

FEMICIDE: A STUDY OF ONE FAMILY'S EXPERIENCE

THEIR "NEW NORMAL"

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree Master of Social Work

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how intimate partner femicide (IPF) has impacted one family. IPF is well researched and studies are largely centered on indicators of intimate partner violence (IPV) and the impacts of children witnessing violence. There is very little research conducted with family members exploring how they are impacted by the violent death of their loved one.

This study concentrates on the impacts experienced by one family who has suffered the loss of a loved one due to intimate partner femicide. This study was conducted via a series of interviews with Gail, who lost her sister. Due to the nature and intensity of the subject matter no other family members were contacted. Our first interview was in person and took place in central Ontario, several hours away from where her sister was killed. I conducted further interviews by phone to obtain additional understanding about her experiences of the loss of her sister.

I used feminist theory to explore the dynamics in the victim's relationship prior to her death. Feminist theory was used because it explores the power imbalances that exist in relationships. This revealed a cycle of violence that existed in her intimate relationship and the challenges this woman faced in her attempts to leave her relationship.

As a result of her sister's death Gail and her children have been very deeply affected. Through a thematic analysis of the data, four main themes emerged: 1) the victim feared for her own safety pre and post relationship; and the family were afraid once the woman went missing; 2) the family members faced and continue to face mental

health challenges including a very young child suffering with suicide ideations, depression, and anxiety; 3) ways of coping included concealment of emotions and the use of non-medicinal methods of healing trauma; 4) Gail felt guilty that she did not do enough to help keep her sister safe but eventually coming to the realization that she did as much as could be done.

Family stress theory is another important theory used to understand and make sense of Gail's experiences of femicide. Family stress theory refers to multiple stressors as a "pile up", a stage that Gail encountered when she struggled with depression, anxiety and financial struggles after taking time off work to care for her own children and grandchildren, resulting from Gail's daughter's own mental health breakdown which she sees as tied to the families experience of femicide.

Of the many things that came from this study I found the most striking was talk of the "new normal" created as a result of the femicide. The new normal has impacted the whole family as they adjust to life without the one person who was central in bringing the family together to celebrate family events. These gatherings no longer take place. When they do half the family does not participate due in part to their ongoing grief and anger over their loss that their sister is no longer present.

These findings of my study bring further attention to the continued struggles and impact that IPF has on families. It highlights that there is still much work to be done to put an end to this heinous crime.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all the women who have been murdered by their intimate partners, and the children and family members they leave behind. The pain of losing a beloved family member to a violent death is a deeply felt by families, friends and the community members.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my dear friend who agreed to participate in this thesis; without her participation this thesis would not have been possible. It is obviously with deepest sadness that the IPF of my friend's sister occurred that ultimately allowed the writing of this thesis to be possible. I want to acknowledge how difficult this subject matter has been to talk about during the interview phase. IPF and particularly how it impacts the family has been a challenging subject to research, explore and even write and reread; however I feel that this is an important topic that needs to be discussed.

I thank my family, my husband who has encouraged and supported me for the past thirty years in my pursuit of continued education and has never faltered in his support of me. My son and daughter who have embraced my path through college and universities their whole lives and have cheered me on have been a driving force for me. I love you more than I can ever express and I know you both know this. To the newest member of my family my daughter-in-law who has taken charge of the household without a whisper of complaint while I have sat in my room for endless hours reading or writing up papers, I

love you and thank you for being part of my family and supporting me while I complete this Master's degree.

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Chapter One: Introduction

I will start this chapter with my own personal story of how violence impacted my family, the trauma we went through and how we coped with this tragedy of the sudden and violent death of my uncle. I am including this personal reflection as a way of demonstrating social workers commitment to critical reflexivity (Fook, 2015) and to feminist epistemology which seeks how gender impacts what we know to be knowledge and the need for researchers to situate themselves in the scholarship (Anderson E. , 1995). The experiences that I bring to this project are deeply personal and are important forms of understanding that when acknowledged and considered, have the power to enhance the meaning that can be made from this study.

The Impact Of Violence On My Family

My own personal experience of how violence impacts the family began long before I worked in the field of violence against women (VAW). I come to the social work field after working in an administrative role for many years in both England and Canada; I currently work as a child protection worker as a member of a domestic violence team, where I continue to see how the children are impacted by the violence endured by their mother and witnessed by them.

In 1992 my family was impacted by violence through the murder of my uncle who was shot and killed in America. He left his wife and three young children in India in search of a new life with the idea that he would then bring his wife and children to America. One of the last conversations I had with him was telling him not to forget us and

not to lose touch. When he arrived in Newark, New Jersey he found a job at a gas station. While working the one night shift, he was shot and killed during an attempted robbery.

I remember every detail of the day I received the news of his murder. Even twenty seven years later this memory is as fresh in my mind as it was on that fateful day in November 1992. I recall being midway through my second pregnancy; my young son and I sat eating lunch at the time when I received the call from another uncle telling me the news. I screamed and cried hysterically at hearing the dreadful news; news that came out of the blue. I gathered my son and drove to my uncle's home in a state of complete shock. My initial thought upon arriving at my uncle's home was worry that I would find my grandmother having some medical issues as a result of this shocking news.

Thankfully she was blissfully unaware of what was happening as she had gone out with some of her friends to the local temple. It felt like hours waiting for her to return, when she did get home my mother broke the news to her and I remember her collapsing and crying so much it was unbearable to watch. This was one of the hardest things for me that day seeing my grandmother being told the news that one of her daughter's was now widowed.

I remember calling for a doctor to come to the house and sedate my grandmother for fear that she may suffer a heart attack from the shock (thankfully she was fine). Over the course of the next few days I remember the hundreds of relatives who came to see my grandmother pay their respects to her. My grandmother was a strong woman but this tragedy impacted her deeply; I believe it aged her as she died just six years later.

These memories, feelings and thoughts from that day did not, and have not left me; I still feel a great sadness when I think of my uncle. During the early years after my uncle's death each time I saw an ambulance rushing by I would suddenly be reminded of my uncle and felt a deep sadness. I would wonder whether he died instantly or did he lie helplessly waiting for an ambulance to come help him. I remember there were many times when I would just begin to cry for no reason. The sound of an ambulance, still sometimes trigger these emotions.

For my family, the death of my uncle had many different impacts. One of the first challenges we faced was 'who' would take care of his funeral and his ashes how this should be organized? My uncle and my father were both born in the same village back in India; in our culture that makes them brothers. I persuaded my father and another uncle to travel to New Jersey to take care of the funeral arrangements and then ensure that my uncle's ashes were repatriated back to India to his family. I convinced my father and uncle to take some photographs of my deceased uncle in case my aunt or other members of the family, (his parents and his children) might need confirmation that it was him. I remember vaguely looking at the photographs and finding some solace in them in that we were grieving for the right person, given that only two other family members saw my uncle's body. When my father came back from America I recall him telling me that when he saw my uncle there was a very small mark on his face where the bullet had exited, and he looked like he was sleeping.

My uncle's death deeply affected me and my extended family as we grieved the loss of a loved one, killed by a stranger. The death of someone at the hands of their intimate partner adds yet another dimension to the family grief.

Research Focus

This main purpose and focus of this thesis is to study the impacts of intimate partner femicide (IPF) on the extended family. Including considerations of how families cope after the death of their family member; what challenges they face; what coping strategies they use to deal with their loss either collectively as a family, or individually as members of the family.

Gail is my main participant in this study, who is one of several siblings of Joy, the woman killed by femicide. Gail is a former co-worker in the VAW shelter that we both worked at for a short time. From this work and her personal experience of IPV Gail has a deep understanding of the VAW sector. She and her family have knowledge of the impacts of IPF that has informed this thesis.

Stories of femicide are relayed through the media; we hear stories of how a woman is killed by her former or current partner, we may hear how abusive their relationship was and whether or not children witnessed the murder of their mother by their father or father figure. We also hear about the trial and the sentencing; however, once the trial is over the family goes back to living their "new normal" life and we hear little in the media about the long term effects of these traumas on the family. Often the only time the woman killed is mentioned again in the media is when another woman is

killed. My main focus throughout this study was to find out how the extended family is coping with their loss; what challenges they have faced since the femicide; what has happened to the child involved and what if any advocacy the family has taken on.

Working in social work and specifically in the VAW sector is both challenging and rewarding. A major anxiety for any social worker who works in this sector is potentially hearing news that a woman they may have known was killed as a result of IPF. Women often tell VAW workers their ex-partners have threatened that if this woman calls the police he would be able to kill her faster than the police could arrive. This fear keeps women from disclosing any abuse to workers, family and friends and reaching out for help.

IPF is a term used generally to describe circumstances where women have been murdered by a previous or current intimate partner (Crawford & Dawson, 2018). IPF is an epidemic that adversely affects female's worldwide; the impact of IPF causes substantial health consequences to women and children (Burnett, Swanberg, Hudson, & Schminkey, 2018). Abuse causes depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health issues. It results in physical injuries from bruises to broken bones and beyond. These outcomes place additional financial burdens on societies which may be particularly challenging for communities that can often already be struggling to cope with the lack of funding to the social services sector; this is evident in our Province where the social service sector struggles to provide counselling for both women and children due to the lack of funding which results in long wait times (Gerster, 2019). When women leave abusers they may go to a shelter and find that many times the

shelters are already full to capacity forcing some women to return back to their abuser as they have nowhere else to go (Tutty, Ogden, Giurgiu, & Weaver-Dunlop, 2014).

Burnett, et al. (2018) suggest that addressing IPV “requires systems to work together to realize policies designed to diminish it” (p.53). There are numerous declarations made by the United Nations to help countries establish goals to eliminate VAW, but nothing appears to be reducing or eliminating VAW. This seems to be an endless topic of discussion particularly when women are killed but again there does not appear to be any measures taken that really protect or benefit women from enduring violence. In fact “intimate partner violence remains the most common form of violence against women” (Burnett, et al. 2018 p. 53).

In 2018, 148 women and girls were killed in Canada (Crawford & Dawson, 2018). There is no data that reflects how many of these women left behind children, parents and siblings. There is no published study that has explored how these families have or are coping with the death of their loved one. This lack of information suggests the need for additional research into the effects of IPF on those left behind.

IPF is a particularly egregious act, committed mainly by men against women. It breaks the family apart in many different ways. Parents are often left to bury a daughter, children are left without their mother, and in some cases these children are left without their father who is incarcerated or dead from suicide. The impact on families is felt by parents, children, siblings, friends, VAW support workers and many others in the social services sector.

I have utilized research that emphasizes the impact witnessing violence has on children when the violence is perpetrated by their father (or other male partner) against their mother. I have additionally used literature that highlights the many stresses that families deal with when they are impacted by violence. Many studies have shown a correlation between children witnessing abuse and suffering from mental health challenges, PTSD, behavioral challenges and educational delays (Hardesty, Campbell, McFarlane, & Lewandowski, 2008).

My first experience of femicide was the murder of a former shelter resident by her ex-partner. Despite working in the VAW field and having daily conversations with women who experience IPV I never really thought about a woman killed by femicide would be someone I knew.

One morning I received a text message from my friend asking me to share (amongst my contacts) news that her sister was missing to raise awareness to help find her. The day I heard about my friend's sister's tragic death I was sitting in one of my graduate studies classes and screamed out in shock upon reading the text message that notified me of this disturbing news. It took a few minutes for this news to sink in before I was able to compose myself and let others in the class know what had transpired. In the coming days I organized a time to go and see my friend and her family to pay my respects with a few other friends. We all took sandwiches, soup and casseroles to help support the family in a very small way. Perhaps they did not need to think about cooking food for a day or two. Having both worked together in VAW shelter; on the day of funeral many of our former colleagues attended the funeral service to support to our former colleague

which was very difficult and emotional for her. It was shortly after the funeral that I decided that my thesis topic would be on IPF and how it has impacted the family and in particular my friend and her family. My hope is that being a participant in this thesis my friend will be able to find a safe space to be able to disclose her fears and feelings about her sister's death.

In the next sections I will guide the reader through my methodological approach of this study, including the design, implementation, and the analysis of my data. I will discuss how through the lens of feminist theory the literature discusses how IPF and patriarchy influences male relationships in keeping women subjugated and often dependent on men. I provide many examples of how patriarchy impacts women's lives at the micro level and societal levels. In chapter five I will discuss the findings of my research and how the study family has been impacted by IPF. I follow up with discussion and implications and what future research may focus on.

Chapter Two: Epistemology And Methodology

I am focusing my thesis on Intimate Partner Femicide (IPF) and specifically the effects of femicide on the lives of family members left behind. This chapter includes a review of feminist epistemology and family stress theory and how these theories explain how IPF has shaped the lives of women and their families.

Epistemology: Feminist and Family Stress Theory

This research is informed by two theories; I have used both feminist and family stress theory in undertaking this project. Epistemology is the academic study of how one

comes to identify and consider things about the world in which they live. Epistemology explores what people believe about understanding and what they deduce from the social location in which they live (Wilkinson, 2017).

Epistemology in family stress theory is important because it supports an understanding of the underlying beliefs individuals hold about how they cope with stressful life situations as ways of knowing. The rules that are created from their understanding of their experiences reflect how knowledge is integrated and used by those with lived experiences (Wilkinson, 2017).

A critical lens allows the researcher to provide interpretation for domineering structures that impact the lives of women and families. This framework is essential when considering the experiences of women who face violence in their relationships. Therefore “feminist epistemology emphasizes the study of feminine ways of knowing” (Anderson E. 1995 p. 50). Furthermore this perspective focuses on how gender influences what we understand to be knowledge (Anderson E. 1995 p. 50).

When we consider academic theory and scientific knowledge in Western societies, it is perceived to be masculine and can prevent women from acquiring and producing knowledges. The lived experiences of women can be excluded particularly if knowledge is tailored to the needs of male managers, or other males in a position of power where changes can be made. Feminist epistemologists claim that the ways “gender has been used to understand the status of theoretical knowledge, whether men or women have produced and applied this knowledge, and whose interests it has served have often had a

detrimental impact on its content” (Anderson E., 1995 p. 50). Anderson, (1995) makes a valid point that “no one disputes the personal knowledge of what it is like to be pregnant” only a female can describe this experience, the intense emotions, the changes a woman’s body goes through and the pain and pleasure of the birth.

Feminist accounts are based on the belief that society would be better if the lives of ordinary women were not disregarded or perceived in one-dimensional terms. Historically women have been portrayed in roles of homemakers and child bearers. Feminists, beginning with those within the realistic tradition, examined the male epistemological stance, challenging its apparent detachment while not recognizing its own perceptivity or its domination of the world it observes (Allen, 2011). Mainstream theories differ from feminist epistemology mostly because they do not take into account the specific experiences that women face. When families separate even though many times women may gain full custody of their children courts will allow men, even violent men to have access, and it can end in femicide. Fleury, Sullivan, & Bybee, (2000) describe the potential dangers that are created by this kind of circumstance:

A woman left her abusive husband, taking their 2-year-old daughter and going to a local shelter. She obtained a restraining order against him and bought a car that he would not recognize. Visits were arranged so that each would drop off and pick up their daughter at a supervised site through a local social service agency. The father dropped his daughter off after an overnight visit, half an hour later, the mother arrived to pick her up. As the mother and daughter got into the car to leave the father, shot and killed both of them, then killing himself a few days later p. 1363).

The experience and lives of marginalized people, particularly women, as they comprehend them, provide the most noteworthy information for the feminist research

process. Gender is experienced in different ways by diverse groups of women, and women exercise fluctuating levels of power in varying environments (Allen, 2011). As in the example above the mother may have had the power to determine when and where the child visited with her father, but ultimately, he used violence to take that power from her.

In order to bring the goals of feminist research to life, feminist standpoint theory seeks to go beyond investigation and account for the role played by social location in constructing and influencing knowledge (Bowell, 2019). The experience of one woman who may be in an abusive relationship but has access to financial and family resources is going to be different than for (perhaps) an immigrant woman who lacks the language skills to be connected to resources that can allow her to leave her abuser. However, both women may be in equally abusive relationships and are equally in need of unique supports.

The major challenges I confronted within this thesis was the tension between privacy of the family and sharing their story in an effort to create evidence to support the need for more knowledge and more resources for families surviving femicide. Meeting these goals required telling an authentic story, rich in detail, while protecting the privacy concerns and needs of the family. As Allen (2011) suggests, I also sought to both hear and empower the story of one family who was deeply impacted by femicide. It was important for me that the manner in which I undertook this research study respected the diversity of the individual experiences while also highlighting shared patterns, perspectives and strategies also present in these experiences. This topic is important to me

personally as since Joy's (the femicide fatality) untimely death I have seen how much stress my friend Gail and her family have endured.

The following criteria were identified as necessary in undertaking this research about and with Joy's family from a feminist standpoint. Feminist research aims to take women's needs, benefits and understandings into account and aims at being influential in improving women's lives (Allen, 2011). Feminist research uses women's own experience as its point of entry and develops their experiences in a way which leads to valuable knowledge (Allen, 2011; Hunnicutt, 2009). It believes the private and personal as commendable of study (Allen, 2011; Taylor & Jasinski, 2011). It develops non-manipulative relationship within research (Allen, 2011). It values reflexivity and feelings as a source of awareness and as a critical part of research (Allen, 2011; Nencel, 2014). It must find ways to present the complex layers of social and cultural lives in expressive ways (Allen, 2011; Swigonski & Raheim, 2011).

Within this study, I am using my own experiences as part of what informs the research process in accordance with the traditional feminist research (Fook, 2015).

As a former shelter worker I have heard the narratives of many women detailing their experiences of abuse. Their stories shaped the manner in which they were able to contribute to improving their lives by firstly accessing shelter without experiencing abuse and maintaining safety and stability for themselves and their children. Hearing women's stories and documenting them for the purpose of aiding them in securing safe affordable housing was one element of my job as a front line shelter worker.

