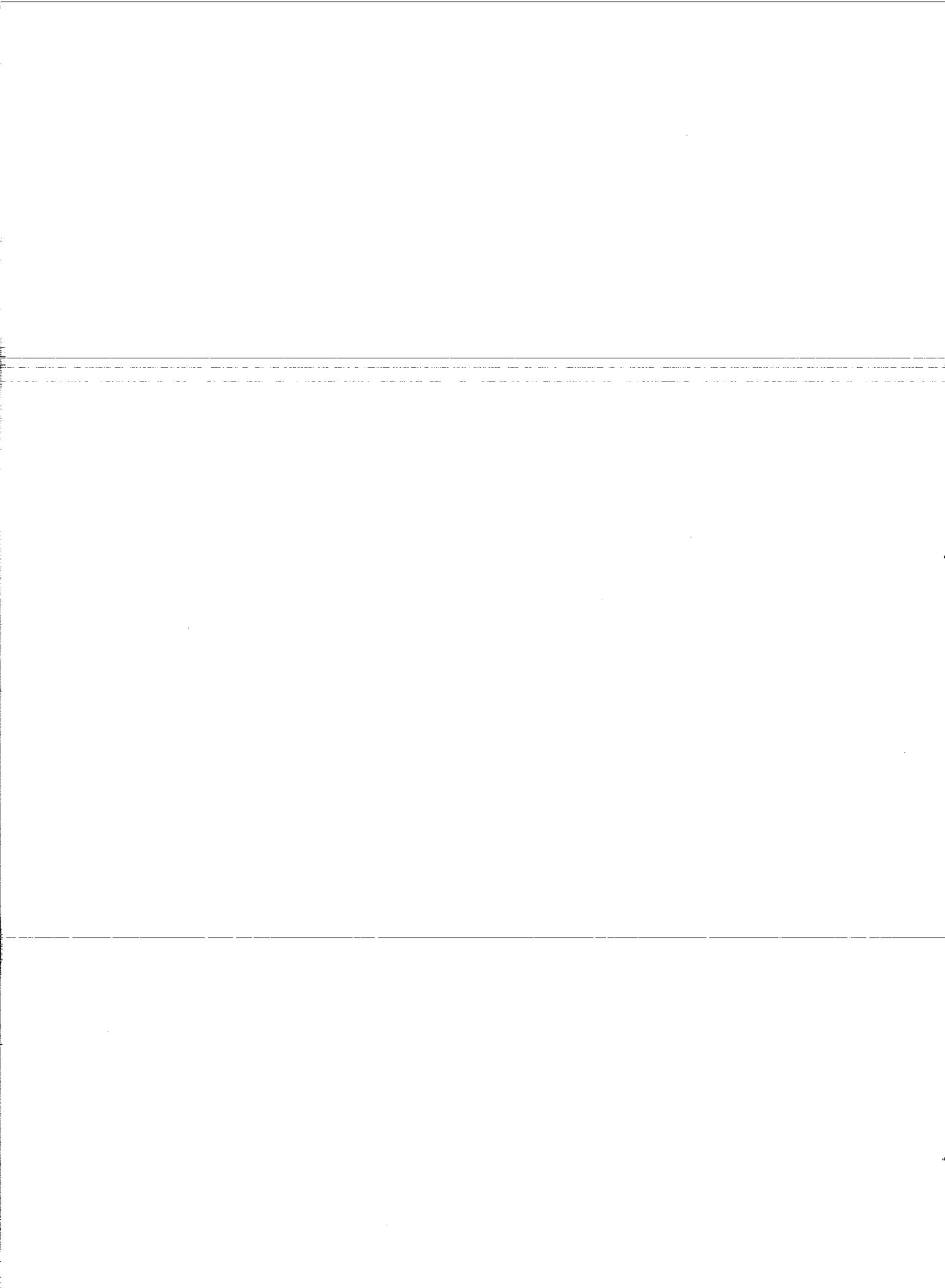


**CHILD PROTECTION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:  
PARALLEL GOALS?**



CHILD PROTECTION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:  
PARALLEL GOALS?

By

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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

McMaster University

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MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK  
(2007)

McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Child Protection and Violence Against Women:  
Parallel Goals?

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NUMBER OF PAGES: vii, 136

## **Abstract:**

The purpose of this research project is to examine the collaboration between child protection agencies and Violence Against Women services in Hamilton. Children's Aid Societies in Ontario are mandated to intervene with caregivers and children to ensure that children are protected from physical and/or emotional harm.

In 2000, the phrase 'child exposure to adult conflict' was added to Section 3 of the revised Ontario Risk Assessment Model and Eligibility Spectrum for Child Protection, to recognize the negative effects on children's well being when they witness violence between caregivers. In 2007, the Ontario government promoted a strengths based practice model. Collaboration between Children's Aid Societies and other service providers including Violence Against Women Services was identified as a desirable goal.

This qualitative research involved conversations with four Child Protection Services workers and four Violence Against Women workers. The purpose of this research was to gather the perceptions and experiences of workers from both sectors regarding relationships between workers, workers' perceptions about the collaboration, and workers' opinions about training.

The results suggests that contentious relationships that existed between workers in Child Protection Services and the Violence Against Women sector a decade ago for the most part still exist today. It is clear that both sectors are working towards the common goal of safety for abused women and their children, yet there is a history of mistrust embedded in complicated power relations that impedes collaboration between these sectors. Despite this, participants of the study have hope for a positive outcome as a result of collaboration.

Further research is required to evaluate new initiatives. Moreover, research that includes the experiences of women who experience violence will provide valuable insight into assessment of the collaboration and training curriculum. Existing training methods are not seen as beneficial. Workers from both sectors want creative, insightful, and applicable training methods.

## **Acknowledgments:**

I would like to thank my parents for teaching me that education is important and that it can be a life-long endeavour. One is never too old to embark on a new learning adventure, and you can teach an old dog new tricks. My puppy Bear spent many long hours lying by my side as I worked at the computer and she sacrificed many hours of outdoor play and long walks. She has been patient and loyal.

I would especially like to thank Darlene Savoy, administrative assistant in the School of Social Work. She was a member of the department when I did my undergraduate degrees and graduate degree. Words can not describe how helpful, supportive, and patient she has been with me over the years and she is 'worth her weight in gold'.

Special thanks go to Sheila Sammon for her belief in my ability to complete the program and for her patience and gentle guidance through the process of my research and the construction of my thesis. Her welcoming acceptance meant a great deal to me and as I move forward in life, I hope to justify her faith in me.

Professors in the School of Social Work at McMaster University imparted their knowledge and wisdom to me and helped me to develop an ability to critically analyze social work practice. Moreover, they helped me realize that I can make a positive change in social work practice, both today and in the future, so that individuals, families, groups and communities will be better served.

I would like to thank a special physician. He planted a seed that grew into the belief that I could return to university yet again and succeed. He tirelessly listened to my anxieties, insecurities, and struggles as I manoeuvred through the program.

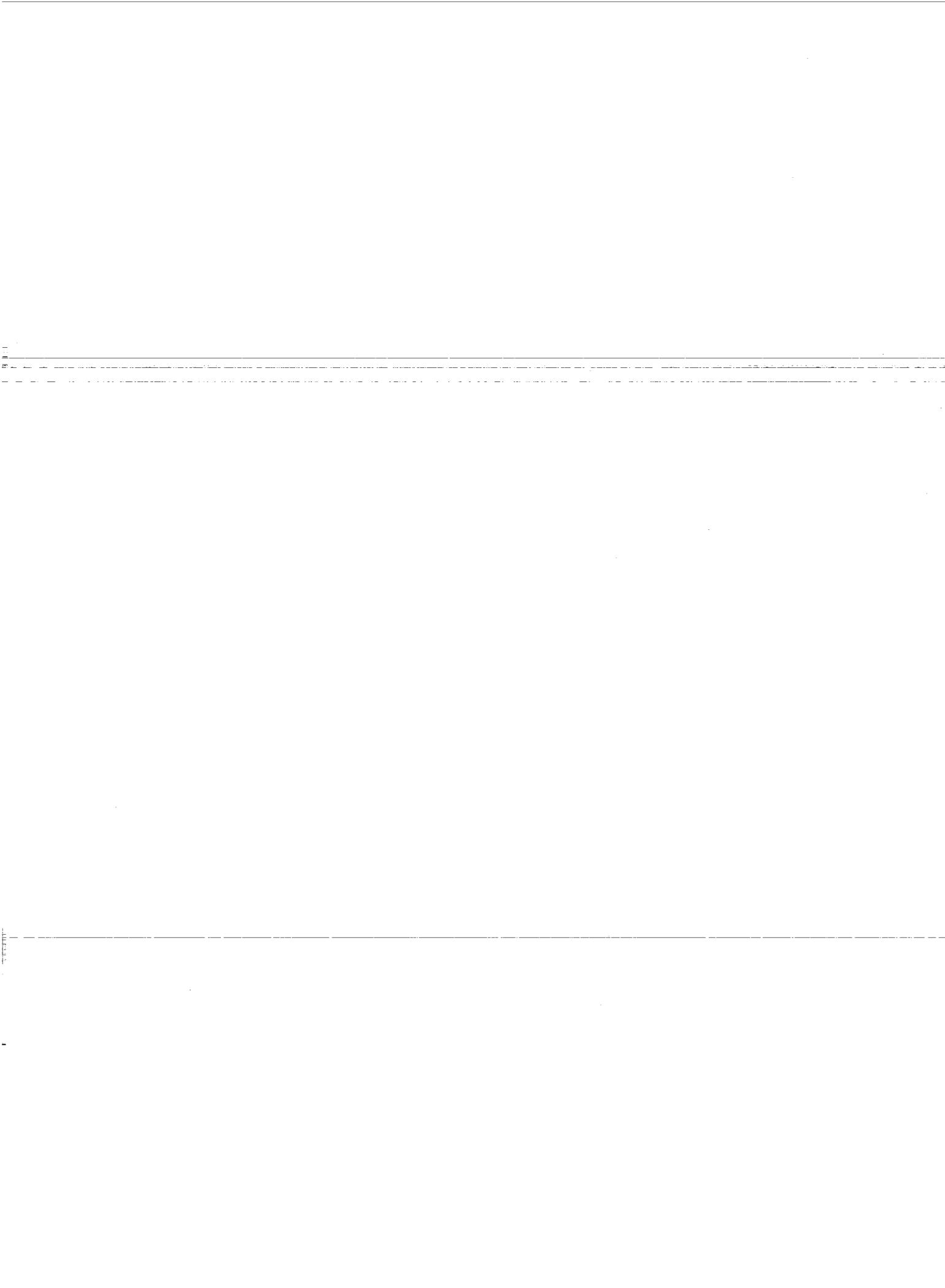
I wish both part-time students and full-time students of 2007 success in their future. Their support and encouragement along with new-found friendships are something that I will remember fondly.

And finally, my admiration and respect goes out to women who experience violence in their intimate relationships, for their strength and courage which enables them to heal and move forward in life. I pray for the children who witness violence in their home and hope they develop resilience.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<b>Introduction</b>	
• Why is the topic important to me?	1
• Definition of Terms	5
• Theoretical Influences	7
<hr/>	
<b>Literature Review</b>	
• Domestic Violence/Woman Abuse: Is a Name Significant?	10
• Discourses of Motherhood	12
• Children Are More Than Passive Recipients	24
• Child Protection Agencies' Involvement with Abused Women	28
• Collaboration: Benefits/Challenges	32
CPS and VAW Collaboration 2000	38
CPS and VAW Collaboration 2007	41
Collaboration Between Whom?	44
Why Has Collaboration Re-emerged Now?	47
<b>Methodology</b>	
• Methodological Approach	49
• Predominant Question/Issues	52
• McMaster Research Ethics Board	53
• Sampling	56
• Data Collection	58
• Limitations of the Study	60
<b>Data Analysis</b>	
• Results	62
• Theme 1: Workers' Perceptions of Relationships	63
• Theme 2: Collaboration	69
• Theme 3: Training	72
<b>Discussion</b>	78
• Areas for Further Research	88
• Implications for Practice	90
• Recommendations for Collaborative Education	93

<b>Concluding Thoughts</b>	96
<b>References</b>	98
<b>Appendix: A</b>	111
<b>Appendix: B</b>	125
<b>Appendix: C</b>	129
<b>Appendix: D</b>	130
<b>Appendix: E</b>	132
<b>Appendix: F</b>	133
<b>Appendix : G</b>	134
<b>Appendix : H</b>	135



## **PROLOGUE: WHY IS THIS TOPIC IMPORTANT TO ME?**

Understanding how our sense of self and how our sense of knowing is constructed; recognizing that this understanding of our self is always flawed and incomplete, should predispose us to enter the relationship with the service user with curiosity, humility, and a desire to understand their experience from their unique perspective. (Swan, 2002, p. 39)

I certainly hope to not lose sight of the importance of trying to understand abused women's experiences from their perspective and incorporate this into my practice with families.

