

# Mothering in the context of domestic violence: the pervasiveness of a deficit model of mothering

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## ABSTRACT

Despite growing concerns with the situation of children exposed to domestic violence, and although women have been seen as central in the welfare of their children, limited attention has been paid to the issue of mothering in this context. This paper examines how concerns regarding abused women's mothering have been articulated in the academic literature on children's exposure to domestic violence, and argues that the dominant discourse in this area has been characterized by a deficit model of mothering. Implications of the pervasiveness of a deficit model for child welfare policies and practices are highlighted. Finally, this paper identifies key elements that should be considered in the development of a feminist perspective on mothering in the context of domestic violence, which could lead to less blaming and more supportive practices.

## INTRODUCTION

During the 1980s and 1990s, there have been growing concerns in the United Kingdom and North America regarding the situation of children exposed to domestic violence. In the United Kingdom, the NCH Action for Children's study has contributed to the increased awareness regarding the situation of children living with domestic violence, demonstrating that 87% of the 108 abused women who took part in the research believed that their children were aware of the violence at home and that almost three quarters of the women said that their children had witnessed violent incidents (Abrahams 1994). More recently, the findings of the prevalence study produced by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children revealed that 26% of the general population sample of 2869 young adults had seen physical violence between their carers at some time in their childhood, and for 5% of the respondents the violence had been constant or frequent (Cawson *et al.* 2000). In North America, the most commonly cited estimates have been derived from family violence surveys conducted in the United States. For instance, Carlson (1984) estimated that at least 3.3 million children are at risk of exposure to parental violence every year. Straus (1992) suggested

that at least a third of American children have witnessed violence between their parents and that most have endured repeated instances of these painful and distressing events, and estimated that more than 10 million American children witness a physical assault between their parents each year. In the face of such figures, the previously 'hidden victims' of domestic violence (Abrahams 1994; Holden 1998) have been given considerable attention, in research as well as in policies and practices.

Despite growing concerns with the situation of children exposed to domestic violence, and although women have been seen as central in the welfare of their children (Gordon 1988; Krane 2003; Scourfield 2003), limited attention has been paid to the issue of mothering in the context of domestic violence. Indeed, Radford & Hester (2001) point out that

Despite almost thirty years of research into and activism against violence against women, little has been written about mothering in the context of abuse, whether from the viewpoint of women's experiences, of children's experiences, or on the basis of review of social policy and academic discourses. (p. 135)

Nonetheless, concerns about women's mothering have continuously been raised alongside concerns regarding the situation of children living with domes-

tic violence. This paper explores how these concerns have been articulated in the academic literature on children and domestic violence, and the implications for child welfare policies and practices. More specifically, the first section of the paper considers the importance of domestic violence as a child welfare matter. The following two sections argue that the dominant discourse in this area has been characterized by a deficit model of mothering and highlight some of the actual and potential implications for child welfare policies and practices. In contrast, the last section identifies key elements that should be considered in the development of a feminist perspective on mothering in the context of domestic violence, which could lead to less blaming and more supportive practices. The paper draws on research from the United Kingdom and North America, but does not present an exhaustive or systematic review of the literature in this field.

#### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A CHILD WELFARE MATTER

Whilst feminist scholars have long raised concerns regarding the situation of children living with domestic violence (Pizzey 1974; Mullender & Morley 1994), a large proportion of the academic work on children and domestic violence has developed within a scholarship that has been characterized by a general move away from an analysis that centralizes issues of gender and power. This scholarship has focused on children and has been overwhelmingly concerned with the negative impacts for children of their exposure to domestic violence (Fantuzzo & Lindquist 1989; Jaffe *et al.* 1990; Carroll 1994; Brandon & Lewis 1996; Graham-Bermann 1998; Carter *et al.* 1999; Fantuzzo & Mohr 1999; Osofsky 1999; Rossman 2001; Wolfe *et al.* 2003). Holden (1998) points out that

The corpus of empirical literature clearly establishes that children who live in maritally violent homes are at risk for a wide variety of problems. Associating marital violence with children's emotional and behavioral problems has been the primary question in most of the research published to date. In studies that are sometimes referred to as 'first generation' research on the topic, numerous investigators have successfully linked children's exposure to family violence with a range of behavior and adjustment problems. (p. 6)