As a child protection worker, I currently work on a service team that is focused on the work with families where IPV is a central issue in their lives. My work includes a day every two weeks where I am located in a VAW shelter. Hearing women's narratives to support them creating a safety plan for their children and reducing the impact of abuse within the whole family is one main focus of my work. I connect women to other professional's to aid abused women by allowing professionals to educate and support women to better understand the personal and cultural complexities which inform and shape women's decision making in the face of severe intimate abuse (Allen, 2011). Encouraging women to utilize educational programs that will give them tools and strategies to help them understand the cycle of abuse and link them with other women who are in similar situations has been another focus of my current role. This insider knowledge of how VAW shapes and impacts the lives of the families I work with has been valuable in assisting me with this research topic.

To bring this concept to life, Anderson (1995) contends that:

The gender of the researcher influences what is known not just through her influence on the object of knowledge but by what are claimed to be gender specific skills, knowledge, interests, or methods that she brings to the study of the object (p. 61).

Family stressor theory conceptualizes stress as something that is normative within family life (Malia, 2006). All families have stress in their lives and use resources that may be available to help them recover from the stress. This thesis centers family stress theory as important in this study, as it will provide insight into what stresses the family endured;

what strategies they may have used to cope including what role adjustments took place with the family.

Family stress theory focuses on events or situations that will occur in a family that will create stress (Malia, 2006). This is followed by mediating resources or the buffers; these are the coping strategies that the family will use. The final component comes with the indicators of stress, which will be seen in health changes for some of the family members, collectively “family stress is a process of family change rather than simply an event or situation that happens to or in the family” (Malia, 2006 p. 143).

When applied to my study of Joy and her family, family stressor theory will provide greater awareness of 1) how the family has coped with the death of their family member; 2) what impacts her sudden death had and continues to have on the family; 3) what major changes have taken place with the family since the murder; and 4) how are family members coping with these changes. I am also interested in what has happened to Joy's daughter (Kate); how she has coped with the death of her mother; what changes have taken place with her and what permanency plans the family may have made. These questions are important because it allows for a greater understanding of how children of femicide are further impacted if they do not continue to have stability with their new family particularly from a child welfare standpoint.

Reflexivity and Insider Status

Discussions associated with reflexive analysis and reflexive writing for feminist research is very important. To this end Nencel (2014) states: “Reflexivity is both epistemological and how we should learn about knowledge, as well as methodological

and how we should do research to obtain this knowledge. Reflexive analysis and practice are intimately related to the researcher's epistemological standpoint” (p. 76).

My insider knowledge of the issue of violence and how it affects families began before my employment in this sector. I learned first-hand how violence can drastically change life in an instant. My own experience came with the death of a beloved family member and this has led me to understand that experiences of violence can be the catalyst for change that brings with it many challenges and changes in the family.

More specifically my awareness and knowledge of VAW comes from working with many women and children over the past few years and seeing how intimate partner violence has impacted women and children especially in the behaviors that children display. In researching the topic of IPF I have discovered this is an area of limited study and that additional research into the impact of the traumatic death of a loved one on families is necessary; how they have coped after the death and what supports they have utilized. This discovery has strengthened my belief in the importance of this research.

Critical reflexivity is also seen as an important resource for considering my own values and beliefs and how these aspects of me may influence my understanding of the world around me (Nencel, 2014). Throughout this research I am reminded of the importance of the subject matter and being aware of any effects my relationship with Gail may have on my understanding of her experience.

My relationship with Gail came about after working with her at the VAW shelter. We worked many shifts together for about a year before she left to begin a new job. We

kept in touch mostly through phone calls and text messages and when she returned to visit her family we often arranged to meet for dinner. I believe this previous relationship with Gail was beneficial to me as the researcher and to Gail, it created a level of comfort and support that allowed her to speak freely about her experience. To this end Nencel (2014) states:

Research relationships are aimed at being non-exploitative, and research should include a functional aspect that should not be conducted purely for the sake of knowledge; the aim should be to support change for individual participants or research for social change, or both (p. 77).

As a researcher who has insider knowledge on the impacts of violence on my family, and knowledge of working within the VAW field I was able to take a compassionate view of Gail's family tragedy. However, often in our discussions I would be reminded of the pain and loss my own family went through. As a result of this self-awareness and reflection I was forced to reflect on my identity as the researcher who needed to take the position of an outsider. This self-reflexivity allowed me to remain impartial and give Gail the space to tell her story without my insider knowledge impacting her insider knowledge.

Theoretical Framework

The main focus of this study is on how femicide impacts on Gail and her family, how they struggled with stress resulting from their loss, and what coping strategies they used. Feminist theory conceptualizes that VAW is perpetrated by men using power and control to keep women oppressed and subdued in their relationships (Hunnicut, 2009).

Men often use their physical strength and power to control, maintaining violence through fear in their relationships. Feminist theory views men's oppression of women as a system of patriarchy that is ingrained in society and as a system that keep women inferior to men (Yodanis, 2004). Power imbalances between men and women allow VAW to flourish in a society that is dominated predominately by men (Yodanis, 2004).

Throughout this study I have used a critical theoretical and methodological approach rooted in feminist theory supported by family stressor theory. These theories are compelling for my research; feminist theory, because women's oppression by men is widespread and is a gendered act. This theory will provide me with a gateway into analysis of these potential power imbalances; oppression and violence that may have existed in the relationship that subsequently lead to victim's death.

Feminist Theory and VAW

The World Health Organization (WHO) suggests that women suffer the most when it comes to VAW and specifically intimate partner violence worldwide (Crawford & Dawson, 2018). Women can and have been killed by their intimate partners for reasons that range from men feeling being disrespected after their partner leaves to being upset that they may never see their children again. The WHO suggests:

VAW is a human rights violation that has an emotional impact on the health of women globally. Eliminating VAW is an important goal that many governments around the world have set out to achieve. Intimate partner violence (IPV), is one of the most common forms of gender-based violence, which affects one in three women worldwide (Burnett, et al. 2018).

Feminist theory declares that women's lives matter. Within the context of patriarchy, feminists demand that women be treated as human beings in the same way men are (Swigonski & Raheim, 2011). For me, as a Sikh woman, this is important concept as Sikhism teaches that women and men are equal and all people are to be treated with the same respect regardless of gender or religion (Sikh World History, 2015).

Feminist theorists first began with social movements as far back as the “French Revolution for the rights of the man, the end of slavery, and the temperance movement for sobriety to help improve the lives of women and children” (Swigonski & Raheim, 2011 p. 11). The first waves of feminists were able to gain the right for women to vote, reforms in education and healthcare in the United States (Swigonski & Raheim, 2011). White women were the main beneficiaries of this first wave of feminism, the intersectionality of race and culture in women's lives was not addressed by this iteration of feminist theory. In the second wave of feminism women declared that the “personal is political” (Swigonski & Raheim, 2011). Women condemned VAW and set out to “reclaim control over their bodies, asserting the political nature of acts within private spaces to claim agency and power for women” (Swigonski & Raheim, 2011 p. 12).

Feminist theory takes the lived experiences of women and sees how the social relationships between men and women can be changed, and “analyzes the historical circumstances of women's lives and the conditions that have shaped these lives” (Swigonski & Raheim, 2011 p.12), feminist theory does not blame women for being oppressed but rather links women's oppression to men and their domineering ways. Patriarchy

A key concept identified by feminist theory is that of patriarchy which embraces the capacity for theorizing VAW and keeping the theoretical emphasis on dominance, gender, and control. Patriarchy acknowledges men as having more power in relationships and in the world in general than women. In this context the problem of VAW is rooted in a social context, rather than individual male characteristics (Hunnicut, 2009). When men dominate institutions such as their family, political arenas and social institutions they use violence as a weapon to dominate women and are able to maintain power and control over women (Yodanis, 2004). Patriarchy is understood as a system of male dominance and female subordination (Hunnicut, 2009), which has been acknowledged as a root of women's oppression (McPhail, Busch, & Kulkarni, 2007). Feminists argue that men use oppression against women to uphold patriarchy (Hunnicut, 2009) and often oppression contributes to violence after the relationship has broken down; this comes from men's perception and feelings of entitlement that the relationship should not have ended and their expectation that the woman should be obedient, loyal and somehow dependent on him (Brownridge, et al., 2008).

There are cultural values that exist in families that foster violence (Brownridge, et al., 2008); the shame of telling family and friends and asking for help is a huge barrier for women. For example in the Sikh culture, which I am part of, there is a huge stigma and silence around any violence that may exist in the home. I believe there is a notion that when one's children get married they have a fairy-tale life and live happily ever after, any deviation from this somehow brings shame on the family.

Patriarchy maintains power imbalances that exist through oppression and gender inequality and emphasizes that men are in crisis because they are challenged by women who want equality. This challenges men's dominance as women are demanding to share men's public domain and men are unable to handle this (hooks, 2004). Some men feel that women's demands have gone further than just women demanding equal treatment rather they are demanding power and control to be taken from men. This would lead men to believe that if they are not in charge they are "eunuchs" (hooks, 2004).

Patriarchy is a set of beliefs, norms and values placed on women in society. Jealousy and possessiveness have a significant impact on relationships and can be a factor in increasing the level of abuse from controlling behavior to physical assault to even death (Brownridge, et al., 2008). I believe this is directly connected to oppression and control that some men have in their relationships. From my work with abused women I have heard from many women who find their partners suspect them of having an affair and they use this as a means of keeping control of what the woman does.

The term patriarchy suggests a fictional continuum where patriarchy ignores differences among men, casting men instead as an unusual group that seems to elevate them to a sort of special status. Feminist argue that men use VAW to uphold patriarchy, however this position simplifies male perpetrators as tyrannical, power seeking abusers. At the same time it overlooks the fact that patriarchal systems can survive without violence. Women can be confined by ideas that cast their subordination as normal. VAW is an expression of patriarchal systems and may reinforce those systems, thus VAW is a consequence of patriarchies than the cause of them (Hunnicut, 2009).

Yodanis (2004) found that “imbalances in power and resources in marital relationships, approval of violence, experiences of childhood violence, alcohol and drug use were some variables associated with men’s use of VAW” (p. 655). There could be generational trauma that has not healed or even discussed, which continues the cycle of violence. Men who use violence as a means to control women may have themselves been exposed to adult conflict as children, and therefore do not necessarily have the skills to handle conflict with their female partners without using violence.

A system of patriarchy subjects women to risks and assumes that women may be equally dependent on men for protection, which is seen as women being in a position of powerlessness at the same time women are being subjected to aggression by men (Hunnicut, 2009). Patriarchy keeps women in abusive relationships particularly where their lack of finances does not allow women to leave or financially manage when they do leave. (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). In my current role as a child protection worker I work with families from all socio-economic backgrounds. Women who are financially stable and can afford to leave often also find it difficult to leave; because they feel dependent on their male partners. Some feel they want to save their relationship because somehow he will change. One woman I worked with went on a make or break vacation with her spouse but still found leaving him was the hardest part as she fears for her financial future without her husband. Therefore she remained in a very emotionally abusive relationship.

Many social support systems are created and maintained by men who are often in political power; in 2018 Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced the government

would provide \$20 million in new funding for a federal strategy to address and prevent gender-based violence. This infusion of funds is doing little to help catch up with the 40% cuts that were made by Steven Harper's government to some advocacy groups and service providers, like rape crisis centers (Gerster, 2019). The types of policies and practices set by men in institutions reproduce and legitimize the domination of women (Yodanis, 2004). Lack of funding and shelter spaces can be the first obstacle for leaving. These types of "social safety nets" (Burnett, et al. 2018 p.53) can often help women and children live violence free lives. However, limited funding to emergency shelters and scarcity of affordable housing leads to women remaining in abusive relationships as they have no safe place to go.

Front line shelter workers often bear witness to the experiences women have and many workers engage with family and police to ensure women are safe. As a former shelter worker, I know working in a shelter was emotionally very exhausting; often hearing the same type of story from different women. It was important for me to remember that I may have heard a similar story from other women but this woman may only be telling me her story for the first time.

Women face additional barriers to leaving abusive relationships when they encounter shelters at capacity which leaves them "emotionally vulnerable" (Burnett, et al. 2018 p.53). This reinforces women's oppression through "re-victimization that perpetuates inequalities sustained through systemic policy based oppression" (Burnett, et al. 2018 p.53). Leaving an abusive relationship can be viewed by men as a way that women are attempting to take back control of their lives and refusing to be oppressed. In these

circumstances, violence can be used as a form of male domination in the family or in relationships to maintain their domination.

The feminist anti-violence sector was founded as a result of women's experiences and women's ways of knowing and their shared epistemologies, which are entrenched in their social and factual perspectives (Bonisteel & Green, 2005). Feminist theory maintains that the more inequality women face the more likely they are to be victims of violence (Yodanis, 2004).

O'Neil & Harway, (1997) describes that men's violence towards women comes in the form of societal, psychological, interpersonal and biological violence. Under these four descriptors they compiled thirteen hypotheses that explained why men are violent towards women. These include changes in gender roles in society in terms of opportunities and the belief of women's lives, which have shaped men's fear of losing their power and amplified violence towards women. When women seek paid employment this leaves the unpaid work in the home that was traditionally done by women undone. This explanation places the blame of men's violence on women rather than with men by saying that if women want equality they can only achieve it through violence being perpetrated against them, which is a form of victim blaming (O'Neil & Harway, 1997). O'Neil & Harway, (1997) go on to explain that "shame is an important issue that may explain some men's violence toward women" (p.192). What they do not explain is whether shame is felt by women and thereby prevents them from disclosing their abuse and thus continuing the cycle of violence; or whether is shame felt by the men in having a female partner who

they perceive as being more successful than they are thereby using violence as a means to control women or even both.

Feminist analysis of power is best understood as a relationship, it moves past relationships of control that are conveyed in power over others (Swigonski & Raheim, 2011). I understand this to mean that men have a relationship with power and they use this power over those they perceive as being weak, namely women. Negative attitudes of women also known as misogyny are common traits amongst men who abuse women (O'Neil & Harway, 1997). If men are not able to control their emotions and handle conflict with women they tend to focus these negative emotions onto women. (O'Neil & Harway, 1997).

Second wave feminism challenged oppression and power by creating “consciousness-raising groups where participants engaged “in analyses of the ways in which women’s lives matter and the ways in which the personal is political” (Swigonski & Raheim, 2011 p.13). From this analysis patterns of power relationships emerged from the lived experiences of women’s lives; these experiences were then intertwined into theories that reinforced actions to end domination and oppression; “to further women’s access to power; and to support women’s skills in the exercise of personal, interpersonal, and empowerment” (Swigonski & Raheim, 2011 p.13).

The feminist perspective views men who are violent towards women as assuming power over them. There are many forms of violence: emotional, financial and physical amongst many others. The link between patriarchy and VAW has been criticized because it simplifies power relations. Women’s fear that men will hurt or kill them can often be

felt as a genuine threat if they leave or seek help and therefore this fear can at times keep women in their abusive relationships (O'Neil & Harway, 1997). Typically men have held more power in society because they are able to earn more money than women; this gives men greater economic power and using this power as a means to keep women from becoming independent and leaving them (Brownridge, et al., 2008).

The theory of patriarchy does not account for men's violence against men, this concept does not allow for understanding why only a few men use VAW in societies characterized as patriarchal (Hunnicut, 2009). For men who assault their female partners this violence is seen as a way to restore their sense of masculine identity (O'Neil & Harway, 1997).

Feminist theory looks for change in the inequality between men and women to decrease women's risk of violence. When women have the financial ability to support themselves and their children they are able to leave a violent relationship which leads to men losing their ability to control women (Taylor & Jasinski, 2011). This allows women to gain equality and the ability to change their lifestyles. Feminist activists have also pushed for a change in social policies. While some change has happened such as arrests of the offender, this can lead to a further risk for women. If the woman does not have the financial means to leave the man, she is likely to return back to the family home risking further violence. Women who have experienced violence need to know what resources are available to them such as shelters and affordable housing. This information should be given to the woman at the time of intervention, which would require that police officers,

lawyers and social service providers are aware of what services exists in their communities (Taylor & Jasinski, 2011).

Women who have separated from their partners are at higher risk of being the victims of “lethal and non-lethal violence” this risk is elevated to thirty times higher for married women (Brownridge, et al., 2008).

Research on VAW looking at signs of abuse and risk assessments is also a well-studied area of scholarship that is highly relevant to my area of study. Out of this research came the Lethality Assessment Protocol tool which was used by law enforcement officers in Connecticut. Beyond assessment this tool was designed to help officers give women information about resources they were able to connect with at the time of the domestic incident (Grant & Cross-Denny, 2017). This qualitative study into the tool examines attitudes and obstacles police officers recognized in putting into practice the Lethality Assessment Protocol. Researchers found that only 4% of victims of domestic violence who were killed by their partners accessed services through domestic violence agencies before they were killed. Therefore, what good is the protocol if women do not use services and it cannot be administered. Research also shows that a little over half of women who survived serious murder attempts by their abusers did not realize the lethal jeopardy they were facing before such attempts occurred. This recognition of the signs of abuse in relationships is important as it allows workers in domestic violence agencies to create safety plans and advocate for new services as identified.

Over the past few decades, there has been a dramatic change in the reaction to intimate partner violence (IPV) by the general public and across the criminal justice, social service, and health care systems. With this

increase in the usage of these systems and increased public analysis has led to a call for approaches to help understand which IPV cases need the most attention and all-encompassing interventions because the demand for domestic violence services far exceeds supply. Campbell, et al. (2009. p. 653).

Limitations of Feminist Theory

A limitation of feminist perspectives is that while advocates are able to identify many forms of oppressions and problems, change and advocacy on issues is slow. This could be due to most social institutions where changes are needed are controlled by men. A further limitation of feminist theory is that many gains that do emerge often benefit white women, women of color do not benefit in the same way that white women do (Swigonski & Raheim, 2011). Even though women of color may experience violence in the same way that white women may, women of color face additional challenges when leaving or attempting to leave a relationship.