The above quotation is similar to Heron's (2005) and Foucault's analysis that warns us that we must analyze our "subjectivity and subject positions" (Heron, p. 341) so that we do not replicate dominant power relations. More plainly stated, the social worker must go beyond the mention of social location, and explore power relations. Therefore, I will attempt to reveal my privilege and my struggles through a critical self analysis.

The lens that I use to view child protection's involvement with abused women is not neutral. My perspective has evolved from my lived experiences as a woman and mother, from knowledge acquired through my social work education, and from my social work practice in a child protection agency for five years. My position as an able-bodied white Canadian woman, whose first language is English and my middle-class socio-economic background facilitated my admission to university and subsequent employment. I should add that I was adopted by a family through children's aid as an infant, and as an adult I spent 25 years in an abusive relationship. These personal experiences affect my internal experience of power, or powerlessness which then becomes a part of how I interact with families.

This experience of power was one factor that facilitated my desire to work with abused women and children. Whereas I perceived that I had little power in my life, my professional role put me in a position of authority with families. The perception held by parents and children about me was contrary to how I viewed myself, and I struggled to comprehend the fear families felt towards me because of the authority endowed upon me by my role as a child protection services (CPSs) worker.

Despite the empathy that I feel for women who live in abusive relationships, I simultaneously want women to have information regarding the impact that trauma may have on their children. Whereas many women believe that their children are not aware of the abuse and therefore will not be affected by it, my experience taught me otherwise. It was not until after I left my abuser that my children disclosed knowledge of the abuse I experienced. Even though I believed that had shielded my children from witnessing my abuse they were nonetheless affected. My children received a distorted image of men's and women's roles in a relationship and those distortions have affected them in their adult relationships. I may well have made different decisions when my children were young had I known about the possible effects that witnessing abuse may have had on them. Protective factors which may promote resiliency in children were not recognized when my children were growing up, however emerging evidence to support this concept is available. Abused women can make informed decisions when they have access to the possible effects that 'witnessing' might have on their children.

Ultimately, I want women to realize that they can live and parent successfully outside an abusive relationship. Therefore, I tried to fulfill the role of a child protection

social worker, (an authority figure) without forgetting the oppression that I had experienced. I had hoped to find a balance between overly empathizing with women, possibly at the expense of the safety of the children, versus further victimizing them.

When my children were young, child protection services were not aware of my abuse because of the resources that were available to me by virtue of my socio-economic position, race and physical ability. My experience differed from most of the women I worked with in the Children's Aid. Consequently as a worker, I was conflicted about the extent that CPSs were involved with women who had been abused. The majority of families that I worked with experienced various disadvantages due to their age, ethnicity, physical ability, race, and/or income. In some cases I wondered whether a child protective agency was the most appropriate service to intervene with the families or whether alternative assistance would benefit them more.

Although I recognize that domestic violence transcends simple gender stereotypes, and because the majority of my experience has been with abused women, I refer to women as the target of their partners' abuse. About three of my five years of practice in a child protection agency from 2001 to 2006 involved mainly mothers who experienced abuse by their partners and the children I worked with may or may not have witnessed the violence. I believe that mothers deserve to have access to services that may dispel the reality imposed upon them by their abusers. Moreover, I believe that women deserve to realize their value and expect to experience a relationship free from abuse. Consequently, I provided women with information about the dynamics of abuse and encouraged them to contact Violence Against Women (VAW) services. I was, however,

surprised when women were hesitant or refused to become involved with the VAW sector. Perhaps I forgot how adamantly I had clung to my abusive relationship 'for the sake of the children'. In fact, because I had left my marriage without coercion I had welcomed the VAW's involvement with me. Admittedly, I had access to resources and most of the women that I worked with do not have those same advantages.

Ultimately, I respect the gravity of the consequences that women face regardless of whether they remain in the abusive relationship or leave it. Women are often overwhelmed and less able to recognize and respond to their children's needs after they leave an abusive relationship. My experiences as a social worker in a child protection agency allowed me to see ways that parents/caregivers resist interventions, which included pretending to follow the Society's prescribed goals. My perception of how parents/caregivers react to the Society's involvement is also noted by Dumbrill (2006) where he explores parent's experiences of child protection intervention. I came to question whether I was putting women and children at an increased risk of harm by driving the abusive relationship underground with so-called 'voluntary plans of services' or involuntary measures. Of particular concern is the well-documented fact that women and children are at increased risk of harm from their abusers when the relationship ends (Davis & Srinivason, 1995 & Mahoney, 1991 cited in Mills, 2000; Peled, 1997). If child protection's interventions force a woman to leave an abusive relationship without an appropriate safety plan, the risk of harm to the mother and her child/ren may actually increase.

## **Definition of Terms**

Child protection agencies have several departments and workers in different units have different roles. Roles vary within departments as well as across departments. When I refer to CPSs workers, the term is meant to signify front-line workers in any department, who have had contact and experience with the VAW sector.

The ‘Violence Against Women (VAW)’ sector refers to any agency or shelter that provides advocacy, support, or services to women who have been abused by an intimate partner.

My use of the term VAW worker is meant to represent any worker, who is employed in the VAW sector, and whose role is front-line work.

‘Domestic violence’, as defined by the Ontario Child Welfare Secretariat (OCWS) and adopted for the use of this research, involves violent or abusive behaviours which can involve a single incident, or can be a pattern of physical and/or verbal violence and/or emotional harm (Child Protection Standards of Ontario (CPSO), 2006). “It is motivated by a need to control and is characterized by progressively more frequent and severe physical violence and/or emotional abuse, economic subordination, threats, isolation and other forms of control” (CPSO, p. 82). The severity of violence can range from homicide to a pattern of less serious physical violence such as slapping, pushing, a pattern of verbal abuse, threats of harm, or criminal harassment. I have only addressed women who are in a heterosexual relationship in this research and in my literature review although I fully recognize that domestic violence is a broad issue that transcends simple gender stereotypes.

'Transformation'<sup>1</sup> in child protection services (CPSs) in Ontario encompasses research and practice advancements

... such as the Differential Response Model, the new Child Protection Standards in Ontario (February 2007) and new legislative changes (2006), by developing some additional necessary scales, making modifications to key Eligibility Spectrum sections, and finally, by doing minor adjustments where needed, such as ensuring terms are clearly defined and language is updated. (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACASd), 2006, p. 11)

'Collaboration' is a cornerstone of practice under the Transformation agenda and promotes two-way alliances between workers and parents, children and youth, supervisors and managers, inter-agency, whole communities, researchers and practitioners, and governments and policy makers (OACASb, 2005).

'Partnership' is a term used when discussing collaboration. For the purpose of this study it is defined as the relationship between shared stakeholders including child protection services, the Violence Against Women sector, and service users. It is recognized that partnership may be an inaccurate term to use in the context of child protection and woman abuse services as partnership implies equality of power between parties.

The term 'service user/s', in the context of this paper, represents women who have been abused by an intimate partner, and are involved with CPSs and/or the VAW sector.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Transformation' is an overarching term used in the Transformation Agenda of the Secretariat of the Ministry of Child and Youth Services. It represents changes in the child protection system and incorporates a move to a collaborative intervention model.

## **Theoretical Perspectives**

Theories, models and perspectives guide the way that we view topics and ultimately shape our understanding of the world and our subsequent reactions and actions. Therefore, the premise that I use to discuss the issue of woman abuse will be representative of my understanding through the lens of different theories. The danger of strict adherence to one theory could lead one to only consider certain points of view and ignore alternative possibilities.

A structural approach to social work incorporates major radical themes. At the heart of structural social work is the ideology of oppression (Carniol, 1992; Mullaly, 1999; Swan, 2002) and it attempts to render primary structures of oppression visible (Carniol). Carniol notes that to Moreau (1979, 1989, 1990 cited in Carniol) economic and political forces inform practice. Moreau emphasized that there is no hierarchical importance given to one source of oppression such as that based on class, gender, race, age, ability, or sexuality. Moreover, although individuals, families and organizations struggle against oppressive patriarchal structures, their attempts may be thwarted by the chief power holders. Dominant discourses may distort language or terms to represent the status quo instead of the purpose that a radical approach would adopt; therefore change needs to happen at the personal and political level (Carniol).

Social constructionism is a metatheory which encompasses critical psychology, discourse analysis, deconstruction and poststructuralist approaches (Burr, 1995b). Social constructionism is influenced by philosophy, sociology and linguistics, and prompts us to examine world views critically (Burr, b). According to social constructionists, language

becomes an important tool in shaping perceptions (Pare, 2004). Burr also states that world views are also influenced by culture and historical periods. Social constructionism influences postmodernist ideology which rejects the notion of one system of knowledge or a definitive truth, and instead draws on numerous sources including the work of Foucault (Burr, b).

I will apply Foucauldian philosophy to explore various discourses regarding abused women, how discourse has been constructed over time, how social work interventions have matched the interpretations, as well as society's reaction to these women. I will utilize discourse analysis and deconstruction to demonstrate my belief that current use of language is reshaping our understanding of woman abuse as a social problem. The ideas of 'partnership' and 'collaboration' have become desirable and I wonder whether the alliances in fact fulfill their connotations or whether they are only terms of rhetoric.

Conflict between discourse ideologies appears throughout the literature and opposing belief systems regarding domestic violence seem to be rooted in either a feminist perspective or a family violence perspective (Valentich, 1996). Feminist analysis which is based on female-male relations conflicts with a family violence approach which considers aggression a genderless problem (Valentich). I will also explore the current direction of domestic violence in policy and enacted by organizations.

Bograd (1999) adds to her feminist approach on domestic violence theories with an 'intersectionality' model which is similar to Moreau's idea that the importance of oppression should not be based on a hierarchy. Domestic violence is influenced by

oppressive structural arrangements and experienced by women on the basis of their social location. Therefore, how a woman experiences abuse and is responded to by others affects whether she and her children will be able to escape and achieve safety. Bograd further argues that while all women are vulnerable to abuse, others may judge them differently, based on whether they are white or black, poor or wealthy, a prostitute or a housewife, a citizen or an undocumented immigrant.

Theories evolve through time, and a postmodern feminist ideology replaces the concept of patriarchy with the idea of 'phallogentrism' which encompasses male domination of "language, symbols, definitions, discourses, sexuality, theory and logocentric thinking." (Wearing, 1996, cited in Healy, 2000, p. 39). Feminists are currently challenging the gender neutral language of neo-liberal principles that have infiltrated research, literature, and organizational practices. Gender neutral policies on domestic violence are relevant to recent legislative changes in child protection.

Developmental theory based on the work of Jean Piaget asserts that children's understanding of the world evolves as they move through distinct ages and stages of development. The argument applicable to domestic violence is that children's understanding of domestic violence varies depending on their age and stage of development. Moreover, how children are affected by witnessing abuse may vary according to their phase of development.

## **Domestic Violence/Woman Abuse: Is a Name Significant?**

The literature contains assorted labels to examine the topic of abused women, but does the language we use to identify the issue really matter? Certainly social constructionism would support the belief that language is significant to how we interpret the world, and changes how people act (Burr, 1995b) and I support this notion.

Pyles and Postmus (2004) conducted a review of 105 article abstracts on domestic violence and found that during the period 1985 to 1990 terminologies such as ‘domestic violence’, ‘wife abuse’, ‘spouse abuse’ and ‘family violence’ were used to identify woman abuse. From 1991 to 1995 the most frequently used terms were ‘domestic violence’, ‘wife abuse’ and ‘battering’ and from 1996 to 2000 ‘battering’ and ‘spouse abuse’ were still used. However ‘domestic violence’ has become the name most frequently used (Pyles & Postmus).

An author’s theoretical viewpoint will affect which term is applied. For example a feminist perspective will highlight the importance of gender, emphasize that violence against women is caused by the unequal distribution of power in society, and assert that the main occurrence is abuse against women.

The Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC) describes “wife assault” (p. 1) from an aboriginal perspective, however it is unclear to me whether the article is written from an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ point of view.<sup>2</sup> The perspective incorporates colonialism and a feminist perspective which classifies men

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<sup>2</sup> An ‘insider’ is someone who has intimate knowledge or understanding of something based on their membership with a group, whereas the ‘outsider’ who expresses an opinion based on their interpretation of a group’s point of view may not accurately reflect the group’s position.

as the abusers. The article uses terminology such as ‘partner assault’, ‘battering’, and ‘abused women’.