This scholarship has been underpinned by a psycho-developmental perspective and has primarily drawn upon quantitative research methods (Fantuzzo & Lindquist 1989; Jaffe *et al.* 1990; Carroll 1994; Brandon & Lewis 1996; Kolbo *et al.* 1996; Edleson

1999; Rossman 2001; Wolfe *et al.* 2003; Harold & Howarth 2004). Linking these theoretical and empirical approaches, Fantuzzo & Mohr (1999) argue that 'using the developmental approach, the impact of child exposure to domestic violence can be assessed by *measuring* a child's performance of age-appropriate psychological, cognitive, emotional, and social tasks' (p. 28, emphasis added). In a review of the research in this area, Edleson (1999) examines empirical studies reporting associations between witnessing domestic violence and child development problems. He concludes that these studies demonstrate associations between witnessing domestic violence, children's behavioural and emotional functioning, and children's cognitive functioning and attitudes. In addition, whilst most studies have examined problems associated with recent witnessing of domestic violence, a number of studies have mentioned much longer-term problems. In this regard, Rossman (2001) suggests that a useful way of thinking about the long-term effects of exposure to domestic violence is to recognize that 'exposure at any age can create disruptions that can interfere with the accomplishment of development tasks, and early exposure may create more severe disruptions by affecting the subsequent chain of developmental tasks' (p. 58).

Two common trends have been identified in this scholarship, which have a notable influence on how abused women are perceived as mothers. The first of these trends is to automatically define children's exposure to domestic violence as a form of child abuse, whether or not the children are 'directly' abused (James 1994; McKay 1994). The second trend refers to the 'cycle of violence' or the 'cross-generational transmission of violence', a theory that suggests that violence is 'transmitted' from one generation to the other through the family and that children who have been exposed to domestic violence will themselves engage in violent relationships, either as perpetrators or as victims (Jaffe *et al.* 1990; Peled *et al.* 1995; Cummings 1998). Caution is however needed when considering these ideas. First, the focus on group trends and on 'problems' tends to obscure the variability of children's individual experiences of domestic violence. As pointed out by Edleson (2004):

Within the groups of exposed children, many do not exhibit problems and do not themselves become victims of child abuse. We do not know which children are safe and recover quickly once in a safe environment and which may develop short and long-term problems. (p. 17)

Indeed, some children who have been exposed to domestic violence do not display more problems than children who have not been so exposed, and children who live with domestic violence do not all engage in violent relationships as adults, and not all adults who engage in violent relationships have experienced violence as children. Moreover, references to the 'effects' or the 'impacts' of exposure to domestic violence tend in fact to indicate associations between variables, and it is thus not possible to establish a causal relationship (see discussion in Morley & Mullender 1994; Edleson 2004; Radford & Hester 2006). Furthermore, these theories draw upon a view of children with little or no agency and fail to explore children's perspectives.

This scholarship has been instrumental in raising the awareness in relation to domestic violence in the child welfare arena, because it has highlighted concerns regarding the safety and development of children exposed to domestic violence (Carroll 1994; Mullender & Morley 1994; Brandon & Lewis 1996). In the United Kingdom, Carroll (1994) argued that many children who live with domestic violence 'fulfil the criteria outlined in the legislation, on an impairment of their emotional and social development which amount to "significant harm"' (p.11), and suggests that the 'response by child protection agencies to other areas of child abuse offers a model which can readily be adapted to meet the needs of children who live in violent families' (p.12). There have been nonetheless important changes in both policies and practices in order to better address the situation of these children, and some authors have recently noted a 'mainstreaming' of domestic violence in the child welfare arena (Humphreys & Stanley 2006; Rivett & Kelly 2006; Featherstone & Peckover 2007).

#### A DEFICIT MODEL OF MOTHERING

As mentioned above, women are generally perceived as central in the welfare of their children (Gordon 1988; Krane 2003; Scourfield 2003). In the scholarship on children's exposure to domestic violence, women's mothering has been seen as a determining factor in the protection of children and in how children are affected by the violence (Holden 1998; Holden *et al.* 1998; Edleson 1999; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann 2000, 2001; Jaffe & Crooks 2005; Letourneau *et al.* 2007). In fact, the quality of the mother-child relationship has been identified as one of the most important predictor in the development of children who have been exposed to domestic violence (Letourneau *et al.* 2001).