Family Stressor Theory

The main concept of family stressor theory is the understanding that stress is a process of family change rather than merely an incident or condition that happens in or to a family (Malia, 2006). Another concept of family stress theory is family coping (McCubbin, 1979); these include strategies that would be used to deal with the stress that the family is going through. These strategies help the family endure the initial stress and recover from it (McCubbin, 1979).

The definition of the term family comes from Ernest Burgess (Malia, 2006), who looked past the notion of blood and legal ties to describe family as a unity of interrelating personalities, each inhabiting locations within the family to which a number of roles are assigned (Malia, 2006). Not all families consist of a mother, father and children; in many families there are same sex parents, step-parents and step children or children who share one parent and a different second parent.

What defines a family is different in many families. Gail is one of nine siblings and Joy was the second of four children for Gail's father and stepmother. Joy was biracial. Gail is not biracial. Gail's family is not unique in that it is a blended family that has parents, and step-parents and children who have a different biological mother or father. To family stress theory the extended and blended family will all grieve for the deceased in the same way as the biological family does (Malia, 2006). When my uncle died many people came to pay their respects to my grandmother and mourn our loss including relatives on my husband's side of the family. I found their presence at my grandmother's house comforting in that they were sharing our grief even though they did not know my uncle personally.

Family stressor theory conceptualizes that all families have stressful events that take place. A critical view of this family's experience may reveal some gaps in services, some reasons the family may want to be involved in advocacy particularly around pressing for more services for women fleeing abuse or tougher sentencing for those with a history of violence prior to the killing, because many families who have experienced the

death of a family member through femicide want to spare other families the same pain they have been through.

Malia, (2006) examines stress at three levels 1) micro level challenges of daily life that causes stress, 2) meso level life events would be found in the VAW community and how they bring attention to the deaths of women, and advocate for change and better protection 3) macro level events or circumstances that impact firstly society at large and secondly the individual.

Prior to femicide, families endure the stress of their family member being in an abusive relationship, that process of separation, and in some cases the abusers contact with the children through custody and access process. In some families this contact can be facilitated by a third party supervisor in the community, which helps reduce the chances for some women that they will be harmed in public, but for many other families direct contact between the woman and her violent partner continues (Fleury, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2000).

When femicide occurs in the family, stress is felt at the micro level. There are events that continue to cause stress to the family including the identification of the loved one, the funeral, police investigations, custody process and potentially the trial of the accused, if there is a trial.

There are additional stresses related to the surviving children in terms of who they will live with; how will elderly grandparents cope with suddenly having to take care of their young grandchildren. Further stress comes if the children need to leave their family

home and school thereby losing their social network of friends and neighbors

(Lewandowski, McFarlane, Campbell, Gary, & Barenski, 2004).

The three stages of family stress are firstly stress of the event; secondly the buffers or filters that help ease the stress and finally the indicators of stress such as changes in health, changes in financial circumstances or even changes in the living arrangements of the family, such as children going to live with elderly grandparents or other family members (Malia, 2006).

Family stress may be understood by indicators that Malia, (2006) describes as a multifaceted balancing act that the family carries on maintaining stability in their life (Malia, 2006). This is likely what Gail describes as the “new normal” that families have after the sudden death of someone. Family stressor theory suggests a “roller coaster” model to describe a family’s journey through crisis after crisis (Malia, 2006). Violence that men perpetrate against women does not just start and stop with one event or even multiple events. There is a ripple effect on other family member femicide survivors. Stressors can lead to a ‘pileup’ which is a convergence of many stressful events that happen to a family. In many instances the families experience new stresses before they have time to deal with the initial event (Malia, 2006). The loss of a child through violence could lead to health problems in the immediate aftermath of the news, heart attack or severe panic attack that leads to a hospital stay.

Hardesty, et al. (2008) found there were some pre-event stresses in many of the families they interviewed, families had experienced physical and sexual abuse of children by the perpetrator prior to the murder of the mother. After the murder of their mother all

the children who had seen or heard their mother being killed suffered some physical health problems. The stress in the family continues until the family uses resources from extended family members being available to them to help them get back to their normal lives. Stressors can be “crisis provoking events” or “triggering situations”; they may be of such a huge degree that leads to major changes in the family (Malia, 2006).

Another concept of family stress theory is family coping. Families cope with stress in many different ways. Coping behavior could be strengthening the functioning of the family by way of using community supports to reduce the stress (McCubbin, 1979). Reducing family stress may be much more difficult where there has been a traumatic death. Attending church and strengthening their religious beliefs may help families who have experienced similar crises as a way of coping. Additionally, seeking support from friends and neighbors to attend the trial (McCubbin, 1979) may be helpful. Families may seek supports to help with daily tasks such as taking care of the children while the adults attend to other matters such as medical or other appointments (McCubbin, 1979).

In their study Hardesty, et al. (2008) found there are many post incident stressors that came to light as a result of the mother being killed these included the children's adjustment to their new life. Some children experienced their caregivers suffering heart conditions and even death of a caregiver/s, this would have heightened feelings of insecurity in the children. Some children also worried that their father would get out of prison and kill their grandparents.

Family stress comes in many forms when a child loses their mother as a result of violence they may have witnessed by their father. They lose both parents to a degree.

There is the child who is placed with the maternal grandparents who has lost both parents with the father now in jail. The maternal family love and care for this young child, but the child is a daily reminder of the loss of their own child, which can be very stressful.

Hardesty, et al., (2008) found that many stress factors that arose after the IPF including symptoms of PTSD particularly by children who had witnessed the murder of their mother. The ability of new caregivers to provide support and security could be critical for children. Family stress can be mitigated with the use of resources as a way of coping with the traumatic event. Some family members may find that participating in advocacy may be a way for them to cope with the negative feelings they experience (Hardesty, et al., 2008). Others may find that talking about their experience may help them cope. A limitation of this theory is that it does not view one major crisis as having multiple impacts on extended family members.

Chapter Three: Qualitative Research Methods

To gain a meaningful and valid understanding about the impacts of IPF it was important for me to hear from a family who was impacted by such a traumatic event. For this reason, I decided to use a qualitative research methodology (Mason, 2018).

Qualitative methods are concerned with how the social world is created and are best for researching many of the 'why' and 'how' questions of human experiences, and the meanings that they generate from it. I operationalized my qualitative research method through the use of several one-on-one interviews for data collection.

The objective of the interview process was to provide a safe space for Gail to speak about the traumatic death of her sister Joy; and tell the story of how her family has been impacted. For the purpose of this study and to allow the reader to be able to keep track of the individuals mentioned I have used pseudonyms that Gail agreed to. Gail is my interview participant, Mary is Gail's sister, Debbie is Gail's daughter, Joy was the sister who was killed and Kate is Joy's daughter.

Recruitment – Single Case Study

A single case study approach was used in this research due to the nature of the study topic and my existing relationship with Gail. Due to the emotional nature of the topic I chose the single case study approach and took care to ensure that the questions asked were relevant to the topic. I ensured that I made myself available to provide emotional support for Gail as needed.

Recruitment for this thesis was very specific and directed to one family and one family member. Gail and I worked together in a women's shelter in a mid-sized city in Central Ontario several years ago and kept in touch over the years. Initially I was hoping that Joy's parents and siblings would also be able to participate in the research and gain a better understanding of what the impact of Joy's death had been on them. After exploratory discussions with Gail, she explained that her parents were not ready emotionally to talk to people outside their family as Joy's death had not occurred too long ago. Gail explored with other siblings whether they would participate in the research and again explained that many of them did not feel ready to speak with anyone outside the family. Gail explained that she and her daughters were willing to participate in my

research; Gail explained that as a survivor of intimate partner violence herself, she felt she had a better grasp of her feelings and had developed adequate coping strategies to cope with her sister's death one of which was being able to talk about her sister and her own abusive relationship. After meeting with faculty members to discuss the parameters of the thesis it was suggested to me that I concentrate on talking only with Gail and to frame the research in more of a single case study approach.

A single case study approach can be used to confirm or challenge a theory; however, in my study it was used to represent a unique and extreme case (Tellis, 1997). Single case studies are best used for revelatory cases because as an observer I had access to a phenomenon that was previously inaccessible (Tellis, 1997). I had access to a family member who had been impacted by the femicide of her sister.

Tellis, (1997) explains:

The unit of analysis is a critical factor in the case study. It is typically a system of action rather than an individual or group of individuals. Case studies tend to be selective, focusing on one or two issues that are fundamental to understanding the system being examined (p. 4).

Data Collection Process

Gail was recruited after the intimate partner femicide of her sister Joy. I spoke with Gail to gain an initial idea of whether she would be interested in participating. Upon agreeing to participate and my ethics application being approved I sent Gail the letter of information and consent attached as Appendix B. I travelled to central Ontario to interview Gail where she now resides and to make the interview process a little less

stressful for her. I knew that the subject and the content of our discussion would already be difficult for her to talk about. As the interview commenced, Gail reviewed again the letter of information and signed the consent to participate. I provided her with a copy of the letter of information and, the consent, as well as resources for crisis support services in her area that she could contact after the interview if she needed to debrief about the interview. We also agreed that she would call me to debrief and I could ask any follow up questions as they arose.

At the start of the interview Gail disclosed to me that she had been feeling very anxious on her way to meet with me but did not understand why she was feeling that way until she realized and reflected on where she was going and what she was going to be talking about. Gail acknowledged that once she made the connection with the two things she was able to recognize what she was feeling and why she was feeling that way. It became obvious to both of us that talking about her sister's death is a trigger that elicits anxiety and this is one of the impacts on Gail of Joy's death. Due to Gail's anxiety we decided to end the interview early and I was left with a number of unanswered questions.

After analyzing the first interview I found I had more questions for Gail. We arranged to have a telephone conversation to gather further data collection, the day the telephone interview was scheduled Gail had a death in her family which meant we had to reschedule for another day. My second interview with Gail was also cut short as discussing some of what had happened in the days after Joy went missing and how the family had coped was also very triggering for Gail.

My third interview was conducted a few days later also over the telephone. Gail agreed to further interviews as required. I continue to check in with Gail after our interviews as I was aware of how talking about Joy triggers her. I had provided Gail with a list of crisis lines and counselling services available in her area that she could call to help debrief about what we had discussed.

My fourth interview with Gail was conducted over the telephone again in early July and this interview allowed for a more in-depth discussion of Joy's murder and its effects of her family. I checked in with Gail a few hours later as the subjects we discussed were again very stressful to talk about. Gail advised this time she had been able to build on her coping strategies to help manage difficult moments and had found the fourth interview much less triggering than earlier conversations.

After each conversation with Gail I transcribed my recording, of the interactions. In total, the four interviews with Gail produced close to four hours of interview time. In addition to the interview materials I kept a research journal to track any changes as well as to collect my thoughts and ideas about how the research was progressing.

Data Themes

Themes that arose from the interviews included triggers, anxiety, fear and danger that was present in Joy's relationship. Feelings of guilt by many family members arose as they felt they did not do enough to protect Joy. However, throughout my interviews what became very apparent was that the family and Joy herself did many things to protect herself and her family from harm. The feelings of loss came with finding ways to stay

connected to the deceased through rituals, pictures, discussion about her and sharing her belongings with family members. An interesting theme that arose was the use on non-conventional methods of coping. Gail used acupuncture, mediation and fasting to help prepare for our interviews and for self-care after the interviews.

Reflexive Thematic Coding

I analyzed my data using a thematic approach as suggested by Ryan & Bernard, (2003), discovering themes and subthemes. I transcribed my recordings and reviewed and read them over several times. I coded the materials manually.

As I read and reread the transcripts I identified themes and subthemes, which I then color coded to better identify them easily. Braun, et al. (2018) suggests within analysis “themes reflect a pattern of shared meanings organized around a core concept or idea” (Braun, et al. 2018 p. 3). The authors further suggest:

The aim of coding and theme development in reflexive thematic analysis is not to accurately summarize the data, nor to minimize the influence of researcher subjectivity on the analytic process, because neither is seen as possible nor indeed desirable. The aim of coding is to provide a coherent and compelling interpretation of the data. The researcher's main goal is to tell a story and actively engage in interpreting data through the lens of their own cultural and social positioning Braun, et al. (2018 p. 8).

Therefore, in developing the themes I had to be able to focus on the data that was relevant to the topic. When analyzing some of themes I viewed them from a child protection lens, and as someone who works within the violence against women sector. These themes included permanency planning and safety planning. As these themes arose in earlier interviews I was able to ask questions in follow up interviews for more clarification.

While analyzing the data there is always the worry that saturation of data will be reached. Saturation may be understood as “information redundancy” that is by “collecting data until no new information is generated” Braun, et al. (2018 p. 8). I reached saturation of data by our fourth interview and therefore did not complete any further interviews with Gail.

Ethics

This study received ethics approval from the McMaster Research Ethics Board. Dual roles and confidentiality were two major ethical considerations for this study. As Gail was my only participant, there was also a concern that there would not be enough data yielded. This was mitigated by asking further questions and multiple interviews were completed.

My previous relationship with Gail and my ability to remain unbiased was a potential conflict of interest and this dual role with Gail presented an ethical consideration. I felt our previous relationship would have benefits to the research topic as Gail would be more comfortable speaking about her own personal experience of intimate partner violence with a person familiar to her that she could trust rather than a complete stranger. Gail could have felt coerced or pressured to participate. For this reason, steps were put in place to ensure this risk was mitigated. Discussing confidentiality (see Appendix B) with Gail as well as creating a safe space for her was essential. The ability to withdraw from the study prior to participating, and the option to skip questions or not answer questions she was not comfortable answering was stressed during recruitment and

also to stop and take breaks as required was presented and utilized. Regular checks in with Gail were conducted to ensure that any triggers were managed. Gail also requested some information be left out of this study, which I have respected. The information that has been left out has not changed the major themes of the study.

Gail decided that she wanted her identity and that of her family to remain confidential, therefore I have taken steps to protect their identities, removed locations and we agreed on using pseudonyms. Data was kept on an external hard drive that only I had access to it. While transcribing the digital recordings I removed identifiers from the data such as personal bits of information that Gail had provided such as the location of the incident and her location. Regardless of the safeguards I put in place, it is important to note that people are identified by the stories they tell.

Another ethical consideration was that retelling her family's story would be very triggering and cause additional emotional harm. To ensure that this was as minimal as possible, I provided Gail with telephone numbers for counselling and crisis lines in her area as well as checking in with her frequently after each interview. During all the interviews the option to stop or not answer a question was presented and on one occasion our interview was cut short and rescheduled as the subject matter was too difficult to continue.

Chapter Four: Critical Review of Literature

To explore my research questions I conducted a comprehensive review of the literature, including peer-reviewed journals, book chapters and online sources. Through

this review, I have sought to understand the connections between patriarchy, oppression and VAW that leads to femicide. I have further reviewed literature on how family stress relates to homicide and femicide in families. Additionally, I have reviewed the literature concerning the impact on children who witness VAW that is perpetrated by their father. Specifically, I examined how feminist theory has found that patriarchy directly causes VAW. I reviewed literature on family stress theory that allowed me greater understanding of how a sudden violent death in the family impacts them directly.

Violence Against Women

Notions of VAW bring to life multiple perspectives that are at times in conflict with one another. For example British feminist activists placed emphasis on domestic violence that occurred in the home and specifically within the confines of marriage namely assault against the wife by the husband (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999). In their study Muehlenhard & Kimes, (1999) found:

Women have been abused by men throughout history. Often, such violence has been condoned and even explicitly legalized as an acceptable way for husbands to discipline their wives, provided the husbands operated within certain limits. For example, the "rule of thumb," thought to have been instituted by Sir William Blackstone in 1768, allowed a husband to discipline his wife as long as he hit her with a stick no thicker than his thumb.

American feminist activists placed more emphasis on sexual violence in relationships and the social construction of sexuality as an expression of male dominance (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999).

One way to hold men accountable for their actions is for them to engage in anti-violence education programs. These programs allow men to gain knowledge and understanding of how violence impacts them and their children, additionally taking an Anger Management program can help men with managing their anger and provides them with skills and strategies on how to manage conflict without violence.

Forms of Abuse

VAW can fall on a continuum of abuse; there are subtle forms that can start with a man telling his female partner that she should not dress a certain way thereby slowly attacking her self-esteem, discouraging her from going out with friends and family can lead to isolation her from her support networks. Physical violence of pushing, shoving and hitting can begin and lead to jealousy, possessiveness and a sense of entitlement over the women (Hannawa, Spitzberg, Wiering, & Teranishi, 2006). Many men will tell their female partners that “if you leave, I will kill you,” or “if I can’t have you, no one can” (p. 541). This is a threat that can often turn into IPF. Escalating violence such as stalking can lead to further violence leaving women scared, this is the other end of the violence continuum.

Another subtle form of VAW is victim blaming. Women who stay in abusive relationships are often blamed when they get harmed and questioned as to why she did not leave. However, there are many barriers that prevent women from leaving, “victim blaming and institutional sexism creates apathy which can leave them isolated and without resources” (Anderson & Saunders, 2003 p. 165). At a macro level there are

patriarchal societal organizations that keep women economically reliant on men. For many women this dependency on men remains internalized and keeps them from leaving (Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

Coping and Barriers to Change

Women utilize many “coping strategies before leaving relationship, short separations can lead to them developing new coping skills and self-efficacy thereby leaving permanently becomes easier” (Anderson & Saunders, 2003 p.171). Having worked in a VAW shelter some of the coping skills developed by women include creating a plan to leave which may entail putting aside money to help when they leave. When women have left and accessed shelter they can connect with a case worker at Ontario Works to access funds, easing some financial tension and giving women back some self-efficacy.

As women attempt to break away from violence they face many barriers such as finding space at a shelter, inadequate funds to help them secure affordable safe housing (Burnett, et al. 2018; Tutty, et al. 2014). Once they have left other barriers that exist include custody, access and financial issues from the sale of the family home. Women may need to get a restraining order and some may even have child welfare involvement. All these challenges negatively impact women and their ability to “create a violence free life and their overall health, well-being and self-actualization” (p. 54).