The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics produces publications with genderless language. Dauvergne and Johnson (n.d.) use terms such as ‘spousal violence’, ‘adult victims of spousal violence’ and ‘family violence’. Baker and Cunningham (2005) reflecting the opinion of the Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System use gender specific language such as ‘woman abuse’. It is evident that different agencies within the justice system take different approaches in the language that they use.

In 2000 the Ontario Risk Assessment Model (ORAM) and Eligibility Spectrum (ES) use a mix of gendered and gender neutral language. The documents incorporated ‘adult conflict’ as a risk factor for child welfare intervention (OACASa, 2000) and legislative changes in 2006, which took effect in 2007, adopt terms such as ‘domestic violence’, ‘partner violence’ and ‘woman abuse’ to warrant child protection involvement.

Contrary information is reported by articles found in the *Aggression and Violent Behavior* journal. Carney, Buttell and Dutton (2006) suggest that empirical research which singles out men as the sole initiators of domestic violence is erroneous and although they concede that gender in abusive relationships is important, say there is empirical evidence to suggest that women abuse their intimate partner at least as often as men abuse women. They use terms such as ‘women who perpetrate intimate partner violence’, ‘domestically violent women’, ‘domestic violence’, ‘husband battering’, ‘intimate violence’ and ‘female domestic violence offenders’.

## **Discourses of Motherhood**

Discourse ultimately moulds the way we perceive reality (Chambon, Irving, & Epstein, 1999) and its definition evolves with time as the need arises (Chambon et al.; Mills, 2003a; Pease & Fook, 1999). When we categorize and interpret experience and events in relation to the current structures we make sense of the world, and it is through this process that we reinforce, normalize and legitimize the structure (Mills, a). Hare-Mustin (1994) says that we can assess the authority of a dominant discourse by asking what institutions in society support the discourse. I will draw upon “unwritten rules and structures which produce particular utterances and statements” (Mills, a, p. 53) as well as the written rules to examine discourses regarding women who have been abused by an intimate partner.

Social work’s response to woman abuse has historically been problematic. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries social workers blamed women for the violence they experienced because of their unwillingness to leave the abusive relationship (Gordon, 1988, cited in Pyles & Postmus, 2004). Moreover, Nichols (1976, cited in Pyles and Postmus, p. 379) stated that caseworker’s reaction to women’s abuse supported the unspoken discourse that women’s behaviour somehow caused the abuse. Furthermore, women who remain in abusive relationships must somehow enjoy it.

Currently mothers are still blamed for any harm that befalls their child/ren, and are expected to leave the home in order to protect their child/ren from harm (Danis, 2006; Kopels & Sheridan, 2002; Magen, 1999; Mills, 2000). Today, when CPSs intervene with a mother, the social worker may comment on the mother’s history of being in

repeated relationships with abusive partners, or the social worker may note the number of confirmed incidents of domestic violence with the current partner. The underlying discourse of these statements is not all that substantially different than what Gordon and Nichols found in the 1970s and 1980s.

In keeping with Foucauldian analysis, power is not something one possesses, rather “power is something which is performed, something more like a strategy. . .” (Mills, 2003b, p. 35). Mills (b) related Foucault’s interpretation of power as being something that is employed and exercised, with people being the vehicles. Moreover, Mills noted that Foucault compels us to rethink the notion of power and the roles that people play. Do people experience oppression, or do they enact power in their dealings with individuals and institutions (Mills, b)?

Power relations are not just found in certain institutions such as the government, but are dispersed throughout society. To better understand power imbalances, one must examine how discursive practices serve to create and maintain specific aspects of social life over others. Any event provides the potential for one to act one way rather than another, which also opens up the possibility for the marginalization of alternative ways of acting (Burr, 1995a). For example, society affords certain support and resources to those people who are deemed to be victims of a violent crime. The empathic approach towards such victims is in stark contrast to the abused woman who is involved with CPSs. Moreover, not all mothers who experience domestic violence are involved with CPSs. Some women are targeted for intervention, while others go unnoticed.

CPSs often become involved with a family after children have witnessed violence in the home, and the caregiver shows a failure to protect the child/ren. “The word *failure* implies circumstances that are controllable, .... In the context of domestic violence this suggests that the failure was due to the mother not taking some action that would have protected her children” (Magen, 1999, p. 128, italics in original). Files are consistently opened in the mother’s name, regardless of whether she is responsible for the abuse or neglect of her children or whether she has experienced abuse by her partner. A non-abusive mother then becomes accountable for the abusive caregiver’s behaviour because she did not make efforts to escape the danger (Kohl, Barth, Hazen, Landsverk, 2005; Kopels & Sheridan, 2002; Magen, 1999; Morrow, 2003). Little if any attention is given to the damage that children may experience where they have been removed from their mother’s care.

Abusive partners are seldom held accountable for their behaviour (Schechter & Edleson, 1995, cited in Danis, 2006). Peled (1997) points out that as professionals we acknowledge the need to make abusive men accountable for their actions, although we simultaneously make abusive men as fathers invisible when we refer to ‘children of abused women’ instead of ‘children of abusive men’.

One of the biggest frustrations in my work has been the inability to get access to information that other agencies have, such as the police or corrections system, or from hospitals and physician records. My frustration is mirrored in Beeman, Hagemeister, Edleson, (1999). I believe that a file should be opened in the name of the man who has been accused of woman abuse so that if and when he moves on to another partner it is

easier to track him in the system. It is ironic that the privacy of abusive partners is so well protected while the mothers, the victims of the abuse, are deemed blameworthy and become the focus and target for intervention.

#### Case Example

The last investigation that I conducted for a co-worker involved a male caregiver who was in a relationship with a single mother of two teenaged children. One of the teenagers made allegations against her mother's boyfriend the day that she was to be released from secure custody. The girl advised facility staff that she did not want to be released to her mother on bail if the mother's boyfriend was in the home. Although the mother had disclosed episodes of domestic violence she later downplayed the seriousness of the incidents and instead focused on her daughter's behaviour. The culmination of the investigation revealed that the mother's partner had a history of involvement with child protection agencies in other jurisdictions with many mothers who also had teenaged daughters. In those instances the teenaged daughters made allegations that included domestic violence and sexual abuse by the man. This man had criminal charges that were unknown to the current mother and there was no indication of criminal charges in agency records.

Academics have written about various theories to explain the cause of woman abuse (Dwyer, 1995; Hammons, 2004). Dwyer and Hammons discuss how theory dictates the discourse of woman abuse and ultimately determines the focus of interventions. According to Hammons a socio-political discourse insinuates that women are primarily the victims of abuse and men are mainly the perpetrators of the abuse which is in agreement with Dwyer's social-structural model and McDonald's (2005) social movement perspective. A socio-political/structural discourse, which is based in a feminist perspective, considers a historical analysis of the power imbalance between the genders crucial to understanding woman abuse (Dwyer).

From a socio-political perspective, women who may sometimes use physical force against their perpetrators are seen to do so in self-defense (Hammons, 2004). “Taboo is a form of prohibition since it makes it difficult to speak about certain subjects . . .” (Mills, 2003a, p. 58). In the context of woman abuse the first taboo that comes to mind is the concept that a woman would defend herself during a physical attack. The woman who defends herself by using threats or physical fighting during an assault risks giving up ‘victim status’. The incident can be seen as a mutual assault and the woman may also be charged for assault, along with her abuser.

A socio-psychological discourse differs from socio-political/structural perspectives and a social movement perspective. The socio-psychological discourse has, as its focus, dysfunctional family relationships, codependence, patterns of distorted thinking, and learned helplessness (Hammons, 2004). The term ‘codependence’, which has been transplanted from the field of addictions, insinuates that women, who are in abusive relationships, remain in abusive relationships or experience subsequent abusive relationships, do so because they need to be with a dysfunctional partner (Frank & Golden, 1995, cited in Hammons). The medical model takes the issue of woman abuse from the macro level and labels it as personal pathology (Hammons). I suspect that the move from a socio-political discourse to a social-psychological discourse has led to the current definitions for woman abuse in the Ontario Risk Assessment Model (ORAM) revised 2006.

Critiques of feminism suggest that age, class, ethnicity, physical ability, race, and sexuality were topics that were ignored by early feminists (Steinhouse, 2001). As a

result, postmodern feminists have focused more attention to dominant discourses which construct and maintain the status of people who have ‘power over’ those who are restricted in our society (Hare-Mustin, 1994). Although feminists have made valiant steps forward in relation to woman abuse, I believe that neo-liberalism is erasing feminists’ gains by removing gender from the issue. The discourse suggests that women engage in violence equal to or surpassing that of men (Carney, Buttell, & Dutton 2006; Dutton & Nicholls, 2005). My position is echoed in an article by McDonald (2005) written to reflect neo-liberal trends in Australia.

Carney et al. (2006) suggest that “female domestic violence offenders share many of the same characteristics as male offenders, including similar motives and psycho-social characteristics ....” They assert, for example, that gender in abusive relationships is important, declaring however that women abuse their partners as much as men abuse their partner. Furthermore, Carney et al. (2006, p. 114) assert that in the 70s and 80s researchers (Gelles, 1972; and Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, all cited in Dwyer et al., 1995) reported that domestic violence is a problem for men and women and agree that domestic violence “... is gender neutral in reality.” (p. 187)

Feminists and theorists may declare that my use of ‘domestic violence’ also removes gender from the issue of woman abuse. Although Dwyer, Smokowski, Bricout, & Wodarski, (1995) make an argument to support the term ‘domestic violence’ as “violent acts perpetrated on a partner within a relationship in the presumed safety and privacy of the home.” (p. 186)

Alternate opinions exist that contradict Carney et al.'s (2006) findings. Critiques of the discourse that supports gender equality in intimate partner violence asserts that such discourse results from: a lack of "consideration of motives, contexts and consequences" of intimate partner violence (Saunders, 2002, p. 1426). Another critique (Moffitt et al., 2001, Stets & Strauss, 1990, all cited in Dobash & Dobash, 2004) emphasizes the erroneous comparison of different types of samples in research. Moreover, personal characteristics and/or who acted first are not adequate evidence for 'self defense' or lack thereof. Researchers have included woman abuse and marital conflict, which are two separate issues into one category (Baker & Cunningham, 2005; Saunders).

Oppression has been perpetuated and maintained by dominant groups in society, and Mullaly (1999) states that people experience oppression based on their membership in a group or category of people. Mullaly argues that oppression currently acts systemically through "... unquestioned norms, behaviours, and symbols in the underlying assumptions of institutional rules." (p. 145) Theorists have described two reactions that people may have to their oppression. They may either internalize the oppressors' belief of inferiority, or reject the oppression through resistance. Mullaly draws on the work of Adam (1978) and Young (1990) however Freire's idea of resistance seems to fit the idea that a woman who has been abused may abuse a partner. Freire (1970, cited in O'Hara, 1989; 1974, cited in Alschuler, 1992) examines the dynamics of oppression. He argues that the oppressed attempt to liberate themselves from their oppressor, and in doing so, identify with their oppressor. Moreover, the oppressed adopt and imitate their

oppressor's tactics (Alschuler; O'Hara). Although Freire's work does not specifically pertain to woman abuse, the same argument could be made to explain how women identify with their abuser and subsequently lash out at them.

What are the benefits and/or consequences of research findings that claim men and women engage in intimate partner violence equally? Minaker and Snider (2006) consider the twist on gender equality as a direct result of neo-liberalism. Dominant discourse is not benign. A gender-equality abuse perspective may affect the need for woman abuse services and limit resource availability (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Minaker & Snider; Saunders, 2002). Arbitrary criminal charges against women may affect custody applications, immigrants may be deported, women may be excluded from certain jobs, and more importantly women may not report further abuse to the police (Saunders).

An empowerment approach to domestic violence attributes power imbalances as the origin of the violence, although on an interpersonal level, the method professes that abuse is a result of intergenerational cycles of violence (McDonald, 2005). Therefore, interventions are not considered for the perpetrator, and instead focus on teaching women how to recognize and control the abuse. Successful intervention emanates not from a woman's decision to return to the relationship, but from her ability to refuse to accept the abuse (McDonald). The implication is that women are able to control abusers' behaviour and stop the abuse.

In 1999, the concern with children's exposure to their mother's abuse, appeared in the literature and continues today. Weithorn (2001, cited in Edleson, Gassman-Pines, & Hill, 2006) place the subject in a larger national context. Legislative changes in

Minnesota, Alaska and Ontario have had similar outcomes. Legislators in Minnesota believed that adding 'domestic violence' to existing child neglect indicators would clarify existing practices however; the execution of the change inundated CPSs with referrals (Edleson et al., 2006). Canadian CPSs were equally overwhelmed with referrals when the ORAM included domestic violence as a ground for intervention. Alaska dealt with the impact of legislative changes by supporting the following ideas: there should be substantial risk before CPSs label child exposure to domestic violence as maltreatment; CPSs should adopt new assessment and intervention protocols; develop training; and collaborate with VAW services (Edleson et al.).