Nonetheless, the focus on children means that women have been relegated to the periphery, to be solely considered in relation to their children, and there appears to be no commitment to the development of a holistic understanding of abused women's complex experiences as mothers. Moreover, the frequent use of gender-blind terms such as 'parents' and 'parenting' (Holden *et al.* 1998; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann 2000, 2001) obscures the fact that it is women's actions that have been at the centre of the analysis, and that different social expectations are placed on women and men (Baines *et al.* 1998; Fox 1998; Scourfield 2003). To some extent, this move away from a gender-based analysis has been justified by the idea that both men's violence towards women and women's violence towards men can be important from the perspective of a witnessing child. As Jouriles *et al.* (2001) suggest, 'it is possible that husband-to-wife violence and wife-to-husband violence – although different from one another in form, function, and consequences – both influence child adjustment' (p.15).

The fact that this scholarship has been overwhelmingly concerned with the negative impacts for children of their exposure to domestic violence, and with women's mothering as a determining factor in how children are affected by the violence, has led to an emphasis on women's 'deficiencies' and 'failures' as mothers. For instance, Pepler *et al.* (2000) argue that 'the problem facing both the mothers and children in families at risk is that women who are abused have few resources to bring to the extremely demanding task of parenting' (p. 42) and that, as a result, 'it is not surprising . . . if these mothers fall short in providing the nurturance and support necessary for the optimal development of their children' (p. 42). A crucial issue in locating the problem primarily with women and their mothering is that it shifts the attention away from men's violent behaviours and their consequences for both women and children. In this regard, Edleson (1999) rightly point out that 'because mothers and children are often more available for study, it is easier to collect data on these relationships, but this unfortunately leads to findings that focus on mothers' problems, rather than the factors that created them' (p. 863).

Moreover, it seems that abused women are likely to be seen as 'failing' as mothers regardless of their actions, because the problems displayed by children who have been exposed to domestic violence are frequently seen as resulting from 'deficiencies' in women's mothering. In their influential work on the

behaviours and beliefs of abused women in regard to their 'parenting', Holden *et al.* (1998) have conducted three interconnected quantitative studies, and the findings of these studies revealed that on the vast majority of measures assessing child-rearing behaviours, women in a domestic violence refuge do not differ significantly from women in the comparison group:

Many of the mothers in violent marriages do indeed engage in aggressive behaviour toward their children. However, community mothers also engage in child-directed aggression; there was relatively little difference between the battered and comparison mothers on the variable. (p. 326)

Moreover, the data revealed a significant improvement for women and children 6 months after the end of the violent relationship, as the women reported significant decreases in the rates of stress and depressive symptoms, and perceived their children as having few behaviour problems. Notwithstanding these findings, Holden *et al.* (1998) assert that 'the question of what is "adequate" child rearing is difficult to determine' (p. 314) and argue that 'although mothers from violent and matched-comparison homes did not differ on a variety of child-rearing measures, that does not mean that the quality of mothering was necessarily good or adequate' (p. 314). They then add:

Ultimately, adequacy is best judged as a function of child outcomes. Given the high rates of child behaviour problems in the violent homes, it could be argued that the mothers were not providing good-enough parenting to compensate for the toxic environment. Perhaps a mother in a maritally violent home needs to engage in certain parenting behaviours above and beyond what may be needed in non-violent homes in order to be judged as adequate for the violent home context. (p. 314)

The burden of responsibility that is placed on abused women – and consequently the likelihood for them to be seen as 'failing' as mothers – is exacerbated by the idea that exposure to domestic violence is automatically a form of child abuse, which implies that children are inevitably affected by their exposure to the violence. In addition, the theory of the 'cycle of violence' suggests that even those children who do not actually display problems will do so in the future.

Furthermore, this deficit model tends to pathologize abused women and their mothering. For instance, Stephens (1999) proposes 'a deeper understanding of what makes a given caretaker respond actively or passively to a child's need of protection from violence' (p. 732), and argues that

Although the trauma of being battered unquestionably plays a part in inaction and in spill over of the violence onto the children, it does not solely account for why some battered women actively protect their children and why others are move passive... It seems reasonable to assume that the impact of domestic violence on parenting behavior is mediated in part by individual experiences and expectation regarding childhood, children and childrearing – that is by the mother's internal mental representation of herself, her child and what constitutes appropriate caregiving. There is high concordance between mothers' internal representations of their own early attachment experiences and the quality of their infants' attachment to them. (p. 733).