One mother with whom I have worked for some time expressed her sadness and frustration around how she and her child had to have a safety plan and a restraining order

and still live in fear that her ex-partner would come back to harm them. Even writing a victim impact statement to the court about her fears of being killed by the perpetrator did not have as significant of an impact on his sentence as she had hoped. He received a short jail sentence of a few months most of which he had already completed while awaiting trial. This is a very similar pattern that I have seen with many women that I work with.

Responses to structural violence

In a study by Burnett, et al. (2018) they found that even with many international declarations by the United Nations dating back to 1981 and more recently in 2013 which are intended to:

Prevent violence against women and support women to live violence-free lives have not explicitly explored the need to modify structures that unintentionally perpetuate additional violence. Without any formal imperatives addressing structural impediments, only moderate progress (e.g. increased women's participation in political positions) has been made”.

In 2014, the World Health Assembly drafted a resolution that take a systems approach to emphasize strengthening the role of health systems in tackling violence against women and girls. Although this resolution brings VAW advocates closer to action, a common action-oriented discourse is absent within its text Burnett, et al. (2018).

There is a great deal of work left to do before women and girls can live a violence free life. Burnett, et al. 2018 found “gender equality, gender mainstreaming, and empowerment” (p. 57) are all characteristics of gender justice. These characteristics are very applicable to intimate partner violence due to the gendered nature of VAW that is

intensely entrenched in ongoing societal patriarchy and role ideology (Burnett, et al. 2018).

Intimate Partner Femicide – IPF

Femicide is placed seventh in United States of America as the cause of premature death of women. Femicide is perpetrated in 30%-40% of cases by former or current intimate partners of the victim (Glass, et al. 2008). Men use violence to uphold their beliefs in what they may perceive as deprived situations; the more disenfranchised men feel they are from legitimate positions of dominance the more likely they are to use violence to regain control (Hunnicut, 2009).

In their report on femicide Crawford & Dawson, (2018) present details of the many women who were killed by their current or former intimate partners. Many of the women were either separated or had been living with their abusive partner for years. Amongst the many deaths they included in the report were some of details of the horrific ways that men had killed women. Included was the killing of a woman by her former partner who was found by her sister stabbed numerous times to death by the victim's estranged husband. Another woman was shot and killed by her estranged husband after she went to pick up their daughter, while her son, mother and new partner waited in the car for her.

In both these cases the men were given lengthy prison sentences before they would be eligible for parole. Crawford & Dawson, (2018) report details of how women are not necessarily safer when they leave their abuser, they continue to be vulnerable to

harm and in some cases more vulnerable when they have left the relationship (Crawford & Dawson, 2018). This conclusion has been validated by other researchers including Anderson & Saunders, (2003) who reported that married and separated women are 25% more likely to be vulnerable to being killed shortly after they have left their relationship. Women who have experienced assaults prior to leaving their abusers often experienced more physical abuse after they left their abusers (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). VAW is a gendered act that is seen across ethnic groups; men target women because of their gender; women do not target men in the same manner (Hunnicut, 2009).

In their study Brownridge et al., (2008) found “post separation violence is a complex phenomenon the dynamics of which can affect more than domination and ownership” (p. 117). Men use violence to “maintain their advantage in the most disadvantaged situations” (Hunnicut, 2009 p. 560) they may feel that once the woman has left them they lose control over her and the only way to regain that control is through violence. In their report Taylor & Jasinski, (2011) found that “men kill their wives after lengthy periods of prolonged physical violence accompanied by other forms of abuse” (p. 345). Brownridge et al. (2008) also found that even in relationships where “patriarchal domination, sexual jealousy and possessiveness” (p. 117) were present this was not a predictor that violence would occur post separation. Further the authors suggest post separation violence is complex and it affects were due to much more than domination and ownership. They maintain that more research in this area needs to be conducted to gain greater awareness.

Education on Risk Factors

Glass, et al. (2008) found there are a number of risk factors identified leading to femicide these include “jealousy and controlling behaviors, partner unemployment and the perpetrator being an ex-partner” (p. 183). These risk factors present a greater risk of femicide for younger women (Glass, Laughon, Rutto, & Campbell, 2008). Further the authors indicate that more education and training on assessing potential risks in relationships is needed particularly at school based and health care settings.

Often the first indicator that there is violence in the relationship is assault during pregnancy and can for some women lead to ending their relationship (Nicolaidis, et al., 2003). Assault during pregnancy is a known risk factor along with the partner's use of drugs, or the partner's access to weapons (Nicolaidis, et al., 2003). Nicolaidis, et al. 2003 found that “clinicians in the field of domestic violence should look for a history of severe or escalating domestic violence or the classic signs of increased risk such as threats to kill or assaults with a weapon” (p. 788). “The higher score indicates more of the risk factors for homicide are present in the relationship” (p.788).

Professionals and institutions can really work together when the woman is open and forthcoming with what she is experiencing and not fearful of the consequence or too ashamed to disclose what is happening. Fear of the perpetrator harming their children and other family members is a huge barrier to why women do not leave relationships and disclose abuse. Ansara & Hindin, (2010) were able to sum up some of the feelings and fears that I found in my study:

Initially, women may be reluctant to disclose the abuse out of fear for themselves, fear of losing their children, feelings of shame, denial, or fear of being negatively judged by others. For many women, certain “turning points” in the relationship influenced her decision to leave and/or seek help including the escalation of the violence, concerns about the negative effects of the violence on their children (p. 1012).

Many abused women who make the decision to leave their relationships often arrive at shelters with only the clothes they arrived wearing and little to no money (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). From my work in the VAW sector I have witnessed firsthand the link between domestic violence and homelessness as a problem that further subjugates women and keeps them in poverty thereby further maintaining forms of patriarchy and women's dependence on men; especially where some women find they have no choice but to return home due to the lack of affordable housing. After leaving their abusers women find they lose a substantial amount of available money as a result of the separation, women who have divorced find that they lose up to 36% of their finances particularly when they have young children in the home (Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

IPF and Child Witnessing

Women's stories of violence fall along a wide spectrum of abuse (Nicolaidis, et al., 2003). This can range from verbal, financial, emotional to severe violence that can include beating, sexual assault and ultimately killing the woman. Lewandowski, et al., (2004) found that in the majority of intimate partner femicide's the women had experienced years of abuse before they were killed. This abuse was witnessed by their children who are subjected to years of trauma before the death of their mother and ultimately further trauma as a result of and after the femicide.

In exploring the impacts of IPF on the family one such impact cited by Ophardt (2016) followed the murder of Aearlana Smith a young mother killed by her partner in 2016. Aearlana's mother explained that not only did her grandchildren lose their mother but they were sent to live separately with their paternal family.

Friends of Tania Cowell another femicide victim recalled the impact of her murder and their sense of loss as being unbearable. They described her as being extremely outgoing, loving, vibrant, soul with such a zest for life, and always willing to help others the best she could; a great friend who was more like a sister (Frogameni, 2018).

There are many impacts on families who have had their daughter, mother or sister murdered by a former or current partner. In many cases, this is the father of the children who are left behind, making the grief and loss for children and extended family more difficult and more complicated. In some circumstances, children who are left behind may be orphaned when their father has also taken his life through suicide. The sudden death of a loved one brings on many stresses for the family.

The loss of a parent during childhood is very stressful particularly if the death is as a result of the father killing the mother in the presence of the child (Lewandowski, et al., 2004). When children witness the murder of their mother the impacts are seen in their behavior and emotional problems. They suffer with "greater cognitive deficits and more sensitivity to conflict" (Huth-Bocks & Hughes, 2008 p.243). In cases where children did not witness their mother's death they are still impacted and stressed as a result of the

murder. Children can have fears that they will also be harmed. Additionally children witnessing the death of their mother can mean that children may need to testify against their father. They may re-live the trauma of seeing and hearing when called to testify in court (Lewandowski, et al., 2004). Additionally, Lewandowski et al, (2004) found “the overwhelming majority of attempted femicide cases there had been prior physical violence toward the mother” (p. 216). The perpetrator made threats towards the entire family and had threatened to harm the children if the mother left.

The number of children impacted by IPF varies from study to study, in their study Hardesty et al., (2008) found that 3,300 children are impacted by femicide. Children lose their mother through her death and their father sometimes when he has also killed himself, or if the father is incarcerated. Children lose their homes, friends and have to live with maternal grandparents or other relatives.

Of the many traumatic events that a child may experience in their life witnessing the murder of their parent has to be the worst. Witnessing the death of their mother often by their father the child may have been left alone with their dead mother. (Ferrara, et al., 2015). Children who are exposed to intimate partner violence have more emotional and behavioral problems, poor social skills and greater cognitive deficits which can lead to poor educational outcomes (Ferrara, et al., 2015). Children who witness the killing of their mother by their father experience trauma when they hear or see something that triggers them.

Children who do not witness the loss of a parent can often be impacted by what they hear about the details of the murder. In their study Lewandowski, et al., (2004)

found that children exposed to trauma struggled with their loss and often did not get the ongoing psychiatric help they needed. Referrals for treatment for children often had to wait between two weeks to eleven years. Therapy interventions can include “eye movement desensitization and reprocessing, play therapy, [and] trauma therapy” (Alisic, et al., 2018 p. 2). Alisic, et al., (2018) found peer support was an effective way for bereaved to receive help. Additionally bereaved children felt some insecurity over time; stability and continuity was important for them to have, further having a support person available to them for multiple years was an important factor (p. 7).

Families Coping Strategies

Not all family members cope with the same loss in the same way. In this section I will explore some of the themes that came from both literature and my interviews with Gail, including maintaining a connection with the deceased is important and concealment by some family members of their feelings of anger that resulted from the femicide. “Having concrete reminders of their deceased loved ones, pictures, video and reflecting upon joyful times spent with their deceased family members are helpful ways of coping” (Sharpe & Boyas, 2011 p. 862).

Another coping strategy is concealment. Concealment is hiding feelings that arise from the death of a family member from other family members. “Concealment of emotions entails suppressing feelings surrounding the murder... concealment also comes in avoiding talking about the deceased family member and discussing the murder...not to burden others with one's grief and to dissociate oneself from the pain” (p. 864). Family

members may find they pull together but do not “spend time crying, screaming and begging” but were aware of each other’s pain (p. 864). Other family members may find that they still get upset and take a few minutes to refocus and try not to get emotional (Sharpe & Boyas, 2011). For others the coping strategies were felt with family members coming together as a family to deal the “practical and emotional needs of other surviving family members” (p.863). Looking at what other family members needed above their own needs making sure that “everybody was able to go to the funeral” (p.864).

Religion and faith was used by families as way of coping and looking for answers, family members may often experience a “crisis of faith” blaming and moving away from God. One mother recalled her gratitude for the prayer line that she could call in the early hours of the morning and complete strangers would talk to her and share her pain and pray with her and cry with her for as long as she needed, this provided the family with a sense of belonging and comfort (Armour & Umbreit, 2012). During one of our conversations Gail told me that she was looking into different religions and ways to help understand and accept loss as a way of healing. She had started going to a local church which she was finding helpful.

Family relationships between the parents of the femicide victim can suffer due to the intense nature and manner of the death. Brown, (1993 p.7) found that “acute distress did not necessarily strengthen the relationship” with family members. While one spouse may want to talk about events constantly the other spouse may want to avoid and mourn privately. Husbands and wives found it difficult to support each other. The husband may feel a need to hold himself together and could do this by distancing himself from his wife

and not be able to cope with her grief. Some couples may find the grief so intense that the relationship may end in divorce (Parkes, 1993).

In summary in the literature I have reviewed I have found there are many connections between patriarchy, oppression and VAW that lead to femicide. I have further reviewed literature on how family stress relates to homicide and femicide in families and found that families endure many different stresses. The literature I have studied on the impacts of children who witness VAW has validated not only my own experiences as someone who works in the VAW sector, but also what Gail reported in her interviews of the impacts on her children, grandchildren and other children in the family have experienced.

Chapter Five: Findings

Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to shed light on how IPF has impacted Joy's extended family through a case study approach. IPF is an emotional topic for the family to discuss. To address this emotional impact I spoke with Joy's sister Gail to explore how she and her family were impacted by Joy's death. By speaking with Gail only, this reduced the emotional impact on the rest of Joy's family, as they were not asked questions that would create further distress to them when talking about Joy. There are many cognitive and physical issues that family members face as a result of the femicide; these include anxiety and, depression. New caregivers may face these issues which may

result in them not being in a position to provide the long term stability that the children who have experienced trauma due to femicide require.

The factors motivating Gail's openness to sharing her family's story is to help other women who may be reading her family's story. She hopes that by sharing this experience other women who read this thesis may understand that they are not alone in what they are experience. In Gail own words: "if my sister's story can save one woman's life by me talking about it at the cost of some emotional pain then of course I'm going to do that". As someone who worked in the field of social work Gail would be able to, not only empathize with women experiencing IPV but also understand better of the many impacts that one person's death can and does have on the family.

Gail's Own Survivor Story

As a result of Gail being in an abusive relationship herself for approximately two years Gail was able to recognize the troubling signs in Joy's relationship. The signs of abuse that Gail refers to during our interviews were both physical and emotional abuse that Joy experienced. Gail herself is a survivor of IPV; these experiences shaped her ability to connect with what was happening to Joy. Gail's own experiences of IPV led her to access shelter and escape her abuser. Once she regained her independence she was able to rebuild her life and ultimately went on to work in the VAW sector. She recalls:

"My initial reason to working in a shelter was to give back, because I too experienced domestic violence. And had lived in a shelter for a period of time because of domestic violence, so I had always wanted to give back for my experience and the support I was provided within the shelter".

During our second interview Gail spoke of her history of IPV. I explored this aspect of Gail's life to gain a better understanding of how her experience led to concerns she may have had with Joy's relationship. Gail described what her previous relationship was like, stating:

“It was physically, emotionally, and psychologically extremely abusive. After my second daughter was born I decided to leave, [and] after losing a child¹ ... Because of my experiences I could recognize some of the signs, even though Joy did not² ... there were times when she would have bruises and she would make up excuses as I did, so I was able to relate to the shame of telling other. [Due to] my experience I did not judge her. I tried to guide her to getting help to get out and in helping her to become aware that it doesn't end. There is always that honeymoon period. Where I am sorry but it doesn't change”.

Gail went on to explain the catalytic event that led to her deciding that her own relationship was over. Gail explained she had been in a relationship with her ex-partner for two years and endured many episodes of abuse during that time. She described she made the decision to leave her abuser came shortly after the birth of her second daughter and another incident of extreme abuse. Gail decided she had to end her relationship. She explained:

“My abuse was extreme and it was very violent, I have a lot of physical scars... You see on the news women go to prison for killing their abusive partners and I can tell you there is an extremely thin line between sanity and insanity... I had got to the point where I would rather be in prison than live one more day with this person. I felt I had no way out...I had gone to work, he had left our 2 month old daughter in the apartment alone...to come and look for me, because he felt I was cheating...I was going up the

¹ Gail lost her unborn baby as a result of being pushed down the stairs by her former partner.

² Gail explained that Joy may not have recognized the signs of being in an abusive relationship, but Gail was able to recognize them from her own experiences.

stairs to get to my daughter and he went up in front of me, kicked me and I fell down the stairs and broke my arm”.

Tutty et al., (2014) explores women's acts of self-defense in response to experiences of abuse. In discussion of Gail's experiences of abuse, she commented on her own attempts to defend herself when she experienced abuse. Gail described an incident when she attempted to save herself from violence. She described throwing a bottle of liquid softener at her abuser which resulted in a slippery mess when the bottle broke. Gail also described how her abuser came to physically harm her. In response to this she grabbed a knife from the kitchen, from the shock of her attempting to defend herself he ran but because of the angle of the knife she was not able to stop herself in her attempt to scare him away, fortunately he slipped on the fabric softener spilled on the floor. Gail said she was holding the knife at such an angle that if her ex-partner had not slipped and fallen the knife would have gone through his back potentially killing him. Had Gail caused serious injury or harm to her partner she could have faced serious criminal charges. The relationship between domestic violence and the criminalization of women's self-defense is an issue that is reflected in the literature. (Tutty et al., 2014).

Despite these very serious events and Gail's understanding of the abuse she was experiencing, she was still reluctant to get the police involved at the time. This reluctance is shared by many abused women who do not involve law enforcement or even tell their family what is happening to them (Tutty et al., 2014). Gail explained that despite being part of a close knit family there still remained an element of shame and therefore she did not want others to know what was happening to her.

Gail's disclosed memories of this incident were very vivid and clear despite the fact that this incident happened many years ago. She explained that the memories and physical scars will never go away. Gail also revealed that on the day of this incident her abuser had kidnapped and held her hostage in his apartment.

She recalled that no one in her family knew where she was for a week. During this time, her abuser had beaten her unconscious believing she was dead. Gail explained when she awoke she was able to escape from the apartment while her abuser was in the shower. Gail called 911 and tried to flee the apartment but he heard her open the door and ran after her. Once outside the apartment, Gail screamed at a neighbor for help shouting at him to call the police, which he did.

Gail explained that once the police arrived she was taken to the hospital. She described how, at the hospital, she decided she was ready to leave her relationship. Gail described coming to the realization that she could have killed her abuser and been sent to jail there would be no one left to look after her children. This conclusion led her to leave the hospital without completing treatment for her broken finger which remains unhealed³. She subsequently fled with her children to a shelter in a different city.

“At the hospital...in order for them to do an X-ray my arm they had to do a pregnancy test and I found out I was pregnant...I was bleeding from the fall and lost the child... I didn't tell the doctors what had happened, again as women we tend to protect the abuser a lot of times...he was there begging me please don't talk to the police. The doctors were asking me to file a report so I said yes to both”.

³ Gail's finger was broken as a result of her being pushed down the stairs in the same incident that led to her losing her unborn child. The finger remains disfigured as it was not treated and healed at the time.