In CPSs cases involving domestic violence, carefully laid out voluntary goals or involuntary interventions are directed towards the mother, and the implication is that women are solely responsible for the family. The social worker may or may not have contact with the abuser. Therefore, mothers become designated gatekeepers who must ensure that their children are not exposed to the violence, are not injured during the violence and are expected to leave the home if necessary to secure their safety. Women are perceived as having failed in the role as a mother (McDonald, 2005). It is preposterous to blame the mother, while few attempts are made to hold abusive men responsible for their controlling and violent behaviour.

Foucault characterizes 'governmentality' not only as the analysis of who can govern and who is governed, but also includes "the means by which that shaping of someone else's activities is achieved" (Mills, 2003b, p. 47). The government is one piece of the state which includes the police, the legal system and all other government

assistance including CPSs. Foucault wanted to demonstrate the difficulty of achieving a singular goal. His claims are not meant to deny that power is exercised over individuals by the state through its various agents, they are meant to have us consider the various conflicting agencies representing the state (Mills, b).

Social service systems re-victimize women who have been abused. There are serious financial, social, and emotional hardships that single women with children face (Mills, 2000). Women who leave abusive relationships face almost double the rates of poverty as lone fathers, and more than four times the rate of poverty than two-parent families (Morrow, 2003). A woman who leaves an abusive relationship may well have assets; however she is unable to access funds until a legal settlement has been made between her and her partner. Furthermore, women with assets do not qualify for social assistance, are left cash poor, and may be unable to provide materially for their children in the short term. Women with no assets experience extreme hardship that lasts well beyond the short term. All women, however, do not experience life equally. Age, race, ethnicity, ability, immigrant status, sexuality, and geographic location further compound the impact violence has on women and their children (Morrow). Consequently, poverty creates a barrier for women when they want to escape the violence, and it is not surprising that women remain in abusive relationships.

Logan, Walker, Cole, Ratliff, & Leukefeld, (2003) explored intimate partner violence of rural and urban women in the United States and concluded that rural women experience victimization differently than urban women, and therefore have different service needs. Rural women conveyed a greater sense of loneliness and despair, and

displayed more introverted responses to their abuse, than their urban counterparts. Rural women have fewer social supports than urban women and have a significantly lower level of education. Rural women also experienced higher rates of physical and sexual childhood abuse than urban women (Logan et al., 2003).

Discourse concerning Aboriginal women suggests that alcoholism is mainly responsible for men who abuse Aboriginal women although Brownridge's (2003) study disproves that analysis. Colonization theory will attribute the alcohol abuse and domestic violence as part of a larger and more complex problem (Brownridge). Razack (1994, cited in Brownridge) maintains that colonization theory is an appropriate tool to analyze the abuse of Aboriginal women, whereas Brownridge asserts that colonization theory fails to explain why some Aboriginal women experience abuse while others do not. Canadian Aboriginal women experience a significantly higher rate of abuse by their partners over a longer period of time than non-Aboriginal women, and Aboriginal women in rural areas experience twice the rate of abuse than their urban counterparts (Brownridge).

Abolitionists, suffragettes, labor organizers, and civil rights activists who fought to build a world for us based on social justice did so in the public realm based on the concrete struggles of people, by constructing and contesting the dominant discourses (Communication Arts & Sciences, 2005). Many of the mothers and families that I work with are from a wide range of racial and/or ethnic groups and may be first or second generation immigrants to Canada. These women and families face multiple intersecting oppressions, and domestic violence may only be one part of the puzzle. Social work is

criticized for focusing on culture and identity at the expense of looking at how people are limited by political, economic, ideological and historical forces (Razack & Jeffrey, 2002; Yee, 2005). Yee suggests that we question and critique dominant discourses and question presumed knowledge. Razack and Jeffrey note that social work's goal in practice and in theory should be accountability and not necessarily inclusion. Many discourses hold the mother accountable and yet social work's and society's ability to hold abusive men accountable for their behaviour is seriously lacking.

## **Children Are More than Passive Witnesses**

Researchers are discovering that “resilience is forged through adversity, not despite it.” (Walsh, 1998) There are conflicting views in literature regarding the impact that witnessing abuse in the home has on children.

One representation on the topic stems from research that has shown that children who witness violence in the home may experience immediate and long-term effects, and are at an increased risk for emotional, behavioural, academic and social problems (Baker & Cunningham, 2005; Kolbo, Blakely and Engelman, 1996 & Psouts et al., 1982 cited in Davis & Briggs, 2000; METRAC, n.d.; Peled, 1997). Peled (1995, cited in Peled, 1997) makes a strong statement by saying that “Subjecting children to the victimization of their mothers is a severe form of psychological maltreatment.” (p. 429) In addition, women who witness abuse in their childhood may be at an increased risk of being abused in adult relationships (Davis & Briggs). Women who witnessed domestic violence as children report “psychological distress and lower social adjustment” (Davis & Briggs, p. 4) than women who did not witness domestic violence in childhood.

Research that documents the negative impact on children who witness domestic violence fails to acknowledge the equally important negative impact that removing a child from parents’ care can have on a child. Steinhauer (1991) notes that, in his opinion, children who have failed to mourn their loss after they have been apprehended by a child protection agency, will experience problems with attachment and separation. Moreover, these children become susceptible to psychological and developmental damage. Steinhauer also states that problems in any one area of attachment, separation and/or

mourning may undermine a child's overall development. Therefore, CPSs workers must consider their actions, and consider which interventions will cause the least amount of harm to the child.

Recent literature suggests that it is erroneous to believe that witnessing domestic violence is inherently child maltreatment (Magen, 1999). Children who witness violence in the home are not all negatively affected to the same degree (Baker & Cunningham, 2005; Shone & Parada, 2005). Moreover, children in the same household react to their mother's abuse in different ways depending on their "age, gender, relationship to the abuser, and role in the family." (Baker & Cunningham, p. 16) Therefore, when our sole focus is on the vulnerabilities of children who witness their mother's abuse, we fail to investigate and consider what protective factors promote resiliency in some children and youth (Magen). Studies report that 53% of children who witness their mother's abuse exhibit behavioural problems and 48% of children experienced depression. These statistics fail to identify that 47% of children do not act out and 52% of children do not show signs of depression (Magen).

Children who witness their mother's abuse develop different understandings about the meaning and cause of the abuse based on their age and stage of development. Baker and Cunningham (2005) say that children, who live with violence in their home, are more than just witnesses. Children "actively interpret, predict, assess their roles in causing violence, worry about consequences, engage in problem solving and/or take measures to protect themselves or siblings, both physically and emotionally." (Baker & Cunningham, p. 16 – 17) Children are often torn by their feelings, and although older children

recognize that the abuse is wrong; they may also love their father (Peled, 1997). Furthermore parents may create a situation where their children are expected to pick sides between their mother and father (Peled, 1995, cited in Peled, 1997).

Infants and toddlers who hear the commotion and feel tension in the home may become distressed if their needs are not attended to, attachment with caregivers may be disrupted (Shone & Parada, 2005), and normal developmental milestones may be disrupted (Baker & Cunningham, 2005). Attachment in preschoolers may also be negatively affected by witnessing domestic violence due to their belief that they caused the incidents (Shone & Parada), they may wish for a hero to come and save them, or they may fear that if the abusive caregiver is gone, their mother may leave as well (Baker & Cunningham). Children from the age of 6 to 12 judge behaviour by its 'fairness' such as who apparently started the argument, or who is bigger, and/or they may acquire a skewed idea of what it means to be male or to be female (Baker & Cunningham).

Adolescents have a greater repertoire of coping mechanisms than younger children (Shone & Parada, 2005). They may take on the responsibility for younger siblings, they may exhibit anger at one or both caregivers and they may use a variety of unhealthy coping mechanisms (Baker & Cunningham, 2005). Moreover, researchers and practitioners need additional information to gain a better understanding regarding how girls and boys are affected by domestic violence at different developmental stages, and whether the effects differ between the sexes.

The concept of resiliency appears in research and literature since 2000 with greater frequency than previously. Current research concludes that not all children who

are exposed to serious emotional abuse and stress exhibit negative emotional or psychological symptoms to the same degree (Shone & Parada, 2005). It is important to understand possible protective factors so that practitioners can assess children and foster strengths.

Davis & Briggs (2000) note various methodological limitations in research findings with children who witness domestic violence. Some of the limitations are that many studies focus on children who stayed in shelters, and this population may not accurately represent children who have witnessed less severe forms of domestic violence (Davis & Briggs). In addition, studies do not distinguish between children who witness violence and children who experience abuse. Accordingly, an increased concern with identifying possible negative consequences to children who witness domestic violence has led to changes in child protection guidelines.

## **Child Protection Agencies' Involvement with Woman Abuse**

You're putting mom in a position of either you get an OFP (order for protection), you get him out of the house, you do this, that, or the other thing, or we will remove the child from your care. (Beeman et al., 1999).

How did woman abuse come to be identified as a child protection concern? The current written rules and structures which guide the legal mandate of child protection social workers include the Child and Family Services Act (CFSA). "The paramount purpose of this Act is to promote the best interests, protection and well being of children." (CFSA, 2007, ¶1) The Act also states that a family's independence should be maintained when possible through the mutual consent of the family and the Society; services to children and families should respect culture, religion, and regional differences; services to Aboriginal peoples should be provided by their own agencies where possible and services should recognize Aboriginal culture, heritage and traditions (CFSA).

The ORAM and ES also guide CPSs workers' day to day practice. The documents were introduced to child protection agencies across Ontario in 1998 and serve as a common assessment tool. Their frameworks have been used consistently by all Children's Aid Societies in Ontario since that time (Khoo, Hyvonen, & Nygren, 2003; Morrow, 2003; OACAS, 2000a). The assessment tools incorporated family violence as a risk factor for child protection intervention in response to a growing concern regarding the negative effects on children's wellbeing when they witness domestic violence. When the model was revised in 2000, 'caregivers' were deemed responsible for "protecting their children from encountering adult conflict in the home and from suffering serious physical or emotional harm/illness from the violence" (OACASa, ¶ 45).

In my practice, I have witnessed some parents resisting the Societies' interventions, which included pretending to follow prescribed goals. Specifically I will address my concern with the possible consequences when an abused woman and her partner feign acceptance with CPSs' interventions. I believe that I was actually putting women and their children at an increased risk of harm by driving the abusive relationship underground.

#### Case Example

My involvement with a family in ongoing services began following confirmed incidents of domestic violence and the abusive partner had been asked to leave the home on more than one occasion. This separation may have initially been, at the bidding of the police; a voluntary decision made by one or both parents; or a decision made by the intake worker. The abusive partner disclosed to me that he had been hiding in a closet, or elsewhere in the residence during some of my visits to the home. He was able to relay exact details of my conversation with the woman. The disclosure was made after incidents of arguing and fighting occurred between the couple, and the abusive partner believed that he could 'get his partner in trouble' by telling me that he was still living in the home or had returned to the home. Admittedly, the couple were still living together but chose to '*play the game*', and I believed that the couple reunited but were unable to share that information with me for fear of the consequences. Coworkers experienced similar dynamics in their practice.

The most disturbing part of this scenario is that we have forced an abusive relationship to go underground, which in my opinion poses a much greater risk of harm to the woman and her children than would be present if we worked openly with the couple. Mills (2000) agrees that a strength based approach often requires the practitioner to watch the abused woman work through her uncertainty, which often means that she will return to the abusive relationship.

Of particular concern is the well-documented fact that women and children are at increased risk of harm from their abusers when the relationship ends (Davis & Srinivason, 1995; Mahoney, 1991, cited in Mills, 2000), and, except in extreme situations, if we expect a woman to leave the relationship because of the damage exposure has on her children, we risk alienating ourselves from both adults.

Few women leave an abusive relationship because a CPSs worker has advised her she must protect her children. In most cases women are quite skilled at protecting themselves and their children. Alternately, we could attempt to work with both adults together, openly accepting the situation in an attempt to establish safety in the home for the woman and child/ren. My philosophy is recognized and incorporated in the differential response model incorporated in the transformation of CPSs agencies.

Hallberg (2006) states that the addition of children exposed to domestic violence in the revised standards (ORAM and ES, 2000), resulted in significant increases in: the number of referrals; the number of children in care; legal costs; and adversarial relationships with families and community professionals. This motivated the move to a differential response model. Risk assessment models are based on risk elements that are supported in the literature, and basically require that all reports of child maltreatment be investigated and assessed in the same manner. Therefore referrals to CPSs for domestic violence after 2000 were investigated consistently, regardless of whether the children were in the home during the incident and witnessed the abuse.