Stephens (1999) suggests that these women are 'psychologically trapped', and that it impedes their ability to see clearly their children's need to be protected from perpetrators. These 'traps' can be found in women's struggle to leave their violent partners because they are their children's fathers, women's 'denial' that their children witnessed or were affected by the violence and in women's convictions that the batterer loves the children and that the children love the batterer. She also argues that women tend to 'adultify' their children, when they view their children as embodying the hated characteristics of their partners, blame and 'parentify' them (thus creating a 'role reversal').

Overall, this section of the paper has argued that a deficit model of mothering has prevailed in the literature on children's exposure to domestic violence, which has focused on the negative impacts for children of being exposed to domestic violence. On the one hand, women's mothering has been seen as important, because it has been identified as a determining factor in the protection of children and in how children are affected by the violence. However, the focus on children means that women have not been considered in their own right and there appears to be no commitment to the development of a holistic understanding of their complex experiences of mothering in these circumstances. The emphasis is therefore on abused women's 'deficiencies' and they are likely to be seen as 'failing' as mothers, regardless of their actions. The following section considers a number of actual and potential implications for child welfare policies and practices with women and children living with domestic violence.

#### IMPLICATIONS OF A DEFICIT MODEL OF MOTHERING FOR CHILD WELFARE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

There has been a marked tendency in child welfare to focus on women and on their mothering, and to

ignore men's role in relation to their children (Gordon 1988; Daniel & Taylor 1999; Krane 2003; Scourfield 2003, 2006; Featherstone *et al.* 2007). In regard to domestic violence, some authors have argued explicitly for a focus on women:

What is clear is that the health and behavior of children in turbulent, maltreating and occasionally violent households known to CPS are mostly affected by their relationship with their primary caregiver, at least up to the age of 6. Therapeutic and behavioral services certainly need to retain a principle focus on the primary caregiver to ensure both protection and appropriate parenting responses to the child. (English *et al.* 2003, p. 55)

Research evidence suggests that a deficit model of mothering has constituted a notable trend in child welfare practices and that abused women are frequently perceived as 'failing' as mothers in this context (Mullender 1996; Magen 1999). In a qualitative study that involved a documentary analysis of child protection case files for 32 families where domestic violence had been identified and interviews with five social workers, Humphreys (1999) identified a general pattern of avoidance and minimization in practices with these families. This happens through not mentioning domestic violence as an issue to be considered, but also through reporting violence as 'fighting' or 'marital conflict', naming the women's violence as equivalent or more important than the men's violence, and naming other issues as the problem and focusing on these issues rather than on the men's violence (e.g. women's abuse of alcohol or drugs). In a number of cases, the children had been registered under the category 'child neglect', which resulted in the focus being placed on women and the violence being made invisible. In contrast, Humphreys (1999) suggested that a trend towards naming domestic violence more directly emerged in practices, and the findings showed that domestic violence was more likely to become a central issue in situations where a child had been hurt or a woman seriously physically injured. Whilst these women and children had been provided with varying degrees of support, intervention strategies such as the removal of children had also been used.

In the United States, Magen (1999) highlights difficulties with the frequent use of the category 'failure to protect' in cases of domestic violence. This concept is problematic because it places the emphasis on abused women's mothering:

In failure to protect cases, the onus to control and predict the abuse is placed on the victim – the battered woman – rather than the perpetrator – the batterer. The problem becomes

defined in terms of what the mother failed to do rather than in terms of the father's actions. (p. 129)

Magen (1999) also point out that child welfare professionals tend to operate on the assumptions that witnessing violence is automatically a form of child abuse and that abused women should leave their partners, and suggests that these assumptions reflect a misunderstanding of the problematic and lead to poor and blaming practices. He therefore argues that instead of operating on such assumptions, child welfare professionals should assess the risk to children on an individual basis, and 'asking to battered women about domestic violence is the minimum required for understanding the risk to children' (p.131).