Gail explained that she said yes to making a police report as the emergency room doctor was pushing her to make a statement against her abuser. She also told her former abuser that she would not make a report to the police about what he did if he gave her \$50; he gave her the money and she used it to buy bus tickets and get out of the city and away from him. Gail explained that this had been her plan and her only way to escape the abuse.

Joy's Story of Intimate Partner Violence

Within the context of intimate partner violence, violence is used as a tool of fear and it is related directly to male assumptions of privilege, access and ownership (Fleury, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2000; Yodanis, 2004). If women speak out against the violence committed against them they are often made to feel responsible for its occurrence and forced to carry the burden of shame (Gill, 2004).

In sharing Joy's story of her abusive relationship, Gail recalls some of the fears Joy experienced. It is to be noted that Gail acknowledges some details about Joy's relationship are not first-hand; these details were shared with her by her daughters. Gail explained that both her daughters were closer in age to Joy than Gail was, these three younger women had a close relationship which Gail described as them being more like sisters, than nieces and aunt.

Like Gail, there was a certain point in Joy's relationship where she made the decision that she no longer wanted to be in the relationship with her ex-partner. While

Gail was uncertain of how long Joy's relationship with her ex-partner lasted, she recalled Joy's decision to leave:

“I would say after the baby was born she consciously tried getting out. The relationship was on and off, and she tried to leave but then he would threaten her. He would use guilt because of the baby and would say she was keeping her out of his life”.

Research indicates that as relationships progress, violence is likely to increase in severity (Fleury, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2000; Anderson & Saunders, 2003). I explored with Gail whether Joy's relationship was more abusive with her ex-partner before her death. Gail suggests this was the case. She described her understanding of the realities of the relationship as:

“Volatile! ...he had broken into her apartment and trashed, he broke a glass table and furniture just smashed everything. She reported it to the police, he admitted it but she didn't have proof...the police said there was no proof that he was the one that did it.”

In many circumstances women do not disclose their experiences of abuse to family members and may minimize the severity of events. I enquired whether other family members knew how abusive Joy's ex-partner was; she stated “we all knew, he had threatened to hurt the family”.

Gail explained that as a result of her own experience she too had not disclosed her abuse to her family as her abuser had also threatened to harm them. She said she would not get the family involved because she was trying “to protect them”.

Many women do not disclose the full extent of the abuse they are enduring to anyone because of shame, and a sense of guilt (Hyman, et al., 2009). Gail revealed how she could

relate to Joy's decision not to disclose her abuse based on Gail's experience which led Gail to minimize her abuse; she reflected:

“From my own personal experience I can say you suffer in secrecy from the shame. You hide it from your loved ones and you become a great actor. My sister would have bruises and she would make up stories about how she got them, although we knew and I did the same. So again, it's that shame and feeling that people will judge you because that's what he is doing. It's not just him that's being judged for what he's done, you're being judged for being in a relationship with him and you keep it private and suffer.”

Shame is another emotion that may limit women who experience abuse from acknowledging it. Women like Joy and Gail may deny their experiences rather than seeking to comprehend their abuse (Gill, 2004).

Woman may feel there is no way to escape their abusive relationship so forgetting or minimizing the violence may be more of an effective denial mechanism that helps them to survive (Gill, 2004). Many women internalize social messages about their experiences of abuse which include: feelings that they somehow are to blame for the abuse they suffer, or not wanting to be seen as a victim of domestic violence. There still continues to be a sense of shame and stigma attached to being a victim of intimate partner violence (Gill, 2004).

The intersectionality of Race and Gender

Women of all ethnic backgrounds experience IPV and IPF (Hyman, et al., 2009). Joy was a young woman in her late twenties; she was born and raised in Canada to a white mother and Jamaican father. Her identity as a mixed race women likely influenced

her experiences of abuse and responses from service providers and the police to her disclosures of abuse (Hyman, et al., 2009).

To this point, studies in the United States show minority women who experience intimate partner abuse are less likely to seek help than white women (Hyman, et al., 2009). Similarly minority Canadian women do not utilize health and social services after intimate partner violence in the same way white women do. Hyman, et al., (2009) found that some of the factors in underutilization of these services were due to women's lack of knowledge that services existed, their abuser prevented them from seeking help, and fear of losing their financial support.

These help seeking strategies can include disclosing experiences of abuse and talking to family and friends, getting medical assistance or reporting abuse to police (Hyman, et al., 2009).

Language can be a barrier to accessing services for racialized women particularly if they are new immigrants to the country and do not know where to go or whom to ask for assistance (Hyman, et al., 2009).

Given Joy's identity as a mixed race person, I asked Gail if there were any cultural practices that Joy as a biracial woman observed. Gail stated:

“Joy was born in Canada, there are no family traditions that have been discussed in the family...they are Canadian and there are not many traditions in Canadian culture...no cultural traditions...because mom is Canadian”.

In my discussions with Gail, she did not mention any racial issues that would have led to Joy being killed because she was biracial; but rather Joy was killed simply because her ex-partner was abusive to her. Having read about Joy's murder in the newspaper I know that Joy's ex-partner is also a racialized man and the femicide may have nothing do with Joy being a biracial woman. However, I cannot know this for certain. There is a possibility that there is some internalized racial stereotypes or oppression he may have about biracial individuals.

However, it is possible that had Joy and her ex-partner both been white they may have received different responses from police and other service providers. Perhaps Joy did not seek shelter due to lack of cultural diversity provided by shelters because service providers take a "color blind" approach to providing services (Gillum, 2008).

African American women seeking medical care as a result of intimate partner violence reported more psychological distress and lower levels of perceived emotional, informational, and tangible support (Gillum, 2008). Hyman et al., (2009) found that racialized women did not seek support to the same degree as white women. Gail did mention that Joy felt some shame in disclosing her abuse to other family members. Gail did not link this to Joy's racial identity, but rather suggested this was more "just the shame of the abuse".

Accessing shelters for marginalized women can be something of a challenge. For African American women their perceptions of domestic violence are different to those of white women (Gillum, 2008). Some literature indicates that Black women were seen as protectors of Black men (Gillum, 2008). Gail spoke about this in her own relationship

stating “I didn’t tell the doctors what had happened...again [as] women we tend to protect the abuser”. Gail also recalled not telling the police her abusers correct name this led to him not being charged for the assault against her.

The lack of culturally sensitive services may be one barrier that prevents racialized women from accessing shelters (Gillum, 2008). From my experience as a shelter worker I know that some cultural issues were addressed and accommodated. Interpreters are made available in many languages hiring staff with dual languages has been practiced, and culturally appropriate food is made available to families. Shirwadkar, (2004) summed the importance of culturally relevant care:

Programs and policies in developed countries do not necessarily accommodate the diversity of cultures within those countries. This shortcoming is increasingly an issue given the influx of immigrants from less developed countries who bring very different cultural practices and family circumstances (p. 861).

Leaving Abusive Relationships.

Leaving an abusive relationship may be the best way for women to achieve safety after abuse (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). However, the link between separation and violence is complex (Fleury, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2000). In many cases women with abusive partners may not end relationships because they are threatened with more violence if they leave, including threats to harm their children, family, and friends (Fleury, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2000).

While interviewing Gail, I explored the risk and benefits that Joy may have experienced in leaving her abusive relationship. I asked Gail about this aspect of Joy’s

relationship and what it was like with her ex-partner to understand if there was fear in Joy's relationship. Gail explained the dynamics of Joy's relationship:

“Joy was not in any relationship with him. She was so scared of her ex that she had a male friend move in with her...she wouldn't talk to me about it directly but she talked to my daughter...then my daughter would be very concerned and she would call me and I would voice my concerns...”

Gail described how Joy's ex-partner had made threats to harm the family, which made Joy even more fearful; to the point where after he broke into her apartment she went to stay with her parents for a while until Mary moved in with her.

Gail went on to explain that prior to Joy's death their sister Mary went to live with Joy in response to the ongoing and escalating abuse that Joy's ex-partner was inflicting on her. Shortly before Joy's death, this included breaking into her apartment and destroying most of the furniture and Joy's belongings. Joy's ex-partner inflicted psychological and emotional abuse towards her. Gail explained that Joy's ex-partner had pretended to be ill and persuaded Joy to meet him:

“That morning she was texting my step-mom sending her messages about what he had said...he said he drank the night before, and was feeling sick and he was throwing up and wanted her to come see him. She said no. He then messaged her again saying he was at the hospital and if she could pick him up”.

Gail explained that Joy met with her former partner, Gail felt that Joy was forced to go with him; she did not believe that Joy would have willingly gone with him. What actually happened in the final hours of Joy's life may be something that the family never finds out.

The information provided by Gail reflects much similarity with the work of Pain (2012). In her study about everyday terrorism and specifically fear in relationships, Pain, (2012 p.14) explores fear as:

...“fear not just as being a by-product of domestic abuse” but rather a “key element that keeps the abuse going. Abuse in relationships works through coercive control; abusers employ a range of tactics and behaviors that may include physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse that together entrap abused women”.

Gail's descriptions of the events in Joy's relationship reinforce Pain's (2012) assertion. It was clear that Joy's ex-partner used psychological and emotional abuse to maintain his abusive behavior towards her.

Many researchers have found the first signs of an abusive relationship can begin and escalate when the woman is pregnant, and prior threats to kill are also present (Nicolaidis, et al., 2003). To validate these findings I asked Gail how many incidents of physical violence Joy endured during her relationship Gail explained:

“It was a lot during her pregnancy she would make excuses that she walked into something as women always do...it started when she got pregnant and then just progressively got worse. My daughter is the one that would tell me and my step mother said she had lots of bruises... the beatings, the choking...I would call her and say you let me call a shelter...she said she would go and then changed her mind”.

Sometimes women tend to minimize the violence they experience perhaps because they often feel there seems to be no escape. Gill's (2004) describes how women in abusive relationships see “no escape” from abuse. For many women “forgetting or minimizing the violence” is an effective “denial mechanism that helped her to survive” (p. 474).

Fleury et al., (2000) suggests that violence by an ex-partner is similar in terms of what a current partner may inflict. In terms of Joy's relationship she endured the same type of abuse from her ex-partner as she did when they were in a relationship. For Joy leaving him did not minimize or stop his abuse towards her. The violence post-separation continues in order to assert power and control over women. Assault after separation is very common; therefore, it is unreasonable to assume that ending the relationship ends the violence. In some cases, the violence is escalated which then leads to femicide.

A safety plan may help women keep themselves and their children safe from harm. This is a practice that as a shelter worker I often used when women were meeting their former partners for access visits or just leaving the shelter to go back to their house to get belongings. When possible, a safety plan could include the request for police to escort the woman to gather belongings to ensure that she was not harmed in any way. Often women will use their own network of family and friends to support them with their safety plan. I asked Gail if Joy had a safety plan with anyone:

“Joy and my sister (Mary) they had a safety plan and I know my step mother also had one, they had a code word that if she's in danger and wants her to call the police that she would say what the code word was”.

I asked Gail if she felt Joy she was in danger when they found out Joy was missing:

“Yes absolutely right away. We all felt it the whole family, On Monday morning Joy wasn't home... Mary was panicking calling the police and Joy's friends...trying to find out any information. When Joy had left she said she was going to visit a friend. Mary contacted the friend...and the friend had not seen Joy. We knew for sure then if she had not shown up for the friend and had not contacted anyone that she was in danger”.

Gail described that Joy was very protective of her daughter and would never have left Kate alone with her father. The family was fearful for the safety of both mother and daughter (Kate); when Kate did not attend school that morning and Joy herself had not responded to any calls or text messages from family members they knew something had happened to Joy.

Dealing with Grief and Loss

Often being told of the death of a relative can be the hardest thing to hear and understand. When I first heard of my uncle's murder I was hysterical at what I had heard. Gail recalled having a similar reaction to hearing of her Joy's death:

“At the time my brain wasn't able to process that you're hearing the person is dead, it's too much but your emotions somehow kick in. For me it was very difficult. I just remember screaming”.

The murder of a family member resulting from femicide is mostly sudden and unexpected and exacts a heavy toll creating distress and emotional turmoil that the family and friends must deal with. As a result normal grief patterns become distorted when the killing is due to murder; the shock of the death is convoluted by the family's fixation of how their family member died and whether justice will be served (Brown, 1993). Family members may even express a desire to avenge the death of their family member. Gail commented that her brothers will say “I just need to be alone with him or something like that”. Guilt can arise from feelings that family members did not somehow protect her and prevent the tragedy from happening (Brown, 1993). Kübler-Ross & Kessler, (2019) explain that there are five stages in the grief cycle and not all people go through these stages. These stages of grief are

denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Gail describes how other members of her family are dealing with the loss of Joy:

“My brother is impacted a lot. He feels like he should have protected his sister and he didn't do that. He knew how dangerous this person was. So there is a lot of guilt”.

Gail describes how her parents are coping:

“With my dad and step-mom they didn't break down until after the funeral and immediately after my dad got sick he was in the hospital...they didn't grieve during that time because there was so many people around and they were talking, interacting and it was after everyone was gone and you're alone with your thoughts that it begins to really sink in that this person is never coming back”.

This is described by Brown, (1993 p. 7) as the “lull before the storm of court hearings”.

Gail has worked with many women who fled abusive relationships and this experience has shaped how she was able to recognize how grief impacted her family. Gail was able to articulate the stages of grief and was aware what stages her parents were in:

“I believe my dad is stuck at anger, my step-mom is past anger and she is bargaining. It's almost like if I had done this, I should have done that...she has not spoken of her (Joy) in the past tense. It will take some time for them to get to acceptance, and they may never get to acceptance. A lot of people don't, when it's such a violent death”.

Gail further explained how one of her brothers is so angry about Joy's death that he could not bring himself to attend the hearings as “he could not bear to be in the same space as the person that took his sisters life”.

The grief and anxiety that comes from IPF is incomparable. The anguish felt by families is further compounded by numerous internal and external stressors such as the manner of the death of their family member, fears about their personal safety and feelings of confusion and anger against the justice system (Horne, 2003). Horne, (2003) found that after the killing of a loved one there were three stages of “grief work” (p.76) to be done in order to regain social functioning. The grief work included “accepting the death and acknowledging the broken relational bond with the deceased; making role adjustments in the altered social and family environment; and finally forming new relationships” (p. 76).

When exploring the grief work of accepting Joy's death, I asked Gail to recall the events leading up to it. She recalled how she found out that Joy was missing:

“I got a call from my step-mom that she was calling her (Joy) texting her and not getting a response and she was very concerned, and worried that something had happened...it was not like her. And then I heard from my sister (Mary) who lived with her (Joy) at the time and she also could not get hold of her so they were very worried very panicked, it was very unlike her not to show up for work...not to take the child to school. So all these things were out of character, and because she was such a responsible person. We knew right away something was wrong”.

Gail recalls what her initial thoughts and feelings were when she found out Joy was missing:

“It triggered my own experience of the trauma associated with abuse. I panicked, she was not answering her phone and she was not home the child was not home. I had a sense of great fear for her life. I recall getting down on my knees and started praying because I knew right away... I was praying. I called a friend and she prayed with me. No one had to tell me anything bad had occurred because this was something completely out of

character... I knew in my heart that if she was not found soon she would not be found alive. He had tried to kill her several times before”.

There was a short period of time where Joy was missing and I had been asked by Gail to share within my social network contacts to help locate Joy. Gail described how she and several family members were driving to meet the search party when she found out Joy was not missing but now dead:

“On the Tuesday I received a call...even though it just happened it’s a blur who called; I just remember screaming. I think it was my sister who called, I don’t remember exactly but it was my sister, yes my sister called. Actually no I had found out on social media that she had been found dead...”

In recalling this event Gail suddenly remembered that she found out Joy was dead after someone had taken a picture of the police where Joy was found and posted it on social media. Brown, (1993) describes how this manner of learning about a family member’s death can cause additional anger. The anger is intensified and can be deflected at other family members who may have known but did not or could reach not out to everyone.

I explored further with Gail the events surrounding Joy’s death and specifically how Joy’s parents found out she had died:

“The police went to the house I think that’s how they found out. When I called them they did not answer. The police told my parents”.

In line with questions on the aftermath of Joy’s death I queried who had gone to identify Joy’s body:

“I don’t think anyone went to identify her, it wasn’t until she was released to the funeral parlor that they actually saw her...I remember saying to my

step-mother that I wanted to go with her when her body was released to the parlor so that she wasn't by herself... I don't believe my dad and step-mom identified the body. I don't believe that they needed to or the police warned them against I can't remember it but I don't remember anyone going to identify her".

Brown, (1993) describes how family members may be discouraged from seeing the body of the deceased due to the nature of the death or the condition of the body. This could be the reason that police may have discouraged Joy's parents from viewing the body until she was at the funeral home.

I asked Gail how Joy's death impacted her children. Gail explained that her daughter Debbie has been deeply impacted by Joy's death. Gail described a "pile-up" (Malia, 2006) of stressors that contributed to Debbie's mental health breakdown:

"She had a friend that died around the same time and then the trial⁴; during this time my grandson fell and hit his head and [seeing] all the blood and connecting it to the trial. I was telling her about how much blood evidence was there... this combination just pushed her."

Gail said Debbie feels she is being judged due to the stigma attached to having a mental illness. Despite Gail's reassurances to Debbie that having a mental health illness is not her fault Debbie continues to struggle to the point that she was hospitalized for almost 2 months which led to Gail becoming the primary care-giver to Debbie's children.

Gail described speaking with Debbie's young daughter who explained that Debbie was not well. As there was no responsible adult in the home Gail called police to attend

⁴ Gail refers to the pre-trial hearing where evidence was presented by the Crown. There was enough evidence presented for a trial to be set.

Debbie's house and conduct a wellness check which resulted in the police calling the Children's Aid Society. Gail describes:

“It was very stressful because I ended up leaving work to stay with the children. It was a stressful time because this was all happening during the trial so it compounded and made it more stressful...the baby is not aware but then children pick up on energy and he would not want to go with her because her energy was different and the older one she developed anxiety seeing her mother sick”.