A differential response model will allow child protection social workers to adapt interventions to the particulars of the report and the unique needs of the family (Hallberg,

2006). Therefore, when children are assessed at ‘moderate risk’ of harm, a collaborative child welfare model emphasizes collaborative efforts by CPSs workers with the family and community services to ensure a parent can access help to appropriately care for their children (Dufour & Chamberland, 2003; Hallberg, 2006 OACASb, 2005). This goal includes domestic violence and the VAW sector.

## **Collaboration: Benefits/Challenges**

It is difficult to find a unified definition for interprofessional collaboration, as the literature uses different terms. For example, 'interprofessional collaboration' may represent collaboration between various professionals (MacKenzie Davies, 2005) and Arredondo, Shealy, Neale, & Logan, (2004) use 'interprofessional collaboration' to signify relationships amongst healthcare professionals. The workgroup mentioned by Arredondo et al. preferred to use the term 'interprofessional collaboration' because it is increasingly used in articles and is thought to be more inclusive. I will use the term interprofessional collaboration to signify an alliance between the parties. Other literature (Austin, 2000, cited in Coleman Selden et al., 2006) uses interorganizational or interagency collaboration to refer to relationships across sectors.

Jeffrey (2003) notes that solutions to today's social issues are not neatly confined to one discipline. Policies, research and services regarding domestic violence will involve many sectors such as CPSs, the VAW sector, police services, court systems, income agencies and housing agencies amongst others. Consequently, services from different sectors that adhere to different ideologies will assist abused women.

The interest in collaboration between CPSs and the VAW sector was adopted in Canada over the past 7 to 10 years. I wonder whether collaboration between CPSs and the VAW sector will improve the relationship between workers in the sectors and relationships with families. More importantly will services to families improve as a result of the collaboration and will the collaboration between CPSs and the VAW sector help level hierarchical relationships?

It is recognized that CPSs and the VAW sector have not had a positive working relationship in the past. Nevertheless, collaboration has documented benefits. It can generate new solutions to complex social issues (Lawrence et al., 2002, cited in Coleman Selden et al., 2006), disseminate combined knowledge (Arredondo et al., 2004; Goodman, 2005; VanWilgenburg, 2005), allow professionals to modify their attitudes towards one another, successfully influence change at the macro level (VanWilgenburg) and secure resource allocation (MacKenzie Davies, 2005). Collaboration has the potential to reduce service duplication and fragmentation which will better meet service users' needs (Coleman Selden et al.; MacKenzie Davies). It is, however, essential to determine how success will be defined and how the outcome will be measured (Andreae, 2002; Coleman, Selden et al.).

Theorists believe that genuine collaboration strives to achieve mutual benefits (Goodman, 2005; MacKenzie Davies, 2005) through creative measures (MacKenzie Davies) although there is little research to understand the effect of collaboration on services (Coleman Selden et al., 2006). Coleman Selden et al.'s study of collaboration between early childcare and education revealed that collaboration improved workers' job satisfaction, increased services available to families, and positively impacted service users' experiences. What is not known is whether the study's outcome is transferable to other situations such as collaboration between CPSs and the VAW sector.

Conversely, challenges have been documented with collaboration between professionals, organizations and service users. Collaboration requires strong leadership (MacKenzie Davies, 2005), excellent communication, and individuals who are eager to

work cooperatively (Goodman, 2005). Furthermore, organizations need to be clear about their mandate, identify priorities for their combined efforts, and determine who will set the agenda since each organization will have its own goals (Andreae, 2002; Goodman). Agencies and professionals may agree to partnerships so that they can provide better assistance to service users, or an agency may merely want to survive (Sowa, 2001, cited in Coleman Selden et al., 2006), this being increasingly difficult due to the former Conservative provincial government's changes, which have led to a 'hollowing out' of the state (Jessop, 1990, cited in Baines, 2004).

Jeffrey (2003) found that in collaborative cross-disciplinary research and collaboration there may not be a common language for discussing the same issue, which may create a barrier for common understanding. I would argue that collaboration even within a discipline but from different sectors may also lack a language that has common understanding to all parties.

The current challenge for CPSs and the VAW sector in Ontario will be to implement partnerships that will benefit service users. I believe that the power imbalance which is inherent in domestic violence is also present between child protection agencies and women's services. Partnerships between sectors are complex and introduce the use of resources. While I wonder how inclusive collaboration will be between the sectors, the current transformation will present CPSs, the VAW sector and service users the opportunity to incorporate anti-oppressive partnerships. Thoughtful analysis is required regarding how 'the authority of mandates' which ultimately controls funding could jeopardize all groups' needs to be considered equally.

Oppression operates at all levels in society. Kinsman (1992, cited in Cain, 1995) concurs that terms such as 'partnership' and 'collaboration', which signify quite neutral concepts on the surface, may conceal power differences that exist between the parties. Cain refers to "the power of the purse string" (p. 88) to illustrate how governments, who make overall funding decisions for agencies and programs, control resources.

Child protection agencies have the legal mandate to intervene with families to protect children, whereas the VAW sector operates from a woman-centred approach and on a voluntary basis. Consequently, the VAW sector could argue that CPSs' mandated power affords them the ability to pressure the government for funding, power which does not exist within the VAW sector (Morrow, 2003). In 1995, the Government of Ontario made a 5% cut to the women's shelters budgets in the province of Ontario and those funds have never been restored (Morrow). Costs to maintain shelters have risen over the past 12 years, and the demand for woman abuse services has also risen. In contrast, allocations from the Government of Ontario to child protection agencies for child abuse and neglect have increased 139% since 1995 (Morrow), which in part, was greatly affected when the ORAM and ES (revised 2000) added the need for parents' to protect their children from encountering adult conflict in the home and/or suffering emotional harm from the violence.

Conflict between the sectors has been based on the issue of child safety versus women's safety (Beeman et al., 1999). The VAW sector maintains that child protection workers attempt to meet the best interests of the child at the expense of the mother. Conversely, child protection workers have argued that women's advocates support

mothers at the expense of the children. The VAW sector believes that men should be held accountable for their abusive behaviour, whereas CPSs workers have expected the mother to protect the children and defer the abuser's accountability to the legal system (Beeman et al.). It has been my experience that the abusive male is not always willing to meet with a society worker unless there is a benefit to him such as child access. If the mother is working with the Society on a voluntary basis there is no legal incentive or requirement for the man to cooperate. Taking the matter to court to force the involvement of the abuser would also negatively impact the mother.

Much of the literature recognizes and comments on the intrusive and oppressive nature of CPSs' involvement with abused women. In contrast, the shelter system is portrayed as having a superior approach, which lends itself to anti-oppressive practice, women's empowerment, and self determination. However, is this really the case?

Latchford (2006) draws on her extensive involvement in the shelter system in Toronto, Ontario as a service user, employee of 20 years, and board member of some community agencies. Latchford discusses the culture of local shelters currently, and reflects on how a grass-roots movement, based on social justice has evolved into "Big business, major employers, training facilities, a permanent and thriving sector ..." (7). She attributes the change to the former Mike Harris government funding cuts. Consequently, shelter management must account for budgets to secure funding, compete for funding, and demonstrate fiscal responsibility. Moreover, shelters must now rely partially on private funding sources, which have added an additional layer of accountability, and requires shelters to adopt "a corporate discourse of efficiency"

(Kimel, 2006, p. 13, cited in Latchford). Latchford has witnessed the effects of the privatization of shelters in the decline of resources and services that are available to women. For example, women now have curfews, have their activities monitored, and limited phone use. All shelters no longer operate as a collective, and each shelter differs in its funding allocations, and in shelters' policies and procedures (Latchford).

I believe that the current challenge for the collaboration between CPSs and the VAW sector is stated well in Jeffrey's (2003) conclusion that:

... the unification of different intellectual and academic fields is not simply a pragmatic alliance that operates mechanically and predictably. On the contrary, the process of creating new understandings provides opportunities for engaging in meaningful debate about theory, methodology and technique, to the benefit of all those involved.  
(Jeffrey, p. 560)

## **CPS and VAW Collaboration 2000**

An advisory committee was established by the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (OMCSS) to develop and implement a protocol for collaboration between CPSs and the VAW sector and develop joint training for the two sectors. In response to the introduction of the ORAM in 2000, the VAW sector was asked to train CPSs workers regarding the dynamics of woman abuse, and provide workers with skills to apply a more woman-centred approach in their work (OMCSS, 2000). The 'draft' CAS/VAW Joint Training – Participant Manual did not dictate regulatory measures to achieve collaboration between the sectors but did provide an information-sharing platform for the two sectors (OMCSS).

The (OACAS) evaluated the joint collaborative training between CPSs and the VAW sector in June 2001, using qualitative information that training participants provided at the end of their training session. One goal of the training was to have workers leave the training ready to "... immediately implement collaborative approaches ..." in their practice (McCahery, 2001, p. 22). The evaluation revealed that participants felt that ongoing training was needed to better serve their clients.

Several useful approaches to maintaining collaboration on an ongoing basis emerged from the training .... Participants suggested that consulting between the sectors in general, and case conferencing or service-planning in child welfare individual situations where women (their error) abuse is present ... Establishing liaisons and protocols were also suggested as useful mechanism to maintain collaboration. (McCahery, p. 23)

Moreover, the OACAS was unsure whether the training would make a difference in workers' service to abused women and their children.

My experience was that few, if any, changes occurred in practice as a result of the training and I witnessed barriers that rendered the mandatory collaborative training impractical. During a training session that I attended there was an obvious split in where workers chose to sit. Generally workers from each sector sat within their coworkers except for small group work and child protection workers outnumbered the VAW workers. Clearly from conversations in the small groups and larger group conversations revealed the animosity between the workers and did little to address the issue. In addition, CPSs workers struggled to attend the mandatory VAW/CAS training due to the high workloads and in fact most new workers had difficulty completing the new worker training modules. Moreover, the tremendous worker turnover also provided a fresh pool of workers with little or no training specific to child protection or to woman abuse issues.

Recommendations made by Canadian participants of the joint training sessions in 2000 – 2001 were not put into practice and this may account for the sectors' inability to work collectively. Beeman et al. (1999) made recommendations that are similar to changes that are incorporated in Ontario by the transformation of CPSs 8 years later.

A Collaboration Agreement for the Children's Aid Societies and Violence Against Women Agencies of the City of Hamilton (CACASVAW) dated March 1, 2004 was signed by the executive directors from both child protection agencies, from two family service organizations, five local shelters, and a community organization. One theme of the document is that we can keep children safe by increasing the safety of their mothers. This agreement outlines ways in which the parties will execute the goals and resolve disputes.

The 2004 collaboration agreement also outlines specific actions that the parties will take at different points in the interaction between the sectors. One measure is that CPSs workers will develop a joint plan with service providers with the consent of the mother if she and her child/ren are residing in a shelter or seeking counselling. The CPSs worker and the VAW worker will understand and agree to their roles and responsibilities when a safety plan is developed. A case conference between the mother and the workers is the preferable approach during the formulation of such a service plan. Further recommendations outlined in the report cover issues such as: when the VAW workers have a duty to report; how CPSs workers can educate and advocate for women and children in the legal system; and responsibilities of workers in both sectors when working with Aboriginal women and children. It should, however, be noted that the terminology for the protocol was decided by the Ministry (not always judiciously, in my opinion). Moreover, the recommended actions contained in this document were not consistently adhered to by CPSs workers, and in fact, may not have been known to many workers.

## **CPS and VAW Collaboration 2007**

The OACASb (2005) describes the move to a collaborative child welfare model as an approach which will allow social workers to draw on their “unique knowledge, experiences and skills to engage parents in promoting the well being and protection of children” (p. 1) and to collaborate with community agencies/resources to ensure a parent can access help to appropriately care for their children (Dufour & Chamberland, 2003). This goal includes the VAW sector.

A number of perspectives pertaining to collaboration exist (Coleman Selden et al., 2006) and I will apply Kagan’s (1993 cited in Coleman Selden et al.) framework which outlines four levels of collaboration where integration may occur: client-centered, program-centered, organization-centered and policy-centered (Coleman Selden et al., 2006).

Kagan’s classification for client-centered integration coordinates services for individuals and families. The collaboration agreement (2004) outlines specific steps that workers in CPSs and the VAW sector will carry out to coordinate their services, including case consultation, however this measure was not consistently implemented until 2007. Kagan’s category of integration at a program level includes collaboration of information, integrated staffing, shared planning, and execution of services. The collaborative curriculum that was released in 2000 aimed to share information across the sectors although workers from both sectors may or may not have attended the training.