Practices that draw upon a deficit model of mothering are likely to be experienced by women as punitive, particularly if they are not followed by more positive practical and emotional support strategies. They are also likely to discourage abused women from reaching out for assistance (DeVoe & Smith 2003; Peckover 2003; Alaggia *et al.* 2007). The findings of a qualitative study conducted in the United States with 43 women who had experienced domestic violence demonstrate that while the participants reported positive experiences with individual service providers, they primarily reported negative experiences in regard to their help-seeking efforts (DeVoe & Smith 2003). The participants expressed a mistrust of the system and the findings showed that 'the fear of being charged with neglect or failure to protect and the threat of losing custody of their children caused many victims of domestic violence to delay or avoid altogether seeking help or protective services for themselves and their children' (p. 287). Moreover, few women reported that they had been able to identify service providers with appropriate expertise to support them and their children. Research also shows that women who are marginalized on the basis of class, sexual orientation, race, immigration status and ability may face greater barriers in seeking help and accessing services for themselves and for their children (Alaggia *et al.* 2007).

In this context, the focus has been kept away from men's violence and its impacts on both women and children (Pringle 1995; Mullender 1996; Stanley 1997), and limited attention has been paid to the role of abusive men as fathers (Bancroft & Silverman 2002; Harne 2005; Featherstone & Peckover 2007). In this regard, Featherstone & Peckover (2007) draw attention to the phenomenon by which 'domestically violent fathers' have disappeared in policy discourses

and in everyday practices, and suggest that rather than simply offering support to women and children, a crucial part of the intervention in this area must be to find ways of engaging men about their behaviour. They argue that naming violent men as fathers has a number of pragmatic and theoretical advantages:

First, in contexts designated around children's welfare, such men will not get attention unless it is seen that this may be associated with better outcomes for children . . . Considerable number (of violent men) are involved with children with no intervention currently. Naming them as fathers directs attention to this. But we also would speculate that engaging with them as fathers may open up possibilities for change. (p.196)

### TOWARDS A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON MOTHERING IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

So far, this paper has proposed a critique of the 'mainstream' literature on children living with domestic violence. It has demonstrated that concerns regarding abused women's mothering have continuously been raised alongside concerns regarding the situation of children exposed to domestic violence, and these concerns have been articulated within a deficit model of mothering. A number of theoretical and practical implications have been highlighted. Given these implications, it appears to be crucial to give more direct attention to the issue of mothering in the context of domestic violence, and this section of the paper identifies a number of key elements that should be considered in the development of a feminist perspective on mothering in the context of domestic violence.

First, it appears necessary to adopt an analysis that centralizes issues of gender and power, and locates the problem clearly in men's violence against women (Bograd 1988; Mullender 1996; Hanmer 2000; Yllö 2005). However, this should not result in a one-dimensional view of women as victims and obscure the fact that they may hold multiple identities and live in different conditions, namely in relation to their mothering (Krane & Davies 2002; Radford & Hester 2006).

In a feminist perspective, mothering is considered primarily in terms of women's experiences (DeVoe & Smith 2002; Radford & Hester 2006), but feminist scholars in the field of domestic violence have long been concerned with the situation of children living with domestic violence (Bowker *et al.* 1988; Stark & Flitcraft 1988; Mullender & Morley 1994) and have explored both women's and children's experiences of domestic violence (Hague 1994; McGee 2000;

Mullender *et al.* 2002; Mullender 2006). Women and children are thus considered together and in their own rights, which allows for a more complex understanding of mother-child relationships in the context of domestic violence. For instance, two large qualitative studies on children's experiences of domestic violence explored children's and women's perspectives and revealed that mother-child relationships may be affected by the violence (McGee 2000; Mullender *et al.* 2002). The findings suggest that children either find that the relationship with their mothers improves as a consequence of the violence or blame their mothers for splitting the family or for taking the violence for so long. McGee (2000) further argues that the mother-child relationship can be particularly affected when the child appears to imitate the aggressor's behaviours and uses violence towards the mother.

So far, these studies have emphasized the difficulties that women face in these circumstances and the negative consequences of the violence for both women and children. For instance, Mullender *et al.* (2002) suggest that the violence affects mother-child relationships, and makes the communication difficult:

The linked processes of self-protection and protection of others combine for both children and women to create contexts in which silence had appeared the best, or at least safest, option. But silence, in turn, had meant that it was possible to misread and misunderstand each other's knowledge, needs and motivations. (p. 167)

Kelly (1994) argues that these difficulties are exacerbated by the 'double level of intentionality' which refers to the fact that men's abusive behaviours directed towards either the woman or the child may be at the same time intended to affect the other. Examples of this include men abusing a woman in front of her child or abusing a child in front of her or his mother in order to control both, or making a woman watch or participate in the abuse of her child. Moreover, Kelly (1994) points out that for some women bearing and caring for their children is so connected to their experiences of domestic violence that it is extremely difficult to disconnect these two issues. This may happen when children are conceived as the consequence of rape, when continual pregnancies are used as a control strategy, when children are encouraged or choose to side with the abusive man, and when children are drawn into the abuse of their mothers.

