPV call.

Dual Arrests - Arrest of both individuals involved in an IPV incident. Occurs even in incidents of self-defense.

Primary vs Secondary Aggressor - Concept utilized in determining the individual utilizing IPV tactics to gain control regardless of who initiated physical violence, particularly used in cases of mutual accusations.

Reactive Abuse - Violence used by a survivor as a means of responding to their own victimization within the relationship.

Self Defense - Narrow and specific definition for use of violence against another within systemic oversight and legal systems.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Police Contacted

Survivor ID’d as primary aggressor

Preliminary Arraignment

Preliminary Hearing

Plea vs. Trial

Case Continued

Dismissal vs. Expungement

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Women were eager to get the case over with and return home, so they accepted a guilty plea without full appraisal of the potential consequences of having a record. These consequences could include being barred from certain employment opportunities, denial or loss of public housing, denial or loss of welfare benefits, immigration status issues, and issues related to custody hearings - all things that disproportionately harm women because they tend to be the primary caregivers in relationships.

Miller, S. L. (3)

WEAPONIZING SYSTEMS

Violating no contact orders

Misunderstandings and manipulation of no (violent) contact orders may give the person using harm leverage.

First to the PFA Office

Detainment, incarceration, and time spent in court may prevent a survivor from filing a PFA before their partner.

Probation / Parole

The person using harm has a unique position to sabotage a survivor's completion of probation before judgement, probation, or parole.

Future Helpseeking

Survivors may feel betrayed by local police or that they cannot access 'victims' services because of their label as primary aggressor.

ICE

Leveraged by primary aggressor and prevent help seeking. Deportation concerns can be initiated by perpetrator, criminal justice system, and/or CYF system.

CYF

Leveraged by primary aggressor and prevent help seeking. Nature of the system is punitive and can be based on perceptions.

WEAPONIZING SYSTEMS

When survivors are charged with assaulting their abusive partners, the criminal charge can give the abuser a powerful tool – it can give [them] ways to manipulate the survivor who resisted [their] violence.

Davis, S., & Pezzell, C. (1)

CONSEQUENCES ON SAFETY

Self

- View self as abusive
- Shame and guilt
- Scrambling (to stay or to leave)

Employment

- Job loss due to arrest or charges
- Difficultly obtaining new employment

Housing

- Inability to remain in the home (PFA, no contact, eviction, etc.)
- Lack of safe, affordable housing

Finances

- Financial dependence
- Court debt
- Expungement fees

Relationships

- Shame
- Muddied water on who is in the wrong

Custody

- Charges become leverage for custody
- CYF involvement if children were present during incident

IMPACTS OF INCARCERATION

- 71-95% of incarcerated women are survivors of **physical** IPV
- 62% of women in state prison have a minor child
- Consequences of a criminal record are felt in areas that provide protective factors to survivors - employment, housing, and economic stability.
- Credibility with systems
- Mirrored experience of power and control



SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

Program Considerations

- Early involvement (ID questions for attorney; early screening and assessment for all arrests, etc.)
- Group psycho education
- Expungement support
- Acknowledge coercion of even the best program
- Identify effective metrics of success

Policy Considerations

- Definition of self defense and self defense laws
- Statewide policies
- Policies that reflect gender nuances and queer inclusion
- Educating legal entities, police training
- Provider training and competency requirements
- Protective services training and policy review &/or modification

Q&A



Thank You

SOURCES

(1) Davis, S., & Pezzell, C. (2025, July). Working with survivors in jail: A manual for community-based advocates. St. Paul; National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women. https://bwjp.org/site-resources/working-with-survivors-in-jail-a-manual-for-community-based-advocates/?section_slug=criminalized-survivors

(2) Malangone, D. (2020). Understanding the needs of criminalized survivors. New York; Center for Court Innovation. https://www.judicialengagementnetwork.org/media/com_jen_documents/documents/71-understanding-the-needs-of-criminalized-survivors.pdf

(3) Miller, S. L. (2001). The paradox of women arrested for domestic violence. *Violence Against Women,* 7(12), 1339–1376. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778010122183900

(4) Osthoff, S., Sadusky, J., Chambers, A., & Cavero, Q. (2025, August). Building a coordinated community response to the criminalization of survivors: A toolkit. St. Paul; National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women.

All other sources are listed in supporting documentation.