In September 2006 the MCYS allocated funds to child protection agencies in Hamilton so that agencies could implement trial programs (Community Capacity (CC),

2006). Domestic violence was one of the areas chosen to receive funding (CC). Innovative programs for review were: clinical supervision for intake and ongoing CPSs workers, transitional supports for mothers and children, a flex fund for women in transition, a children's support group, a group for male perpetrators from aboriginal, newcomer or immigrant backgrounds, and a men's antiviolence support group (CC). The pilot programs were evaluated after six-months to determine which services would continue to run. The initiatives were discontinued after the evaluation, in part due to a lack of awareness and to a lack of enrolment in the programs.

Kagan's organization-centered integration for collaboration includes umbrella agencies at parliamentary and local levels (Coleman Selden et al., 2006). I don't believe that the current formation of a collaborative committee between child protection agencies and the VAW sector meets Kagan's criteria for this classification.

A policy-centered integration according to Kagan includes commissions, advisory policy councils, shared block grant funding, and the development of programs. The MYCS did allocate shared block funding to the two child protection agencies in Hamilton and the agencies partnered with community services to develop pilot programs<sup>3</sup>. In response to the evaluation one agency has established a VAW worker at their agency two days per week, and the other agency has implemented a specialized domestic violence team. Therefore, Kagan's model helps articulate the levels of integration for collaboration.

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<sup>3</sup> The shared block funding to the two child protection agencies in Hamilton did not support only domestic violence initiatives. Other initiatives were created which encompassed addiction services, programs to support young single mothers and their child/ren, parent/adolescent conflict, youth in transition, and children's mental health were formulated. For the purpose of this document I have considered only programs pertaining to domestic violence.

Perhaps Kagan's model can be used to assist future evaluations. When the 2007 collaborative measures are evaluated, will we see the same results as we did with the 2000 process? Will collaborative efforts be sustained or will they do nothing to address systemic barriers? How will participants of this study view the current reattempt at partnership between the two sectors?

## **Collaboration Between Whom?**

Trotter (2002) compares CPSs workers' skills and client outcomes. He states that research identifies CPSs workers effective when they:

... make use of collaborative problem-solving processes (sometimes referred to as working in partnership). They help clients to identify personal, social and environmental issues that are of concern to them. They then help their clients develop goals and strategies to address these issues. The more effective workers tend to work with the clients' definitions of problems rather than their own (the worker's) definition and they deal with a range of issues which are of concern to the client or client family. (p. 39)

In contrast McKnight (1995) states that:

... the power to label people deficient and declare them in need is the basic tool of control and oppression in modern industrialized societies of democratic and totalitarian persuasions. The agents with comprehensive labelling power in these societies are the helping professionals. Their badge bestows the caring authority to declare their fellow citizens "clients" – a class of deficient people in need. (p. 16)

Although Trotter's (2002) study takes a client centered approach, I believe it is a paternalistic view of how social workers, 'the experts', provide services to their clients. Dumbrill (2003), Harding (1993 cited in Beresford, 2000) and McKnight's (1995) cite similar opinions.

Canada has followed Britain's interest over the past several years regarding service users' involvement with social service agencies as evidenced by Mayer and Timms' (1970 cited in Beresford) early work on client studies. Critical theorists and practitioners agree that service providers need input from service users to best understand the impact of their assistance (Beresford, 2000; Dumbrill, 2003a; Glasby & Beresford, 2006). Beresford (2000) adds that social work will benefit from service users and

grassroots organizations' involvement in a manner which will not demean or stigmatize them, and will challenge dominant discourses rather than reinforce them. Beresford also suggests that service users acquire skills, which will enable them to explore their ideas and determine priorities before they engage in social work's discussions.

Glasby and Beresford (2006) suggest that 'service user researchers' may be better able to acquire service users opinions based on their personal experience within the system. I believe that Glasby and Beresford's point is significant and is not mentioned in conventional literature. Perhaps this point becomes visible because Beresford (2000) situates himself as a service user. Moreover, this point is notable to me because of my experiences as a service user. Dominant discourse leads to the belief that there is an 'us', service providers, and a 'them', service users. Rarely is it acknowledged that service providers are people who experience life, disadvantage, medical problems, and trauma, amongst other things to the same degree as service users and may therefore be a member of both worlds.

Harding discusses 'standpoint theory' which suggests that service users are better able to ask critical questions because of their unique knowledge, whereas 'outsiders' do not possess that knowledge. Dumbrell (2003) differs from Trotter's (2002) idea of a solution focused approach in that Dumbrell believes the success of collaboration must include service users as active participants in the process. Collaboration involving service users will present additional challenges to the process due to the history of child protection's dominance and the lack of credibility afforded to service users. The collaborative effort between CPSs and the VAW sectors in 2000 did not include the voice

of service users. Even though the philosophy of child welfare's transformation incorporates the idea of collaboration between CPSs workers and parents, the current collaboration has not incorporated service users' involvement.

Will the current transformation open a window of opportunity that will allow service users to enter the process in a meaningful way? More specifically will mothers who have been abused have the opportunity to participate in planning and decision making that will ultimately affect the delivery and effectiveness of services?

## **Why Has Collaboration Re-emerged Now?**

The Transformation agenda supports partnerships between CPSs workers and parents, partnerships between organizations, and partnerships between parents and multiple agencies. Certainly the goals of collaboration and differential response may benefit families. I wonder, however, if the changes emanate from a genuine concern to provide children and parents with better outcomes, or if the change to a collaborative model is in response to the government's desire to sustain a less costly organizational system. Reference to this idea is contained in documents put out by different stakeholders.

Revisions to the ORAM and ES in 2000 resulted in significant increases in, the numbers of referrals received by child protection agencies in Ontario; the number of children in care; legal costs; and adversarial relationships with families and community professionals (Hallberg, 2006). Hallberg states that the unintended consequences of the child protection reform in 2000 are one factor that has motivated the move to a differential response model. An OACAS (b, p.1) handout describing the collaborative model states that "the new model is based on:... The need to develop a model that is sustainable" however also states that "The need to balance the Ontario system is not based on fiscal priorities ...". Information published by the MCYS (2005) agrees that an unintended consequence of the 1998 – 2000 child protection reforms led to a system that is not "... sustainable without modifications to the funding framework, to government policy, and to the children's aid societies' approaches to service delivery." (MCYS, 2005, p. 5) Reference is also made to 'performance based funding' which includes new

“... measures, incentives and targets within an accountability framework focused on outcomes.” The model being introduced to CPSs is adopted from the National Outcomes Matrix (NOM). The child protection standards in Ontario revised 2006 also state that one reason for revising the current structure is to create a “... fiscally sustainable...” (MCYS, 2006, p. 6) system.

The Conservative provincial government introduced changes in the mid 1990s that led to reduced public spending on all social programs and in child protection these cuts produced an increasing number of cases that front-line social workers are expected to handle (Andreae, 2002; Aronson & Sammon, 2000). I experienced the results of the government’s actions when I started work in a child protection agency in 2001.

A partnership is meant to benefit all parties mutually. I wonder whether the collaboration between CPS and the VAW sector will benefit both sectors. Moreover, what efforts will be initiated and how successful will the partnership be between the sectors when efforts in the past have been ineffective? It will be interesting to follow the implementation of the new endeavour in the Hamilton community and it will be equally important to evaluate how community partners and service users assess the model.

## **Methodological Approach**

Qualitative research methods allow researchers to study people, and understand them within their social and cultural contexts (Babbie, 1995). Epistemology is the ideology that informs research, although it does not necessarily dictate the method that a researcher uses to obtain data (Myers, 2006). Interpretive researchers believe that ‘reality’, is realized through social constructions (Ceci, Limacher, & McLeod, 2002; Walsham, 2006). Accordingly, researchers who employ interpretive principles try to communicate the perspectives and interplay of the people/groups in question. Walsham believes that interpretive studies should supplement interviews with other forms of data, such as a review of internal documents. Part of my investigation included examining the collaborative agreement, a past draft of the collaborative training manual, documents relating to pilot projects of child protection agencies, and relevant government documents.

Gender is critical to research on domestic violence. Therefore, feminists support the use of qualitative research because it helps make gender issues more visible (Finch, 1991). I used qualitative research methods to explore issues pertaining to the collaboration between CPSs and the VAW sector. My study is based on data that I obtained during interviews with participants, and interpreted through my impressions and reactions.

In keeping with personal preferences, I applied grounded theory, from a constructivist perspective to guide my research and analysis regarding workers’ perceptions of the collaboration and joint training. Grounded theory has branched off

into two trends, constructivist and objectivist methods (Charmaz, 2002). The objectivist researcher searches for 'reality' from an 'unbiased' position, while the researcher who uses a constructivist perspective explores how people construct meanings, and act based on those meanings. Researchers, who use grounded theory, collect and analyze data at the same time. Research results combine the stories of multiple participants into a cohesive picture, and a researcher's challenge is to balance an individual's subjective account with a collective analytical account (Charmaz).

There is some controversy over the merit of member checks in qualitative research, and Hammersley (1992, cited in Morse), Morse (1998, cited in Morse et al., 2002), and Guba and Lincoln (1981, cited in Morse), wonder whether member checks, in fact, pose a threat to validity. Morse et al.'s reference to member checks relates to study results and at this stage of the process participants' accounts have been combined with other participants' information so that individual participants will not be recognized. Morse et al. also state that researchers may confine their results to a descriptive account and restrict the analysis of data. Member checks in a different context can be used to have participants review actual interviews. This practice will allow participants to clarify or expand on information.

I began this process from the belief that prior collaboration between CPSs and the VAW sector was unsuccessful, and proceeded from that standpoint. Part of my analysis explores workers' reactions and subsequent actions towards coworkers, and workers from the 'other' sector.

An interpretive approach advocates that:

Researchers should offer feedback of some sort if they are asked to do so, ... The form of the feedback can involve a single presentation to a group of participants from the field site to a more intensive workshop involving a wider range of participants over a longer time period. (Walsham, 2006, p. 322)

Certainly the Master of Social Work (MSW) Program at McMaster University encourages students to think about how they will disseminate their research findings. Dissemination of results addresses a concern that at times, research is done for the sake of research, with no thought of benefit to participants.

## **Predominant Issues /Questions**

The purpose of my study was to explore the experiences of workers from CPSs and the VAW sector in relation to the current collaborative initiatives. Prior attempts at collaborative training between CPSs and the VAW sector in 2000 were unsuccessful at building partnerships and positive relationships, and the two sectors worked mainly independently of one another.

Power can be magnified in collaborative relationships. Power imbalances that are inherent in abusive relationships are central to research (Davison, 2004), and pivotal to the quality of relationships between workers. A hierarchical relationship seems to exist between CPSs, who have mandated authority, and the voluntary nature of the VAW sector. Moreover, both sectors are in a position of power over the women and children that they serve.

Little is known about how we can best bridge the gap between the sectors, facilitate positive relationships, and maintain a partnership. Therefore, I wanted to explore workers' accounts of the process. How can we foster and maintain partnerships between CPSs and the VAW sector and have them move beyond their different histories, philosophical foundations, mandates, and structures? Moreover, how can training facilitate that process?

## **McMaster Research Ethics Board**

An ethics proposal (see Appendix A), and letter of information (see Appendix B) were submitted to the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB) for approval on February 19, 2007. The purpose of the letter of information is to inform potential participants about: why I am doing the research; what will happen during the process; potential harms and benefits resulting from participation in the research; confidentiality; my need to disclose information to an appropriate source should I believe there is any chance of harm to self, or harm of others; the voluntary nature of participation, and the right not to participate and withdraw from the study at any point in time; and how participants can obtain results of the study. MREB approved my application on March 20, 2007 (see Appendix C).

I was employed by one of the child protection agencies between April 2001 and September 2006, and I am currently on a one-year educational leave of absence. My employment in one of the sectors, and my past use of VAW services could be considered conflicts of interest. To address this concern, I made participants aware of my association with CPSs, and my past use of VAW's services. CPSs workers did not disclose the name of any service users, when they discussed practice examples and workers in both sectors did not disclose the name of any workers in relation to their opinions.

Certainly psychological and social risks exist for participants in a research study. I remained conscious that asking participants to speak about their experiences of tension or frustration with the collaboration, and/or relationships with workers between the

sectors may be difficult for them. Participants may have found questions embarrassing, unpleasant, stressful or otherwise upsetting. Therefore, I advised participants that they did not have to answer any questions if they uncomfortable and I encouraged participants to have me clarify any questions that they did not understand. I am also aware that challenges are inevitable when sectors form a partnership. The perception that power is not held equally amongst all parties may create additional tension. Therefore participants may feel a heightened sense of powerlessness when discussing their challenges with the process.