It is important to locate the difficulties women face in these circumstances in a comprehensive under-

standing of the social organization of mothering and of the high expectations that are placed on women as mothers, because these elements influence both women's identities and the conditions in which they perform their mothering. Mullender *et al.* (2002) do that when they point out that 'it is not an accident that abusive men attack women's abilities to mother, they know that this represents a source of positive identity, the thing above all else that abused women try to preserve, and also that it is an area of vulnerability' (p. 158). However, limited work has so far been done in this area.

Furthermore, to document the difficulties involved in mothering in the context of domestic violence is not sufficient to fully understand women's experiences, neither it is to counteract the deficit model of mothering presented above. Indeed, it is also necessary to explore the positive strategies women adopt in these circumstances. In this regard, Radford & Hester (2001) propose that 'the efforts that women living with violent partners may make to resist the violence and continue parenting on a daily basis are not adequately considered in the research literature' (p. 145) and that 'a more constructive future research agenda would build on women's efforts and experiences to consider ways of working with them in meeting the needs of children' (p. 145). A few recent studies have acknowledged the fact that abused women do develop strategies in order to protect and care for their children (Mohr *et al.* 2001; Mullender *et al.* 2002; Radford & Hester 2006), and Mullender *et al.* (2002) conclude that

Domestic violence creates an environment deeply un conducive to achieving even 'good enough' mothering. That so many women do resolve this impossible conundrum is testimony to their spirit, endurance and determination. That many are unable to surmount the obstacles constantly and consistently should surprise no one. (p. 157)

This perspective has the potential to lead to less blaming and more supportive practices in the child welfare area, because it places the focus on men's violence and reiterates the idea that the best way to protect and help children is through protecting and supporting their mothers (Kelly 1994; Mullender & Morley 1994; McGee 2000; Mullender *et al.* 2002; Humphreys *et al.* 2006), although it is crucial not to suppose an 'inviolable alliance' between women and their children (see Featherstone & Trinder 1997). As pointed out by Mullender & Morley (1994) in their work on children living with domestic violence:

Women's and children's interests may conflict but, except where this is demonstrably and irresolvably the case, the most

effective and cost effective way to help children is to understand what is happening to their mothers and to work in alliance with them. (p.10)

It should be noted that although the work of feminist scholars has been instrumental in raising the public awareness of the situation of children living with domestic violence, this perspective does not fit easily within the current child welfare agenda. Featherstone & Trinder (1997) rightly point out that the association between feminism and child welfare 'remains conceptually a marriage of convenience, with limited prospects for an enduring and stable relationship' (p. 150). Whilst the elements that have been proposed in this section could feed into a broader rethinking of child welfare, in the short-term, child welfare workers could take pragmatic steps in order to provide abused women with more space to share their experiences of mothering while questioning and challenging their own views on mothering.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the notable influence that the academic literature on children's exposure to domestic violence has had on research, policies and practices, there has been limited critical examination of the ways in which mothering has been considered in this work (Radford & Hester 2001). This paper has proposed a critique of this scholarship and has demonstrated that concerns about women's mothering have been largely articulated within a deficit model of mothering, which raises a number of theoretical and practical implications. In the child welfare area, the deficit model of mothering shifts the focus away from men's violence to emphasize women's 'deficiencies' and 'failures' as mothers and leads to blaming practices. Such practices are likely to be experienced by abused women as punitive and to discourage them from reaching out for assistance.

This paper has thus stressed the importance of giving more direct attention to the issue of mothering in the context of domestic violence, and has proposed that the work of feminist scholars provides a more promising basis to build on in this area. This perspective has the potential to lead to less blaming and more supportive practices in the child welfare area, because it places the focus on men's violence and reiterates the idea that the best way to protect and help children is through protecting and supporting their mothers.

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