This ‘pileup’ of stressors (Malia, 2006) happened after the major traumatic incident and resulted directly from Joy's murder. This is an important issue to families as in the case of Gail and her family they are all in different locations. They are not necessarily all discussing Joy's death on a daily basis, but they nevertheless all continue to be impacted. For Joy's parent the stress of Joy's death is very visible in the form of them being primary caregivers of Joy's young daughter. Gail disclosed her that father suffered a stroke and a heart attack after Joy's death.

Feelings of Guilt and Sadness

The murder of one family member has a deep impact on other family members. Armour & Umbreit, (2012) describe this as a change in the family relationships and how one person reacts to the murder is not necessarily the same as the reaction by another person in the family. I explored with Gail how Joy's murder had impacted and changed her life.

“There is a lot of guilt. I feel I could have done more. I should have done more and I didn't... there's been a lot of pain and guilt...”

Participants in the Malone, (2007) study described feelings of intense rage, shattered values and feelings of powerlessness, isolation and guilt. Gail describe having feelings of guilt and sadness even at simple things like laughing:

“You know having to deal with the after effects of that because it’s a domino effect having to go to the trial and look at this person it’s retriggered each time. Sometimes I feel guilty (at this point Gail started to cry, we paused for a few minutes) you know when you in an instant you laugh, feel joy, and you feel guilty because she’s not here. She was just such a beautiful soul”.

Gail described how she was no longer as carefree as she used to be. I asked her to clarify what she meant by her statement, I could sense the sadness in her voice as she spoke. She said she did not laugh as much as she used to, or leave the house unless she had to and is trying to work through her grief.

Gail went on to explain how her parents have been impacted by Joy’s murder:

“My parents didn’t want them to leave⁵, they wanted them there...So I think there’s a lot of guilt on their side because we tried to get her away and then she would call or text me and say mom and dad don’t want me to leave...My step mother wants her pictures everywhere...for my dad it is painful...their relationship is strained they[each] spend time alone...for our parents it kind of pushed them apart because she wants to remember her (Joy) constantly talking and he wants to just pretend like it never happened”.

This sentiment is similar to findings of Armour & Umbreit had, (2012) one participant explained that: “I’m the woman and I cry and I want my spouse to cry, my husband doesn’t want to. They feel guilty because they couldn’t protect their child” (p. 86).

⁵ Gail explains that there had been a plan for Joy and Kate to leave the city in an effort to get away from her abusive ex-partner and start over near Gail.

Gail described family gatherings and holidays as always being a reminder and because Joy is not around anymore family members did not want to get together anymore. She described how the family is separated in different parts of the province and that this separation almost felt like the family itself is divided. Gail recalled how Joy would be the one to say “ok I’m going to rent a car and drive down and we’ll celebrate”. Now nobody cares to get together. Gail recalled the first year after Joy’s death was very difficult; in an attempt to get the family together her daughters arranged for a gathering at Easter. Gail recalled the arrangements:

“We had Easter dinner planned and no one came. We rented a hall my daughter ended up cancelling it because no one wanted to come because it’s a constant reminder. Thanksgiving was the last family get together...[that] was the last time we all saw her. And so every family gathering is a reminder that she’s not there”.

This sentiment was something that Armour & Umbreit, (2012) found in their study of family members who survived femicide. Family members described how every birthday, and other major holiday they get sick and these major holidays felt like a unhealed scab that just gets knocked off, sending them back right to where it all began.

Impacts of Child Witnessing of Violence

Children who witness the violent death of their mother are undoubtedly impacted and traumatized for the rest of their lives. Many children experience intrusive thoughts, triggered by sounds and images. I asked Gail how Kate was told about her mother’s death:

“Actually she was the one that told us that mommy wasn't coming to get her because she was in heaven. So in her young mind she knew from what she saw or heard I don't know but she knew something obviously”.

Many children who witness the femicide experienced nightmares, anxiety, fear and poor concentration. In their study Burman & Allen-Meares, (1994) detailed the experience of a young child who had witnessed his mother's death:

Through tears Joseph expressed how much he missed her. He described the nightmares in which he saw his mother being killed and spoke of his fear of the dark and afraid that his father might get out of jail and come hurt them too (p. 32).

Working with children I know they are curious and will ask questions about family members they no longer see. To expand on this line of inquiry I asked Gail how the family was handling Kate's questions about her mother:

“She hasn't asked me. My step mom she said once in a while or out of the blue she will say something like “I miss my mommy, or my mommy was very beautiful, I hate my dad, I hate my dad” from whatever she observed again it's confirmed for her that daddy hurt mommy”.

Gail explained how these questions and statements were handled and advised her step-mother that the family needed to allow Kate to have moments whenever they came up and that she should be given a space to talk. Gail said she explained to her step-mother how these moments of Kate talking about her parents would be difficult for the family but nevertheless they were important for Kate to be able to express her feelings and emotions. Gail encouraged her step-mother to talk to Kate about Joy as a young child and provide Kate with:

“...Happy memories that she had with her mother...because she will never forget that her mom was murdered. She might forget [details] but instead to focus on how she lived and how much of a good mother she was and tell her things about Joy when she was a child so she has those memories. It will normalize her childhood”.

Gail explained that she communicated to her step-mother that the problems would surface in later years and encouraged her to do seek counselling for Kate. Gail said she was not sure whether this advice was followed up on.

Counselling for children who have witnessed the death of their mother is encouraged at the early stages (Ferrara, et al., 2015). Children who witness violence can experience symptoms of PTSD “If treatment is neglected or postponed adaptations to satisfactory and optimal functioning can be severely compromised” (Ferrara, et al., 2015 p. 5). For children who have experienced the trauma of witnessing violence, without intervention they can be triggered which can lead to them experiencing such issues as substance use and mental health breakdown. Burman & Allen-Meares, (1994) found there is little attention given to children who witness the death of their mother. They found the damaging effects of violence seen by children have largely been overlooked from a psychiatric perspective.

Relationship with Grandparents

Maternal grandparents often bear the greatest burdens after the femicide has occurred, taking on the role of caregivers when there is nowhere for their grandchildren to go. They often have to find a balance between taking care of their grandchildren, dealing with their own grief and whether or not the children should have access to the father and his family. In their research Hardesty, et al. (2008) found one caregiver who took care of

her four grandchildren who all had different responses to the murder of their mother by their father. This included some children did not believe their father was responsible for their mother's death and he should not be in jail.

I asked Gail what Kate's relationship with her father and his family was like. Gail explained:

“There was no relationship really with the father. Joy would never allow her (Kate) to be with him alone so if he did see her it was with her (Joy) but it wouldn't be for long periods”.

She said that Joy was constantly worried that he would harm her. On one occasion he called Joy and demanded to see Kate. Mary intervened in the phone call. Gail recalls:

“Joy was very upset. Mary took the phone away from her and said “if you want to meet your daughter that badly I will meet you with the child” that's how fearful we were of this monster. So Mary said she would take the child to a public place and he could visit with her at a Tim Hortons. But Joy said “it's not the child he wants to see, it's me he doesn't really care to see the child”.

Gail and I explored whether Joy had any relationship with her ex-partners family. Gail described his relationship with his family as 'toxic', he had pushed his mother down the stairs, and she no longer wanted him in her life. Joy had reached out to the family once she became pregnant as she wanted them to be a part of the baby's life, but he was against this idea. Gail explained that Joy did not maintain any relationship with her ex-partners family and Kate also does not have any relationship with the paternal family.

After the femicide children often go and live with maternal grandparents (Hardesty, et al. 2008). Kate has been living with her elderly maternal grandparents since

Joy was murdered. I explored with Gail what permanency plans the family had discussed in the event that the grandparents were no longer able to care for her.

“They are presently the primary caregivers. I know they have discussed with the boys...and with Mary about where she [Kate] will go if anything happened to them, but there is nothing written in stone, but it has been discussed”.

I felt this was an important line of enquiry as children who have experienced femicide need stability which is important to help them heal from the trauma. This point is illustrated by Hardesty, et al. (2008) in their study:

A stable relationship with a caring and consistent adult (e.g., a grandmother) has been found to be an important contributor to later adjustment among children exposed to domestic violence the ability of new caregivers to provide a supportive and secure environment may be critical for children's recovery after IPF (p. 102).

Role Adjustments

As mentioned in the previous section grandparents who take on the role of parents to young children face added stressors. The stress of losing their own child through violence as well as their own age and health struggles can impact their ability to care for children that may be young, energetic and of course traumatized by what they may have witnessed. Gail spoke of the challenges and role adjustments her parents had to make when they took on the role of parenting their grandchild:

“Dad is in his seventies, having to raise a child with my step-mother, you know it's nice, she's very active but they don't have the energy like they did when her mother was a child... it's their connection to her so they need to have her there”.

From this statement I was able to tell how difficult it was for Joy's parents to be raising her daughter. Having lost Joy in such tragic circumstances. The grandchild is a

constant reminder of their loss. They are bound to be reminded of Joy as a child herself and they reflect on the dreams they had for her.

I further explored with Gail the daily challenges her parents were facing in raising a young child.

“It takes a lot of energy to raise the child at that age. My dad is in his 70’s and his health is failing, so their age is definitely a huge factor and it’s definitely different to when they raised their children. My step-mom talks about being tired all the time she’s (Kate) active and kids want to go to the park, they want to go to places and do things.”

Gail stated the difference in parenting a young child when her parents were younger themselves is very different to how they are managing now. “When you’re doing it on a part-time basis and you get them once in a while in the role of grandma then its ok but when it’s an everyday thing it can be difficult”.

Gail described the mix of emotions the family go through each day. They struggle with their pain of losing their child and also the guilt of discouraging Joy from moving away to escape her abuser.

“... Lots of pain; my parents are stuck...and not able to move forward. It’s affected my dad because he [felt he was not] protective. I would talk to them and I would say she really needs to get away... you have to think about her safety and the child’s safety”

Gail said her parents struggled with the notion of Joy and Kate moving away from them because they really enjoyed spending time with Kate, and they would miss the close attachment they had with Kate if she moved away with Joy.

Impact on children

Children witnessing domestic violence or the killing of a parent are forever affected in many different ways. Children who have witnessed violence including femicide may experience “intrusive thoughts, images and sounds of the incident. Nightmares sleep disturbances, emotional detachment and anxiety” (Hardesty, et al. 2008 p.102). If children did not get help and relief from these symptoms this hinders their ability to grieve and make progress from their traumatic loss. One remedy to help children deal with their trauma was for children to be placed in a stable relationship with a caring and consistent adult to help with adjustment, this could be grandparents.

This can also be challenging as Hardesty, et al. (2008) discovered in their study that several months after the death of their own child “two caregivers had suffered heart attacks, two underwent major surgeries...[and] the children in one family lost both maternal grandparents within two years of the death of their mother” (p. 112).

Gail's daughters and grandchildren were very close to Joy and her daughter, Kate, in terms of family relationships and in terms of age, therefore the impact of Joy's death has affected them deeply. Gail described the impact the death had on one of her young granddaughter's:

“She held a knife⁶ and said she wanted to die so she could be with her aunt Joy... she was the one who snuck out of the room where all the children were and went to see Joy's body and she had nightmares afterwards”.

⁶ Gail disclosed that her granddaughter held a knife to imitate the manner in which Joy died. As this case has not yet been before the courts and at Gail's request I cannot disclose the manner in which Joy was killed.

Children who witness their mother being murdered suffer deeply from the impact of this trauma. The children who were the focus of Hardesty et al. (2008) study had some comparable reactions of self-harm to the femicide they witnessed: “A 13 year old girl attempted suicide three times in the first year after her mother was killed” (p.109). The study also found other children experienced sleep disturbances and separation anxiety after the femicide. The children would wake up in the night after nightmares, and were afraid of the dark. One child did not want to sleep alone or close doors to rooms.

Gail did not share with me any details of what Kate had witnessed. I asked Gail if there were changes in her behavior since her mother died:

“I know in the beginning there was some regression, it was almost like a baby like stage she went through, very clingy, very moody, and talking in a baby voice...what I have observed is that she now calls her grandmother mommy. I don't think she is aware she is doing that. There are times when she will become very quiet and withdrawn...”

Studies of child witnessing suggests it is likely that this exposure to violence will have a permanent impact on Kate. In discussing the long-term effects Gail explained:

“It will be a lasting impact on her life because she was there. The other day out of the blue she said “I hate my daddy. I hate my daddy”. When my stepmother [her grandmother] asked why she said that [her response was] “because that's why mommy's not here”. Once in a while she will come out with something. She talks about missing her mother”.

Children experienced heightened feelings of insecurity when elderly caregivers became ill or die. Children may have increased worries after one grandparent has died that the other grandparent would also die and that their father would get out of prison and

kill the surviving grandparent (Hardesty, et al. 2008). They constantly fear losing another person to whom they are emotionally attached.

To explore what impacts the femicide had on the children in the family I asked Gail how her own grandchildren were dealing with Joy's death and what struggles they were experiencing on an ongoing basis. Gail described their responses:

“There is sadness, the second one [Gail's granddaughter] ... I truly believe it's because she saw Joy in the coffin and I don't know how any adult [didn't stop her from seeing Joy]. She's the one that talks about it the most and it's affected the most. I think it has to do with her curiosity and wanting to see why the children were in one area and the adults in another, don't tell a child you can't do this and that's exactly what they will do. I think that's what happened and because of it [she is] traumatized”.

Gail said her granddaughter is struggling at school and the teacher had sent a letter home and recommended counselling. Gail said she was not sure if Debbie (her daughter) was able to follow through with these suggestions due largely in part to her own mental health struggles. Gail said she believed Kate had spoken with her cousins about what had happened and this had further impacted them:

“She did talk to them, I don't know the details, but I do know she did tell them. My eldest grandchild came to me and said Kate said that her mommy is never coming back, they did not know, they knew something was up...but it was when [Kate] told them all that her mommy was not coming back that they knew. You saw the sadness and they said “she said she's never coming back” because in their heads in their realm of understanding not coming back means not coming back for a while, [when] she told them [about Joy] was when I think they understood what was really happening as it came from a 4 year old it wasn't from the adults”.

Gail described that the information that her niece had provided to the police about what may have happened to her mother was enough for them to commence a search party.

Realizing the Loss

The murder of a family member changes the order and structure of the family. The parents have one less child, sibling's order of age changes they may no longer be the middle or oldest child (Sharpe & Boyas, 2011). Gail mentioned this at the outset of our interview when she referred to Joy as the baby and her stepmother 'having three children now not four'. Gail's own feelings were that once the funeral had taken place things began to feel final and the loss of a loved one starts to sink in. Planning and organizing a funeral particularly for a child is not an easy task, however it often serves as a distraction for the family members. Reflecting on the significance of the funeral for Joy's family, I asked what decisions were made and who by about the preparation and arrangements and how family members coped with this difficult task; Gail responded:

“Oh my goodness, my stepmom...went to the funeral parlor and did all of that so all of the planning was done by my stepmom. I believe that they were still in shock and the shock of having people in and out and around all of the time it really didn't sink in until the viewing and it was after the funeral I would say that they fell apart. Because then it was final it was it was real, the funeral kind of made it real for them...you know I think they were in shock and then you know the steps of grieving. I think they're still at anger”.

Brown, (1993) speaks to this point that when the death of a person is very public, the family's grief becomes scrutinized and the funeral is held in the glare of publicity. The grieving process becomes suspended until after the funeral takes place.

Triggers

As our first interview commenced, Gail revealed that she felt very anxious on her way to meet with me, explaining that initially she did not understand why she was feeling that way until she realized and reflected on where she was going and what she was going to be talking about. She said once she had made the connection between the two things she was able to acknowledge what she was feeling and why she was feeling that way. It became obvious that talking about Joy's death is a trigger that still elicits anxiety and this is just one of the lasting effects of Joy's death.

Triggers can bring back floods of emotions without any warning at any time. In one of my follow up interviews with Gail she revealed a major triggering event:

“When I was shopping for a dress for my daughter's wedding, I ended up in the same store that I bought the dress for Joy's funeral...In the store I became overwhelmed with all these emotions and could not figure why I was feeling this way and started crying out of nowhere and didn't know why”.

Hardesty et al., (2008) discuss triggers in their study as being anything that could elicit a memory of the IPF incident. One caregiver described how her granddaughter would not go out alone and does not like doors or even shower curtains closed in the house. Gail spoke of her trigger which occurred when she was sharing memories with her aunt not realizing that not everyone is grieving the same way she is. Gail explained that she was thinking about Joy in a happier moment. She recalled that:

“For me I thought I would be okay talking about it but it does bring you back into that place and reminds you that person is not here and that's why I'm having that conversation and it becomes real and all those emotions come flooding back. So it's not as easy as I thought it would be”.

During many of our interviews Gail spoke of how deeply Debbie had been affected by Joy's death. I asked how Debbie was dealing with her triggers on a daily basis. Gail explained that Debbie was doing better, but when Gail discussed the subject of the pretrial with Debbie a mental health breakdown was triggered. Gail explained that Debbie is seeing a psychiatrist and is learning to cope with the triggers by acknowledging the feelings that she is having and talking to Gail about her anxiety.

Coping Strategies

Gail spoke about the coping strategies of her family members:

“My sister (Mary) tends to mourn in private and keeps her emotions private whereas I will cry easily. Like when I'm on the bus. We haven't really talked about how the other person is feeling and she is not one to talk about her emotions”.

Mary is using concealment as a coping strategy which works for her (Sharpe & Boyas, 2011). In our interviews Gail disclosed that her father also uses concealment as a coping strategy as he does not like to talk about Joy and particularly her death.

Other coping strategies have come in the form of support from the police who were very helpful to the family and offered counselling for anyone who needed it. The officers were also supportive by answering questions the family had regarding court proceedings. Staff from the Victim Services department tried to normalize Christmas for Kate by dressing up as Santa Clause and bringing her presents. A theme that Hardesty, et al., (2008) also found was detectives on a case took special interest in the family and helped tremendously.