All participants are female, and may have a personal history of abuse. Feelings could be 'triggered off' during our conversations. Participants of this study all work in a counselling role with other individuals. They are experienced workers, and have access to peer support, possibly Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services, and all participants are familiar with community resources should they require further assistance.

I intended to conduct interviews with participants at a convenient location, which might have been outside of their direct work environment to ensure confidentiality. Participants may worry that coworkers, or workers in the 'other' sector may view them negatively if they made unfavourable comments and those statements were identifiable. I notified participants that I would not use individual's names with with any quotations that I use. Two factors affected participants' anonymity. When I had difficulty finding participants, managers in both sectors assisted me by approaching employees to elicit their participation. Some VAW workers felt that shelter directors' had to approve their involvement, before they could consent to participate in the study. Accordingly,

managers in all work environments know who I interviewed with the exception of one worker. Moreover, all but the one participant chose to be interviewed at their places of employment.

A participant may also be uncomfortable disclosing their practices to a colleague. I explained to participants that I understand how complex many of the issues are pertaining to the collaboration, and at times, let them know that I too struggle with some of the same concerns that they were experiencing.

Participants may benefit from knowing that their ideas and concerns have been heard. In addition, participants may also benefit from knowing that they may have made a positive contribution to the future collaboration. Moreover, participants may appreciate my commitment to sharing their experiences. I advised participants that I hope my research will contribute helpful suggestions for training.

## **Sampling**

I initially contacted three members of the Collaboration Agreement team and expressed my interest in learning more about the collaboration between CPSs and the VAW sector. The members suggested issues that required further investigation, and one topic was the training needs of workers in both sectors. After MREB approved my research proposal, I contacted both child protection agencies, and four shelters in Hamilton. Each location requested a copy of my research proposal, letter of information, and ethics approval. After I received permission from each stakeholder, I provided each location with recruitment posters (see Appendix D) to display in the agencies.

Sampling is purposive and non random when participants are selected based on features or characteristics that are relevant to the study (Babbie, 1995). This type of selection yields productive information, with a smaller number of participants. In a stratified sample, participants are selected from subsets of the population. Stratified samples allow the researcher to compare data between subsets (Babbie). I decided to use a stratified non-random purposive sample to obtain the most relevant information within a limited period of time. I compared data from participants in the two sectors.

I did not seek participants from the entire population of workers in either sector. Instead, I recruited participants from a pool of front-line workers who had knowledge and experience with the 'other' sector. I accepted and subsequently interviewed four front-line workers from CPSs and four front-line workers from the VAW sector. The four VAW workers all functioned in different roles within their respective environments. I sought one participant from four separate VAW shelters, however, one shelter is

unrepresented in this study. I expected that all participants would be female, although I would not have discounted a male worker if he wanted to be involved with the study. All participants, are in fact female, and over 18 years of age.

## **Data Collection**

Geertz (1973 cited in Walsham, 2006, p. 320) made an astute comment regarding data collection that fits nicely with my philosophical preferences:

What we call our data are really our own construction of other people's construction of what they and their compatriots are up to. (p.9)

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Qualitative research is a participant's subjective account of their reality. How I interpret

that data is coloured and influenced by my own subjective analysis. Therefore, the qualitative researcher does not gather objective truths about a topic of interest. Moreover, my goal with this research study is to examine workers' opinions about the collaboration, their perceptions of relationships, and suggestions for training. These are all subjective accounts that will help me to deconstruct discursive practices. Structural inequalities are one aspect of power relations, and discursive practices create and maintain specific aspects of social life over others (Burr, 1995a). Qualitative research and grounded theory use flexible open-ended interviews that allow a participant's story to unfold. Researchers, who use grounded theory, collect and analyze data at the same time. Research results combine the stories of multiple participants into a cohesive picture. Charmaz (2002) indicates that a researcher's challenge is to balance an individual's subjective account with a collective analytical account.

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All participants reviewed the letter of information and I answered any questions they had prior to beginning the interview. All participants agreed to have their interview taped, so I could have the interviews transcribed, which would enable me to more accurately represent participants opinions. I gave participants a copy of the consent form,

and kept a second copy for my records. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix E).

I conducted eight individual interviews, lasting approximately one hour in length. The interviews were taped, and transcribed shortly after each interview. This procedure allowed me to incorporate information from early interviews into subsequent ones. I used a rough outline of open-ended questions, to guide my interviews (see Appendix F) and consistent with grounded theory I found it necessary to revise my questions (see Appendix G) after the first three interviews.

Seven of the eight participants requested that their interviews take place at their agency. I did, however, interview one participant at her home. One interview was interrupted, as the participant had an appointment to attend and I finished that interview over the phone the following week. The second part of that interview was not tape recorded. I made brief notes during interviews, although I found it distracted me somewhat from concentrating on what the participant was telling me.

## **Limitations of the Study**

This study incorporated a relatively homogeneous racial and cultural group of participants. All of the participants were employed in either sector and perhaps a significant limitation of this study is the exclusion of service users' voices. Many qualitative studies have a small number of participants, and there is no one method to determine what an 'ideal' number of participants should be, to reach 'saturation'<sup>4</sup> (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995). Each participant provided me with a unique perspective and I therefore, did not achieve saturation of any one theme or data in general. My difficulty eliciting participants in a short period of time did not allow me to recruit additional participants.

Researchers who draw on grounded theory use early data to shape subsequent interviews and choice of participants. The use of this sampling method lends more validity to a study, than a one-time sample. I did not use multiple sequential interviews and I did not use early interviews to shape subsequent choice of participants due to time constraints and my difficulty recruiting participants.

In addition, Morse et al. (2002) say that 'member checks'<sup>5</sup> are one strategy to attain 'trustworthiness'<sup>6</sup> in a study. I did not incorporate member checks into my

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<sup>4</sup> Luborsky and Rubinstein define saturation as a point when a researcher discovers no new data from subsequent interviews. The data no longer contributes additional information to existing data. Luborsky and Rubinstein say that in qualitative research, a generally accepted number of participants to achieve saturation is 12 to 26.

<sup>5</sup> 'Member checks' involve asking participants if you have interpreted their thoughts correctly. Member checks are a commonly accepted method of checking or increasing the validity of data in qualitative studies.

<sup>6</sup> 'Trustworthiness' is a term used with qualitative research to reference the reliability and validity of a study.

research method due to time constraints, and heavy caseloads of the workers. I do believe that member checks would have been an invaluable resource to me.

## **Results**

All of the participants function in various capacities in their sector. Participants from both sectors advised me that their experiences with the 'other' sector depends on their role, and on the experience and knowledge of the workers. I explored relationships between workers in both sectors, and elicited their opinions regarding the current collaboration. I asked workers for their recommendations to facilitate improved partnerships between the sectors. Ultimately the collaboration between the sectors aims to improve services that workers provide to abused women and their children.

Workers who have been employed in either sector for the past 5 - 7 years have a historical context and they were able to consider workers' relationships between the sectors over time, and compare the attempts to collaborate. Moreover, workers who had the initial training could compare the curriculum. Several themes emerged from my review and analysis of the information, such as workers' perceptions of their relationships with the 'other' sector, workers' experiences with the collaboration, and opinions about training. Workers have varying positions on the process of collaboration, and at times, were confused about whether the current collaboration is unique or a continuation of the 2000 collaborative project.

## **Theme (1): Workers' Perceptions of Relationships**

Workers from both sectors discussed their perceptions of relationships with either workers in the 'other' sector or coworkers, and/or relationships between workers and service users. Workers from both sectors were somewhat hesitant to express 'unfavourable' opinions about other workers and the wide range of responses demonstrates the complexity of relationships amongst stakeholders.

Negative and positive relationships exist between workers from the sectors. A 'power imbalance' between stakeholders is a common theme for all participants, and this perceived disparity contributes to poor relationships. All participants made a distinction between the principles of a woman-centred approach versus that of a child-centred approach. A CPSs worker compared how roles in the sectors affect workers' tactics with abused women and their children.

... if safety of the children wasn't being prioritized [we are] ... having to step in and having to enforce that, having to direct women and fathers ... So really direct and really forceful if needed. ...the VAW sector is ... more care giving in a supportive role versus our agency role ...

The perception of conflicting approaches continues to be a source of misunderstanding and tension between workers across sectors, and within sectors. It is difficult to imagine that one could separate the well-being of a mother from the well-being of the child/ren. Moreover, it is problematic to prioritize the safety of one person over that of another.

A woman-centred perspective encourages an approach that will 'empower'. A CPSs worker used a practice example to demonstrate her belief that, at times, it is inappropriate for a VAW worker to use an empowerment approach. She advised me that

a woman may be too overwhelmed when she first leaves the abusive relationship to accomplish complex tasks without assistance. She stated:

The word empowerment is such an overly used word. Although ultimately that's what we would all like, to support and see for women. I just, I think ... the definition tends to get confused with you need to do for yourself, find housing, this or that, and that's where I think its such an over used and actually abused word for telling women what they have to do themselves.

A very basic understanding of abuse is that the abuser misuses his power over women through threatening and intimidating behaviours. Over time women's self esteem and sense of efficacy are worn away. VAW workers attempt to 'empower' women, to help them regain their self esteem, realize that they have options, build confidence in their ability to make decisions, and regain a sense of power over their lives. However, the CPSs worker pointed out that when women are in crisis, at times they need someone to assist them with tasks during the initial stages.

An important principle of relationships is respect. One perception common to both sectors is the idea that workers in one sector do not respect workers in the other sector. One VAW worker stated that although nothing is said directly, the message is implied covertly in CPSs statements. Similarly, two CPSs workers mentioned that at times, coworkers show a lack of respect towards VAW workers. One of these workers described disrespect as a mutual phenomenon:

I've heard VAW women directly say that that they have worked with some Society workers who have been terrible like condescending to them and to the women that they work. And then I've also heard from our own staff, that are still here, that it was terrible because the VAW will refuse to work with us, and just had an opinion that that we weren't there to help the women at all. So I've heard both sides of it ... and said that they (CPSs workers) don't ever want to work with the VAW sector again ...

The second CPSs worker described an example of a time when she perceives that a VAW worker do not show respect towards her.

I didn't get treated very well at a shelter when I've gone to try and visit a mom. ... it was just a case of 'oh its Children's Aid' [spoken in a loud manner by the VAW worker] and I've always been respectful to all of my clients around I don't disclose loudly who I am its up to the mom whether she wants to disclose. So usually when I come to a shelter ... I give them my card ... and some of the shelters 'oh its Children's Aid to see you' ... and the mom looks at me with a wary eye because she's thinking I'm the one that now has said it loudly and that's why the shelter workers are nasty.

Another common theme in both sectors is the perception that workers' relationships depends on the worker's knowledge and understanding of woman abuse. VAW workers report that CPSs workers either 'get it' or 'don't get it'. They identify 'good workers', and 'not so good workers', 'progressive workers' and 'directive workers' or 'punitive workers' who abuse their power, and the 'enforcer of rules'. Moreover, VAW workers say that you have to do things "... their way and their way is right...".

One VAW worker attributes power imbalances to a difference in educational levels between workers in the sectors.

... shelter workers don't have the same educational stance as well and what do we value in our society. CAS workers for the most part are more educated than the vast majority of shelter workers and the shelter sector is very informal in many cases. So I think that that impacts communication cause it can be intimidating to go into a meeting with a CAS worker ... from my experience I felt really offended and sort of threatened myself for my client said oh wow I felt violated I can't even imagine how this woman must feel.

Power imbalances extend beyond the relationships between workers, and are also evident in workers' relationships with service users. A VAW worker described a situation when a CPSs worker exerted her power over service users. In that instance, the

worker replicated the power imbalances that women experience in abusive relationships.

This worker relayed a situation where she believes children were damaged as a result of a

CPSs worker's misuse of power:

A worker I've dealt with, a family where the children were apprehended for absolutely unclear reasons ... and nobody could sort of get to the bottom of it ... I think it was almost 2 months before she got her children back and was going to the head of the agency ... and of course there's no reparations for the damage that was done to those children. That's an extremely traumatic incident that really came as a result of a worker power tripping ...

A CPSs worker also sees coworkers abusing their power with the women:

... you see this is where I think ... the VAW worker it's justified that they don't like us it's a case of you need to protect your children, you know like you can't go back to that partner. The partner cannot be in the house  
....

Power is not solely inherent to CPSs workers. VAW workers are in a position of power over service users. Two VAW workers commented on their power over women.

I think that for both agencies myself included ... we talk to these women about the power imbalances of a relationship but really don't always do that in a direct conversation around services that they're getting. ... I'm the one with the expertise, I'm the one that you know give them knowledge ... even from my perspective working from you know more of a feminist approach ...