I explored the coping strategies Gail was using that she found helpful. She said she also found going for acupuncture to help with depression and anxiety once a week worked better for her than seeing a psychiatrist, and talking to a counsellor every two weeks. Gail said she felt this treatment method was so beneficial to her that she also encouraged her eldest daughter to try it which she also finds helpful. By the time Gail and I spoke for our final interview she had utilized further coping strategies that worked for her. She explained:

“I had to meditate before I spoke with you and I fasted. I find that when I do that it helps me...because when we met, the first time; it took a few days for me to get up pull myself out of that terrible feeling... I have been looking at old ancient ways of healing trauma instead of drugs and I find that it's been helping”

This means of coping and dealing with trauma was encouraging to hear; hearing that it was working for both Gail and Debbie and they were finding it beneficial was interesting.

Their New Normal

When a family member is killed suddenly it creates a new family status. As Armour & Umbreit (2012) state the “emergence of a new self” occurs for many people. Within the family there is an experience that “everything is new, every event and holiday is new everything is either before or after” the death of a loved one (p. 84). In another study by Armour (2002) one participant summarized this experience of change stating: “Things have returned to their new normal I don't know that life is better or worse I feel I know a whole lot more and am better prepared for the rest of my life” (p. 378). With the

murder came a new way of living and as family members were forced to reconcile with new beliefs these new beliefs became their new normal (Armour M. P., 2002).

Their “new normal” is a term that Gail used to describe life without Joy. It really stuck with me as being very impactful, it is a phrase that encompasses a lot of the things Gail has discussed and I hope it will inform readers a little bit of what the family is going through since Joy’s tragic death. One of the most difficult things Gail struggled with in our first interview was using the word “was” instead of “is” when talking about Joy. Gail said she refers to Joy as still “being here” in the present rather than in the past tense. The family’s “new normal” is not just life without Joy in the physical form; it is also missing the things that the family did with Joy and the things that Joy did for the family. Joy was the one who spontaneously arranged family trips she was the one who would bring the family together for holiday’s and special events. Since Joy’s death no large family gatherings have taken place. Even when a family event was planned by Gail’s children the event was subsequently cancelled because many of the family did not want to attend. The family members commented that they knew Joy would not be there and it reminded them of her death, and therefore to attend the event was too painful and difficult.

Gail disclosed that sometimes she feels guilty if she finds herself laughing: she also feels she has isolated herself in her home only going out when it is necessary. This is her “new normal”. Elaborating on this discussion Gail explained how difficult the first year after Joy’s death was for the family, particularly Joy’s mother:

“I know that on Mother’s Day my step-mom said it was the worst Mother’s Day ever and she was very depressed about it. She was extremely depressed and just kept saying “why”... It was like she relived the

experience again in a way...you know it's like that movie Groundhog Day. If only she could go back and just remember something that would change the outcome. You know I feel like she's stuck and she keeps reliving it over and over".

The impact of Joy's death on her father is also difficult. Gail explained that he rarely speaks about his daughter's death. This is his way of coping. In contrast for Joy's mother talking was something she feels she needs to do:

"For her if she doesn't talk about it she feels guilty for not remembering her, not that she doesn't remember but you know talking about, or if she feels some kind of happiness then she feels guilty because how can you be happy when this person is no longer here. It's like emotionally you become a hostage because you start punishing yourself for what he had done to her...and you feel guilty if for some reason your laughing and you[then] remember oh how can I be laughing? When there is such sadness I shouldn't be feeling any happiness or joy and how dare I feel this way when this person is no longer around to experience that".

Keeping Joy's Memory Alive

Horne, (2003) discusses the importance of memmorium; he describes the significance of "acknowledging the broken relational bond with the deceased" (p.76). Acknowledgment is something that comes at different stages after the death. Firstly, it could take place when the funeral occurs. Secondly, when the home and belongings are packed up, stored or shared with family members; at this time things may begin to become more real and final. Finally, it may come when the alleged perpetrator is found guilty and sentenced. Trying to maintain a connection with the deceased is something that families do, often by keeping photographs and other memorabilia that belonged to the deceased, reflecting on the joyful times with deceased and finding these acts to be helpful coping strategies (Sharpe & Boyas, 2011).

To explore this point Gail was asked about how the family maintains a connection with Joy. She explained that Joy was cremated and her ashes are held at the funeral home. Originally after Joy's murder the family had set up a memorial of pictures, cards and toys near where she had lived. They later moved the memorial closer to the family home to make it easier for them to visit and keep Joy's memory alive. Now the family goes to the funeral home:

“The family members go there to put flowers, cards and letters in the niche...it's almost like in their minds they are going to visit her, it keeps her alive in [their] memory...they bring pictures and fresh flowers and make sure the pictures are still nice looking. On her birthday they went there released balloons and took flowers, Kate also goes there”.

In continuing the line of enquiry on maintaining a connection with Joy, I asked Gail whether she had any of Joy's belongings. Gail explained that her step-mother has given every family member something to keep. Gail was given some slippers and an outfit. There was a sadness in Gail's response that while these items were things, they were Joy's things and parting with them for Joy's mother felt like she was “giving away a part of her and it makes it final it makes it real...subconsciously you're holding onto her.”

Advocacy Work

Many families who have been affected by femicide may be left with feelings of injustice and feel the need to engage in advocacy so that another family does not have to go through what they have experienced. I explored this issue with Gail she spoke of two issues that she and her family are working on.

Gail explained she discussed with Joy the possibility of going to stay in a shelter. Gail wanted Joy to see what the shelter that she had previously worked at was like. Gail said she searched many websites to look for photographs but struggled with finding photographs of what the rooms in the shelter looked like. Gail explained:

“There is this preconceived idea of what shelters look like or what they’re like, and tried to explain [that] to her. One of the things I tried was to find pictures on the website and I searched everywhere just to show her what they were like to try convince her... my sister already had in her head what the shelter is like, a room with a whole bunch of people... a lot of women for that reason don’t leave their home because they have children and they think about bringing their children into an environment where everyone is kind of lumped together”.

Gail felt very strongly that the women’s shelters have pictures or a video on their website so families had a general idea of what to expect. One option we discussed was arranging to meet with the Director of the shelter where we had previously worked. The purpose of the meeting would be to advocate for a video or pictures of one of the shelter’s empty rooms to be put on their website. Gail felt this may help other women seeking to leave abusive relationships feel they had safe options that would not intrude on their privacy. She explained that Joy was a private person who like many women wanted to keep her abuse to herself. She also explained that when she herself had been in the shelter she had share accommodation with other women and children who had also left abusive relationships. Gail explained that there are many shelters in the province that have a more communal living arrangement, but the one that both she and I worked at are single apartment rooms. This creates more privacy for the women as well as giving them a sense

of independence while still having a safe living space. Campbell, (2004) suggests advocacy work would include “becoming more proactive in advertising services to women through other systems such as health care” (p. 1473).

As an advocate for change Gail hopes to be influential in this work. The importance of her desire to create change is reflected in the work of Clark, et al., (1996) who states: “Advocates play an important role in promoting change both at the systems and individual case levels... advocates have a single purpose and can keep attention focused on domestic violence issues and the victim” (p. 43).

Gail's commitment to advocacy work is demonstrated in her discussion with management at the shelter where she worked. Gail may be able to have this very simple piece of advocacy completed quickly and with minimal cost to the organization.

The second piece of advocacy involves a petition. Gail explained that her stepmother has started engaging in advocacy work through a petition:

“My stepmom has started a petition to the change the laws in regards to restraining orders and police taking women's claims more seriously... For Joy I truly believe in my heart that when she went to the police if they had questioned him [after he broke into her apartment shortly before Joy was killed] but they didn't and so he's thinking he's got away with it. He said I did it but she had no proof it was something that he said. It wasn't a message he left or anything but they didn't dust for fingerprints they did nothing, they just said you can't prove it”.

Unlike Gail's first action, this piece of advocacy may take some time to get the changes implemented. Gathering the required number of signatures may take some time. Getting this passed into law will take more time and the help of a politician. It is not

impossible, just time consuming. Fleury, et al., (2000) identified that future research was needed to address whether the abusers' history of violence and criminal record was related to their ex-partner which was a factor that police were required to address when making an arrest.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Summary of Findings

This thesis has explored the impact of IPF on one family, through multiple interviews in the context of a single case study. Our first interview was conducted in person and three follow up interviews were conducted by telephone, due largely in part to the geographical distance between Gail and me. All my interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded by me.

Emerging from this study on the impacts of femicide on the family are several key findings that are discussed in this chapter. First is Joy's abusive relationship with her abuser and how this relationship evolved from intimate partner violence to femicide. Secondly, a theme arose of dealing with the grief and loss as an ongoing impact of Joy's murder, which also led to feelings of guilt for some family members. Third is the impact of children witnessing violence and how it is dealt with. Finally, one major theme was the role of new caregivers coping with the femicide. This theme links with the child's relationship with the maternal grandparents and the role adjustment they often make after the femicide. Using a family stress theory framework I identified a coping theme of the family's "new normal" life after femicide. All these themes intersect and overlap to form a greater understanding the impacts femicide has had on one family.

Abusive relationships

Femicide is recognized globally as a gendered act of violence that warrants its own label (Crawford & Dawson, 2018). Internationally, violence against women and girls has seen little progress to help protect them from being killed (Crawford & Dawson, 2018).

Many studies that have shown the risk factors in relation to IPV, some of these predictors influence violence towards women. These indicators include the length of time the abuser and the woman were in a relationship prior to the first assault. Fleury, et al., (2000) found the longer the couple were together the greater the chance there would be violence in the relationship. A key indicator in reducing violence within intimate partner relationships was seen when partners separated and one person was no longer living in the same city. In fact, escaping the violence from their abusers may be one reason that Gail left the city she was residing and wanted Joy to leave the city where her abuser lived.

A major risk factor found in many studies was alcohol and/or substance use by the abusive male partner Tutty, et al., (2014). While alcohol was not identified by Gail as being a factor in Joy's relationship; Joy's abuser did use it as a tool to manipulate Joy into meeting with him when he told Joy that he drank and had been hospitalized as a result of the drinking.

Gail's experience of her abusive relationship led her to leave her former partner and successfully transition to a safer life with her children. Using this experience Gail was able to make connections with signs of abuse that Joy was experiencing and

attempted to offer solutions to Joy to help her leave her abuser. For example, Gail reported that an accusation that she was having an affair led to an increase in violence towards her by her abuser and this was also the case in Joy's relationship. Fleury, et al., (2000) notes how extreme sexual suspicion may be a warning sign of increased violence. Unfortunately, Joy was not able to safely leave her abuser. Fleury, et al., (2000) found that leaving an abusive relationship did not necessarily mean the violence ended. As in Joy's case even though she ended her relationship she experienced an escalation in the violence, which ended in her death. Joy experienced many episodes of assault after she separated from her abuser; like many of the women identified by Fleury, et al., (2000).

Leaving an abusive relationship is just one component of living a violence free life. Fear of an escalation in the violence often keeps women from leaving (Fleury, et al., 2000). Many women, often with young children, who want to leave, are faced with the reality of where to go after leaving. Shelters are a short term option; once women leave the shelter they face inadequate housing and financial support, which can often result in making a choice between homelessness and returning to their abuser (Tutty, et al., 2014). There remains a great deal of work to be done before women and girls can live free from violence.

Gail recalled her struggle to get Joy into a shelter particularly after Joy's abuser broke into her apartment and vandalized most of her furniture. After this incident Joy's sister Mary moved in with her to provide some safety. Campbell, (2004) describes this as an experience shared by many families of abused women; while participants discussed the

process of urging their daughter or sister to call the shelter but only a small number of women actually did and these women were almost never femicide victims (p. 1473).

Campbell, (2004) discusses the importance of safety planning within the context of IPV and suggested that safety planning should be “done in every system that women use” (p. 1473), these included health care and shelter systems. From my experience working with women in the shelter system this approach has both benefits and negative implications for front line staff. After women left shelters often many did not always maintain the same contact details therefore making it difficult for workers to adequately safety plan with them. Rather the approach we as shelter staff used was to encourage women to create a safety plan with their family and friends, and foster support systems which may include a safe word or phrase that would indicate assistance was urgently needed. As a child protection worker I encourage the women I work with to use this approach as well.

As a survivor of intimate partner violence herself Gail was able to recognize the dangerous situation her sister was in. Gail expressed that while many in the family may not have believed that Joy could have been murdered, Gail knew from her own experiences of IPV that murder could be a possibility for Joy. Gail reflected on the fact that she did not reinforce this potential outcome with other family members, and as a result blames herself for not doing more to help Joy. Gail's feelings of guilt and regret reflect in Hardesty, et al., (2008) who found that family members were concerned about and aware of the dangers the abuser presented; however, in many instances they were still unable to prevent the death of their loved one.

Ongoing impacts of femicide

The impact of Joy's death on the children and adults in the family is another important theme reflected in this case study. Joy's murder, particularly the time immediately after her death, was a very difficult time for the family. Joy's death continues to have significant impacts on many of her family members as they struggle to come to terms with their loss.

Joy's father has suffered very major health issues including a stroke and a heart attack since Joy's murder. With her husband's declining health Joy's mother is now the primary caregiver for a vibrant young child who needs more support than other children of a similar age due to her mother being murdered and her father awaiting trial in jail. My findings create a link between the research undertaken by both Hardesty, et al., (2008); and Lewandowski, et al., (2004) in relation to how families and children adjust to life after femicide, and the multiple stressors that families experience after femicide. Hardesty, et al., (2008) in particular found that stress after the femicide included illnesses of the caregivers and was a source of insecurity amongst children, particularly where the caregivers were the grandparents of the children. The illnesses or death of the new caregivers resulting from the accumulation of stress was described by one young child whose grandfather died; he worried that his grandmother's death would soon follow and his father would get out of prison to kill her. Gail did not disclose whether this was a source of insecurity for Kate.

Children witnessing abuse in the family home is an issue that takes its toll on families; it also places strain on social service agencies who struggle to provide the support families need in a timely manner due to limited resources. Gail had concerns with how her niece, Kate, would cope with her need to express and talk about her parents. Gail spoke with the family on how they could support Kate and allow her space to express her emotions and feelings with them in a safe way. Similarly, Hardesty, et al., (2008) discussed the different types of supports that families identified as being helpful; these included the pros and cons of various styles of counsellor, which included a counsellor calling the family to check on how they were doing as opposed to coming to meet with them in the home. Furthermore, the authors identified the lack of support and services that femicide families received after their family member's murder and how this support decreased after the initial crisis. Sharpe & Boyas, (2011) suggests that for many families inviting a stranger into the family system even in a crisis was a taboo. To this end Gail mentioned some family members were reluctant to access the few supports that were offered to them because they did not want to speak with people outside the family.

Burman & Allen-Meares, (1994) found there is very little attention given to children who have witnessed femicide. In many instances therapy for children is overlooked particularly when the children are not the target of the violence. As a result, children tend to receive treatment only when they themselves are the victims of abuse (either physical or sexual). This leaves a very serious gap in services for children who have witnessed violence leading to long wait times.

In some instances, social workers (in the form of child welfare workers) become involved with families surviving femicide. In Joy's family, Gail was for a short time, the primary caregiver for her grandchildren when Gail's daughter struggled with her own mental health after Joy's murder. Additionally Gail spoke to the family about who would take care of Kate if Joy's parents were no longer able due to illness or death. In the study by Hardesty, et al., (2008) extended family members were described as being able to find their own solutions to where the children would go without necessarily involving systems like child welfare. In some instances this planning also becomes about negotiating limits and boundaries around the role of paternal grandparents in the life of children who survive femicide.

While child welfare involvement is not always a required element in femicide case, there are times when intervention is required. For example, if families are not able to take care of the children within their own family systems child welfare may become involved to find alternative solutions which include foster care or adoption. This intervention while necessary is not always ideal, as child welfare involvement can push already over burdening systems and workers to their limit, as well as creating further stress on the family.

Despite the overwhelming support from her family and friends Joy was still the victim of femicide. For Joy's family the impact of her death is far-reaching and has added further stress to the extended family. The additional stress has resulted in health problems for her father, the mental health breakdown of Gail's daughter Debbie which created

further stress for Gail as she also struggled with her own depression resulting from Joy's death.

Child Witnessing

Suddenly being thrust into the role of full time caregivers for grandchildren who are traumatized by witnessing the murder of their mother can be a very difficult time for families. Children and caregivers manage numerous health and adjustment challenges (Hardesty, et al., 2008). PTSD is most commonly reported as a result of witnessing the murder as well witnessing abuse in the home prior to the femicide (Hardesty, et al., 2008).. Amongst the many symptoms children may suffer sleep disturbances, poor concentration, emotional detachment and anxiety (Hardesty, et al., 2008). Gail recalled how Kate can be quiet and withdrawn at times, and overcome with emotions and inconsolable as she did at Gail's daughter's wedding. A happy event where Joy was to be a bridesmaid and Kate would have attended with her.

IPF poses a substantial risk to children's long term health and adjustment to their new circumstances (Hardesty, et al., 2008). Lewandowski, et al., (2004) considered the murder or attempted murder of a parent as an event that carries profound and lifelong consequences for children. The authors also noted that very little is known about these children due largely in part to insufficient data post homicide. Children who witness violence in the home can develop aggressive behaviors which without intervention can lead to children having negative interactions with their peers and in society in general (Lewandowski, et al., 2004). Children who witness the femicide may have to recount the

events to police and court, which exacerbates high stress levels. For this reason Gail had encouraged her step-mother to seek counselling interventions for Kate to be able to express her feelings and thoughts in a safe manner.

Coping

One key aspect of this thesis was to find ways Joy's family was coping and what strategies they are using to deal with their loss from femicide. Families can develop various methods that work for them. Gail and her family looked for strategies outside the usual medical norms and found acupuncture, fasting and meditation were better avenues to cope with the trauma and ongoing challenges that have arisen.

Other members of Gail's family cope with their loss by concealing their feelings and emotions from others and choosing to grieve in private. This theme was identified as a coping strategy by Sharpe & Boyas, (2011), who described this event as not just of suppressing feelings that arose from the murder but rather concealing them from family members in an attempt to avoid burdening them with further pain associated with their loss. This coping strategy of concealment is used by many members of Gail's family; this was also a strategy that was used in my family when my uncle died. The ability to avoid and not discuss our feelings of loss is something that continues to be used in my family. It may be a cultural thing that you do not speak about the dead once they have passed particularly when the circumstances of their death are painful. It is most likely that my family just did not know how to talk about my uncle's murder because it was not something that anyone outside the family had experienced and could offer us support on or suggest ways to cope.

Families deal and cope with the death of a loved one differently. Religion was identified at various stages for some families as an important coping strategy in healing and managing with their loss. Gail recalled praying for her sister's safe return when she first heard Joy was missing. Sharpe & Boyas (2011) found some families used cultural values of "communalism, interdependence and extended family which utilized values and strengths from spiritual and holistic forms" (p. 861) as a means of coping.

There still remains ongoing stress for many family members who struggle to cope with Joy's death. Some family members struggle to talk about their grief, while others express the need to talk as a way of coping and keeping Joy's memory alive. These different approaches to grieving and coping are another source of stress as family members may avoid one another for fear of conflicts over these coping styles.

For Joy's young daughter the loss of her mother by femicide is immense. She may struggle with posttraumatic stress disorder from what she may have seen or heard happening to her mother. Over the years many things may trigger her and remind her of her enduring loss. The loss she has experienced is not just the loss of her mother, but also the loss of her father who will likely be in jail for most of her young life.

One avenue of Kate's enduring loss that I explored with Gail was whether the family had given any thought to events such as graduation or marriage when parents would normally take the lead in these ceremonies. Gail explained that they had not thought about this mostly because Kate was still very young; but it may be a topic of

conversation as Kate gets older, particularly if Joy's parents are no longer able to participate in these ceremonies either due to ill health or their deaths.

Recommendations

There are a few recommendations that I think would be beneficial for governments and policy makers to consider and implement. In particular the issues of 1) police responses to IPV needs improvements; 2) the risk of continued IPV after separation and 3) kinship care resources.

The lack of police follow up is an avenue where improvements can be made. This was an issue that Gail mentioned in our interview, Gail was very upset when Joy's apartment was broken into shortly before her death and the police did not question Joy's former partner. Gail felt strongly that had the police followed this line of inquiry with the ex-partner as a prime suspect, particularly given that there had been many documented incidents of violence that Joy endured prior to her death. Gail felt that the police should have told him to stay away and perhaps this may have prevented Joy's murder. Gail feels that where there is ongoing abuse and a pattern of behavior by an abuser the police should investigate the former partner first.

Many families I work with continue to endure ongoing effects of IPV, even where men have been arrested, charged and separated from their partners they often continue to impact their families with the effects that IPV has on them. I have worked with men who even after they have attended Men's Anti-Violence programs and gained knowledge into how IPV impacts their partner and children will continue to be abusive either after the parents have reconciled or post separation. While working on this thesis I have become

more cognizant of how IPV can result in IPF and this enhanced understanding has already allowed me to recognize risk factors where others may not see them. There may be women who will ultimately become victims of femicide regardless of how many safety plans they have because her ex-partner will kill her no matter what and that is a sad reality of violence against women. This can be seen in Joy's story that despite the safety measures that Joy's family put in place she was a victim of femicide. A comprehensive safety plan which included a safe word and a plan to leave the city were in place. With that said I do not know what else the family or Joy's friends could have done differently to protect Joy.

Kinship care is an important aspect of child protection particularly where the parents are no longer able to care for their children. Foster homes and foster families are paid hundreds of thousands of dollars year to care for children, if governments could utilize these funds and give them to kin families and provide ongoing support to them with raising the children there has be benefits to this approach. A good argument can be made that children who remain with kin family gain a sense of permanency, stability and belonging which will lead to children experiencing fewer behavioral challenges that can result in a healthier life which does not rely on already burdened social services.

Implications for Social Work

Many of my findings have been found in similar studies on impacts of domestic violence, children witnessing abuse and grief and loss. However, this literature is limited as few studies specifically with families who have been impacted by IPF and the exploration of how these families cope with their sudden loss exist. The study conducted

by Armour, (2002) found families who lost a loved one to homicide felt invisible and neglected and their needs for supports are not addressed by the social welfare of criminal justice system.

IPV and IPF are problematic in Canada; it is an issue that governments have tried to tackle but have failed to put in place the financial funding to truly resolve the issue. Globally IPF is also recognized as problematic but again governments have not been able to find any solutions (Crawford & Dawson, 2018). This lack of funding means that many women and children live in abusive relationships because there are few alternatives. Ongoing abuse in families keeps women and children tied to other social institutions such as police, child welfare and medical professionals where social workers encounter clients who experience a vicious cycle of violence with little offer of help to break the cycle. Without adequate funding for programs and education the cycle of violence will continue and more families will undoubtedly be impacted by violence and loss.

The literature suggests that governments need to enact adequate laws to tackle the issue of violence against women. They also need to provide adequate funding to the VAW sector to support women and children to leave abusive relationships. Changes in the criminal justice system are also needed so that men who are violent to women are held accountable for their actions and serve sentences that have some lasting effects rather than a few months in jail and then a few years of probation. The rehabilitation of offenders with adequate education on the impacts of violence on women and children could lead to lower recidivism rates and breaking the cycle of violence by perpetrators.

The lack of affordable housing and inadequate funding for shelters leaves women and children trapped in abusive relationships. This is a vital area that requires more attention and funding.

IPV and IPF creates significant challenges within the field of social work as it impacts many aspects of a woman's life. The impact of this act of violence is far reaching beyond that of the immediate family members and children, impacts are also felt by siblings their children, and grandchildren as well by the friends of the deceased (Crawford & Dawson, 2018). IPF often results from women being in abusive relationships with the man who ultimately kills her. Women who leave relationships are at a greater risk of being killed when they leave than at any other time (Brownridge, et al., 2008).

Limitations of Study

One of the major obstacles I faced with this study has been finding literature that supports the first-hand experiences of other families who are impacted by intimate partner femicide; and how this experience shaped their lives and the lives of their children. Little attention is given to the study of femicide families and in particular how they cope. For this reason I was compelled to undertake my study as a result of tragic circumstances that presented themselves.

This study is solely based on the impact of IPF and the experience of one family therefore the results are not generalizable. Further and more detailed studies are needed in order to gain a better understanding of how families who survive femicide cope and what

challenges they face. Conducting such a study would contribute to the knowledge base of IPF significantly.

This study has highlighted many different stressors faced by my study family for which I have not been able to find any scholarly resources. For this reason it would be vital to study other families who have experienced femicide in order to explore whether any of these stressors are also experienced by them. One example of this is whether other femicide families struggled with decisions on whether children should or should not attend the funeral of their mother. Gail had indicated that Kate did not attend Joy's funeral but she had attended the celebration of life after the funeral service. Ferrara, et al., (2015) also make this point that this area requires further study.

Another limitation for me was the limited number of participants in this study; I feel this study may be enhanced if I had either spoken with other members of Joy's family or had a second family who experience femicide to speak with. Nevertheless, this study has yield important topics for future research.

Future Research

I believe there is a great deal of research left to do with families who have experienced IPF. Their struggle to deal with the loss of their daughters is not something that comes to an end after the trial of the offender is over, or when the offender is sentenced, or even released on parole. The impact of the family's loss continues long after others may have forgotten and the case no longer receives media attention.

In future research, I believe it would be important to collect further data to solidify the findings of this study and even recreate it on a larger scale without the restrictions enforced on a master's thesis. A future study could include follow up with Gail and other families impacted by IPF to involve them in the process of refining theories and analysis of findings with the possibility of finding gaps in services and even sharing coping strategies they have found helpful. Additionally, future research may find data on whether there have been further health changes for both children and caregivers.

Other avenues of future research could focus on how families have coped and dealt with the trial of the offender. Research could explore the effects of the trial outcomes and the family's perception of justice resulting from the trial. Assuming that a guilty verdict was pronounced how long the offender will serve before he is eligible for parole and whether this is in line with how other offenders have been sentenced. A longitudinal study could be conducted that follows a line of inquiry to assess what has happened to the children, what trajectory their lives took in terms of having struggles in school. For children who went to live with their grandparents an examination on whether the grandparents are still alive and if not whether the children were then placed with other family members and exploring how this transition worked. Finally, what ongoing supports are these families able to access as well as what financial supports that may be available is another avenue for future research. I feel all these avenues of future research are valid lines of enquiry as the cycle of violence is known to continue when children are exposed to violence and interventions are not used at early stages to break the cycle.

I support the conclusion by Lewandowski, et al., (2004) that significant future research is needed to determine which children are most affected by the stressful events that they have been exposed to. There is a need to identify risk factors as well as protective factors and what family strengths exist to help mitigate these effects. Possible protective factors include positive coping skills, self-esteem; attachment with important others such as family members, teachers, social workers, and community members

While it was outside the scope of this study, an avenue of study on the impact on first responders who are first on scene of femicide and often deliver the news to families is another focus of enquiry which would be interesting.

Concluding Remarks

Using a family stress framework in this study I have witnessed the stress that femicide has caused this family. The aim of this study was to explore how families who experience femicide cope with the murder of their loved one. While my study was conducted with only one family using a single case study approach I feel it has generated some useful information that can be used to consider coping strategies that may support other families coping after femicide.

Through a feminist theoretical lens I was able to examine Joy's intimate partner relationship which was very violent during the relationship and after Joy ended the relationship. The experiences and outcomes resulting from Joy's violent relationship and the consequences of attempting to leave are validated by scholarly literature. (Fleury,

Sullivan, & Bybee, 2000). Leaving an abusive relationship is not easy and in some cases the violence increases after the separation as it did with Joy.

I would again like to thank Gail for participating in my research, without her help I would not have been able to document her story and that of Joy's. I hope that Gail was able to find some form of healing during our very intense interviews, which were not easy for her. This thesis was written in memory of Joy and the hopes that other families will be spared the pain that Gail and her family have been through. Finally Gail wanted readers to know what her sister Joy was a really like "she was a good person she had a beautiful smile and beautiful calm quiet personality, very loving, she loved her daughter she was not an aggressive person".

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A: EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Email Recruitment Script

Manjit Kaur Mandair BA, BSW

Masters Candidate in Social Work

A Study of Intimate Partner Femicide – Impacts on the family.

E-mail Subject line: A Study of Intimate Partner Femicide – Impacts on the family

We have already discussed the possibility of you participating in an interview for my research on Intimate Partner Femicide and the impacts on the family. I would now like to officially invite you to take part in the interview and have attached the letter of information with the full study details.

Through this study I am hoping to learn how the death of your sister has impacted your life and that of your extended family. I also hope to understand your experiences and understanding of how the criminal justice system handled the death of your sister and finally how the outcome of the trial shaped your ability to come to terms with your loss. This research is being completed as part of the requirement for my Master of Social Work degree.

The risks in this study are minimal but recounting the details of any traumatic event will not be easy. The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal, but you may feel uncomfortable with anxious, uneasy about talking and thinking about your sister's death. You may find it stressful to explain how you have dealt with all the emotions. You may worry about how others will react to what you say.

I will travel to meet with you to conduct a face to face interview. With your permission I will audio tape record our interview for accurate transcription. I will then ask you some questions which will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes; we will take breaks as you need. We can stop the interview and reschedule it for another day should you feel the process is too stressful. You can ask for a break or stop the interview at any time. I may need to conduct a further follow up interview with you; this will be for clarification or follow up questions. This can be completed by phone or at a location that is convenient for us.

You can stop being in this study any time during the interview and afterwards up to May 25 2019. I have attached a copy of a letter of information about the study that gives you full details. This study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you any have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you can contact:

The McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat

Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142

c/o Research Office for Administration, Development and Support (ROADS)

E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

I would like to thank you in advance for your time and consideration. After a week, I will send you a one-time follow-up reminder.

Manjit Kaur Mandair BA, BSW

Masters Candidate in Social Work

Department of Social Work

McMaster University, Hamilton Ontario

Tel: 905-525-9140

mandaim@mcmaster.ca

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT

A Principle Investigator:

Manjit Kaur Mandair
School of Social Work
McMaster University
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Faculty Supervisor:

Dr. Tara La Rose
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DATE: April 1, 2019

Study on Intimate Partner Violence – Impacts on the family

Purpose of the Study:

Dear Participant,

I am inviting you to take part in this study on Intimate Partner Violence – the impacts on family. Through this study I am hoping to learn how the death of your sister has impacted your life and that of your extended family. I also hope to understand your experiences and understanding of how the criminal justice system handled the death of your sister and finally how the outcome of the trial shaped your ability to come to terms with your loss. This research is being completed as part of the requirement for my Master of Social Work degree.

Procedures involved in the Research: At the time of the interview I will review the consent form and I will answer any questions you may have regarding consent or the study more broadly. This will take approximately 2-5 minutes. The consent form will be signed. With your permission, I will audio tape record our interview for accurate transcription. I will then ask you some questions which will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes; we will take breaks as you need. We can stop the interview and reschedule it for another day should you feel the process is too stressful. You can ask for a break or stop the interview at any time.

These questions will be focused on your recollection on the events leading up to your sister's untimely death. How her death has impacted and changed your life.

If you choose not to answer any of the questions we will move on to the next question.

During the interview, I will be taking hand written notes, electronic notes, and voice recording the interview. This will help me with processing the data for accuracy and compile any follow up questions.

There may be need to do a follow up interview depending on the need for clarification on certain questions or the need for additional information. Or if you were not able to complete the interview in the first meeting, we will schedule a time and venue to meet or agree a time and date to conduct a telephone interview.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts: Are there any risks to doing this study?

Recounting the events of any traumatic event will not be easy. The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal, but you may feel uncomfortable with anxious,

uneasy about talking and thinking about your sister's death. You may find it stressful to explain how you have dealt with all the emotions. You may worry about how others will react to what you say.

You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. I describe below the steps I am taking to protect your privacy.

Potential Benefits: This research may not benefit you directly. However, there may likely be some benefit for you in being able to talk about a very difficult and traumatic event in a safe space. Benefits to other families who have experienced a similar family event may be possible as they will be able to understand your struggle. If there were any gaps in services that you may have found helpful this could be something that you may do some advocacy work on.

Confidentiality: I will discuss with you whether you want to be an anonymous contributor or whether you want to be identified and named. If you decide you want to be an anonymous contributor I will ensure that any and all identifying data is coded or removed. I will be using direct quotes that you provide in your interview in my thesis; this increases the chances of identifying you as the participant.

If you choose to be anonymous your sister's identity and that of your parents and siblings will also be made confidential.

Caveat: While I will do all I can to protect your anonymity (if you request it) there are always some identifiable data through our personal stories and that should be taken account when deciding what information you feel you want to divulge and what you want to keep to yourself.

The information/data you provide will be kept in a locked desk/cabinet where only I will have access to it. Information kept on a computer will be protected by a password.

Once the study has been completed, the data will be destroyed. I do not plan to use the data for any future study.

Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to be part of the study, you can stop and withdraw from the interview for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study or up until **May 25, 2019**, when I expect to be starting my thesis. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.

Information about the Study Results:

Data will be disseminated in the thesis. The data could be presented to women who have experienced intimate partner within a safe setting as a conference or women's anti-violence programs held at shelters. Data could also be used to write further articles. I would consider writing a summary of my thesis as an article and submit it to a journal for publication such as Violence Against Women; Journal of Family Issues; Journal of Interpersonal Violence; Journal of Stress, Trauma and Crisis. I expect to have this study completed by approximately December 1, 2019. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

Questions about the Study: If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

Manjit Kaur Mandair BA. BSW. MSW Candidate

Email: mandaim@mcmaster.ca

Phone: 905 334 8396

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat

Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142

C/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support

E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Manjit Mandair of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until *May 25, 2019*.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

1. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded.

Yes

No

2. I agree to have my responses from this project used in future related projects.

yes

no

3. Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.

Please send them to me at this email address

Or to this mailing address:

No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

4. I agree to be contacted about a follow-up interview, and understand that I can always decline the request.

Yes, please contact me at:

No

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Questions

Intimate Partner Violence – Impact on a family

Manjit Mandair, (Master of Social Work student)

(Department of Social Work – McMaster University)

Information about these interview questions: I would like to learn about the impacts of intimate partner violence and how you have coped since the death of your sister. Interviews will be one-to-one and will be open-ended (not just “yes or no” answers). The exact wording of the questions may change a little. Sometimes I will use other short questions to make sure I understand what you told me or if I need more information when we are talking such as: “*So, you are saying that ...?*”), to get more information (“*Please tell me more?*”), or to learn what you think or feel about something (“*Why do you think that is...?*”).

- 1) Please can you give me a little bit information about your family and your sister's family, in terms of who the family consists of?
- 2) Can you tell me about your experience of intimate partner violence prior to your sister's death?
- 3) Please tell me about how you found out your sister was missing.
- 4) Do you remember what your initial thoughts and feelings were when you found out your sister was missing? Did you feel she was in danger when you found out she was missing?
Please tell me more about why you thought that?
- 5) In the months prior to your sister's death what was her relationship with her ex-partner like? Did your sister have plans to end the relationship?
- 6) Was there any time in her relationship with her ex-partner that your sister expressed being fearful of him?
If yes what did he do that made her feel fearful?

- 7) How many incidents of physical violence did your sister endure during her relationship with her ex-partner? Did your sister have a safety plan that you were aware of?
- 8) How has your sister's murder impacted and changed your life?
- 9) Is there something important that you would want to tell other women who may be in a similar type of relationship as your sister? Is there anything else you want to share about your sister?
- 10) What supports (counselling, talking to friends/family), did you use to help cope with your sister's death?
- 11) What support did your family get from the police and justice system?
- 12) Many times we are triggered by feelings and emotions that remind us of the incident. How do you handle feeling and emotions that trigger you? What other types of stress have you experienced since your sister's death?