A second VAW worker relayed her use of power which is similar to VAW workers' criticisms of CPSs workers although she justified her exercise of power by adding woman-centred principles:

... I was directive with behaviours working as a child care worker because if they didn't conform to the behaviours I was requesting I was going to call [CPS] and with that there is a great amount of authority but I also tried to weigh where are they coming from and would take sort of a AOP into account ... I know my power when someone whose desperately pleading

for a bed ... and I have no beds left ... or maybe I do and I want to save it for someone else. Like that sort of decision impacts their life immensely.

In general, workers from both sectors described more examples of negative relationships, although there were also examples of positive experiences with workers from the 'other' sector. One VAW worker compared her perception of her relationships with workers before the current collaboration to more recent experiences. She believes that relationships with CPSs workers have improved, although she is not sure if this is a result of the collaboration, or whether it is a reflection of her current role. Another VAW worker described a specific example of a positive experience with a CPSs worker:

She's explained what her role was and ... and does a really great job of it and honours the power imbalance. She just does an amazing job ... it made it ... I wouldn't say safe but safer for the women to voice their concerns. And she was open to providing answers about what should be happening and shouldn't be happening.

A VAW worker noted that some CPSs workers make positive efforts to collaborate with women:

... there are workers who come in and are very kind ... and instantly you have to feel relieved because the worker was kind, listened to her, was genuine, was caring towards her I think that goes a long way.

Another VAW worker also noted a CPSs worker's effort to collaborate:

... we'll meet together so there's a bit of a transition. That tends to work more ... especially if the client has a good relationship with their CAS worker. Believe it or not that does happen. ... so if there's already a trust built there you know often if we, the three of us meet together then then it tends to work a little bit better...

Even when workers attempt to collaborate, the heavy workloads of workers in both sectors acts as a barrier. Workers from both sectors generally recalled examples of poor relationships between workers in the sectors. I imagine that the real and perceived

quality of the relationships between workers has been a hindrance in the collaboration, and may well have a detrimental effect on the current initiative. Workers do, however, believe that the collaboration has valuable possibilities for workers and service users. They anticipate that with increased understanding relationships between workers will improve, and services provided to abused women and their children will also improve.

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## **Theme (2): Experiences with Collaboration**

Workers from CPSs and the VAW sector discussed whether the collaboration is having a positive or negative impact on relationships and services. I questioned participants about interactions between agency workers in the 'other' sector and within their workplace, between workers and service users, and between workers and other community services. Workers from both sectors believe that the collaboration is important because they are working with the same population, and the goal common to both sectors is to keep women safe and children safe. Workers agree that when women are safe they are better able to keep their children safe. Participants from both sectors recalled positive experiences as a result of collaboration. They also believe that collaboration will facilitate information sharing, and the result will be improved services for women. One CPSs worker elaborated:

I've had a fairly good experience when working collaboratively with one of the shelters in Hamilton, with their workers and the moms, and I think its because doing extensive I guess information sharing around a particular file the shelter worker actually understood that I'm there to work with the shelter in supporting mom, as opposed to their belief is that we're going to go and take the kids and give mom a hard time you know at a time when she is very very vulnerable.

One CPSs worker is somewhat ambivalent about whether coworkers will continue to use a woman-centred approach after a family is transferred to a different unit, or whether the benefits of her efforts will deteriorate. Her critique of the CPSs worker in the protection role is similar to the VAW workers' criticism of CPSs workers:

... basically what's changed is its not just one worker whose doing all this. Like it was me before now it's basically opened up to everyone who has a domestic violence case, which can work but I think its going to take a little longer [workers in other units] ... to just automatically think oh I have

to consult the shelter staff. Because for me it was just, it was an expectation every week I had to do that so, ... it's up to you and ... we are over worked as we are. So that's going to be a little shift for people to see its relevance. I think its happening. ... I would do all this work with this family, ... in conjunction with the shelters and then it would be transferred ... so that was a problem and that's another reason why they put someone [a shelter worker] in here so that both departments could be easily accessed.

Moreover, part of this worker's role is to consult with the protection worker and ensure that she is utilizing a woman-centred approach and not "focusing on the negative, that we're not doing any blaming or shaming of the family".

Another CPSs worker relayed her positive experiences with the collaboration. She discussed the efforts that she makes with workers, service users, and community organizations:

... there's a worker that I consult with from the VAW sector ... every four to six weeks and I can run cases by her and get some more, you know, other information that she would suggest as well. ... it's been great because I've been able to make some positive connections with some of the other VAW Centre workers ...

The same CPSs worker also described her efforts to collaboration with women:

I've been telling her since the file came to me that we're working with her and that we're supporting her decision so she needs to tell us if she likes the way we've written the Court papers, she can review them ahead of time. ... I'm just involving her in the steps along the way so that she's informed of what we're doing.

This worker also extends her collaboration to other services in the community:

So the police removed the father from the home and put him in jail ...and now our Society's working with Victim Witness, the probation officer, the police officer who is representing in Court for what happened and trying to work with the Crown ...

One VAW worker described her idea of what a positive experience would be when she consults with CPSs.

That would be when I'm, if I'm calling Children's Aid because there's a child at risk of being hurt ... and I'm expressing concern about the abuse, for example, is escalating and those concerns are taken seriously as opposed to putting more responsibility on the woman saying oh she can handle it or she has to keep herself safe- those kinds of things, ... it's very rare for me to want more CAS involvement ... I have a couple of work experiences where I've been very concerned about how things are escalating.

Another VAW worker advised me that she sees the collaboration as a top-down scheme that in practice will not function well for front-line workers:

So there's two different types of systems that are trying to meld together and I think on a higher managerial level it meshes better ... together than the actual workers on the ground level - it doesn't work as well. ... It seems like you know the CAS and the head of shelters got together and hey this is a great idea. And they all operate from that managerial standpoint so it's a great discussion for them to have but I think as it plays itself out when you bring together that many CAS workers and VAW shelter workers, it just doesn't play itself out. I think it's valuable, it's a valuable start ... but I don't see it as being the big catalyst of change ...

Interestingly enough, even though workers in both sectors gave a generally negative viewpoint of the relationships between workers, for the most part they spoke positively about the collaboration. Cognitive behavioural theory states that our thoughts influence how we behave, what actions we choose to take or not take. The positive anticipation that workers in both sectors express are a stepping stone to changing relationships and subsequent behaviours. The changes that evolve between workers will trickle down to their interactions with service users.

### **Theme (3): Training**

Joint training between CPSs and the VAW sector was initiated in 2000. Workers, who have been working in either sector for the past five to seven years, were able to compare past training with the current curriculum. Participants told me what current training information that has been helpful and unhelpful for them.

All eight participants feel that training between the sectors should be mandatory and ongoing, so that knowledge is informed by current research and best practice techniques. An untapped source of information for training to this point is the views of service users. One CPSs worker specifically mentioned her belief that service users have an abundance of wisdom to share with workers.

... I learn a lot from the women that I work with who have been in domestic violence relationships. They are my teachers as well and I take what they've taught me and what they have learned through their experiences and I think that's a very very valuable part of learning ... there's a bigger impact ... and that tends to stay more with a worker than ... the canned educational package that tends to be, you know, it's the same for everybody, but doesn't really get updated.

Research and literature on woman abuse consistently asserts that systems and professionals do not hold abusive men accountable for their behaviour. Two CPSs workers concur:

The one that they did this past year ... was really good ... and it was on women with men who abuse so that was challenging right because for many ... it was very informative to know how to reach men because that's the other half like the ... it was nice to see how to hold men more accountable, more responsible ...

Although, she wondered whether VAW workers have an equal interest in the information:

... what I heard was that most people enjoyed it. I think the VAW sector [they didn't like] topic choice because ... such a small percentage that do work with men.

A CPSs worker feels that training should include information on how the dynamics of abuse may affect women.

I went to one training ... what I found powerful about it was that it really brought home what it's like to live in a relationship where you don't feel safe day in and day out. ... he did take Stockholm Syndrome and really kind of compared it to well here's someone whose brutally you know beaten, tortured, whatever, yet goes and finds their attacker, is not that different than women who leave these relationships and go back ... Basically if you have someone telling you how to dress, how to sleep, how to eat day in and day out that you can feel a little lost and ... there's way more psychological and emotional stuff that happens ...

Another CPS worker mentioned the importance of understanding how culture affects the dynamics of an abusive relationship.

... culture plays a big role in terms of how things are reported, how things are dealt with in families, what's appropriate, what's not, you know whose let in on this information. Some cultures it's appropriate ... to talk within the culture about it but that's it - we don't go to the police, we don't go to other community supports. So it's ... very important to look at to make sure you're addressing the needs of the family in appropriate and sensitive ways so we're not forcing, you know, values on them ...

Multiple systems are involved with families when woman abuse is present. The court system is an important piece of intervention, and judges ultimately determine custody and access issues. One CPSs worker wonders how we can help community services understand woman abuse.

...we want to try to be intervening by exposing to the Court the type of the ... tactics that ... he's using to harm the children. ... how to educate the Court system and how to approach it in training the Court system in the area of woman abuse and the effect on children and the women.

Training includes two elements. One part is the actual content of the material and the second component covers the delivery of the material. Many participants advised that the current training curriculum does not provide them with the information that they want to know. In addition, the training is not presented in a way that is interesting and memorable. Therefore, I asked participants for their input.

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One VAW worker described an innovative way to deliver training.

... so much of training is the standard cut and dry workshop and ... something else I don't know about I like retreats and intensive workshops that are therapeutic and push for self reflection because I think before you can sort of sit in your arm chair and cast decisions on another's life, about another's life, you need to really understand where you're coming ...

CPSs workers and VAW workers gave me examples of information that they need to assist them in their work with women and children. They also commented on what information they want to know about the other sector, and what information they want the other sector to know about their role. I have divided workers comments down into four distinct categories so that I can reflect on any similarities and/or differences between the sectors.

*'CPSs workers want VAW workers to know'*

CPSs workers want VAW workers to have a better understanding of how the CFSA guides workers' decision making, and the restrictions and limitations of their power. They also want VAW workers to know that apprehending a child is a last resort, and they want to support the mother. Moreover, changes resulting from Bill 210, the transformation, and introduction of a differential response model will allow CPSs workers to work more collaboratively with women and children. CPSs workers want

VAW workers to know that some of them have been employed in the VAW sector and are familiar with the dynamics of abuse and a woman-centred approach. One CPSs worker summed it up well. She wants VAW workers:

To be supportive, that we want to help and to welcome us with open arms and to come with their big bag of education/learning to pass on to us and if we don't agree we really need to talk out loud about what's going on because we actually ... we need to educate each other how we can best attain that ... Together we have more resources and means, the two agencies together ... I know that there are some who actually disapprove of having a child protection worker ... in the shelter. And we're not there to spy. We're there to help.

*'CPSs workers want to know'*

CPSs workers want VAW workers to help them understand more about the dynamics of woman abuse. More specifically, they want a better understanding of why women remain in abusive relationships and how the dynamics of abuse may lead to addictions. Workers want to better understand the stages of change model, and how they can best work with women at different stages. They also want to know what community resources are available for women and their children. CPSs workers want to understand how PTSD affects women's coping mechanisms, mental health, and behaviour, and how PTSD affects children and ways it may manifest in children's behaviour. One CPSs worker worries about how she can safeguard information about women's and children's whereabouts and still meet child protection recording standards. She believes that VAW workers have valuable expertise on the subject:

... being careful around what we even put in our case notes, you know, that they can be opened up for disclosure. And I think that's where, to go back to a question you asked earlier, where the VAW workers are far more careful in noting and case noting their stuff. We aren't and its kind of taking our cue and learning from them how to protect the moms and their

children and keep them safe and they can teach us how to effectively case note. So it's that collaboration of, you know, you can teach us, can you teach us how to do that? I think that's a piece that we need to have.

*'VAW workers want CPSs to know'*

VAW workers expressed their frustration, and belief that CPSs workers do not respect their expertise. They also want CPSs workers to consider their referrals seriously, and know that they are equally concerned about children and women. VAW workers want CPSs workers to understand their roles and remember that their services are voluntary. Women need to have choices about their decisions, as long as the children are safe. VAW workers want CPSs workers to better understand the tactics that abusive men use over their partners, their children, as well as with CPSs workers. One VAW worker wants CPSs workers to know that:

There is no such thing as a free choice in an abusive relationship. Women aren't choosing to put themselves in situations, they are not "allowing" themselves to be abused or "allowing" their children to be exposed to abuse. They're surviving. ... this idea of ... she keeps getting into abusive relationships so she needs to go to counselling ... to fix yourself so you stop attracting abusers is just ridiculous.

*'VAW workers want to know'*

A VAW worker discussed the sector's budget constraints, which affect the resources they have available to women. She wondered what resources CPSs have to assist women and their children. Budget constraints also affect the availability of training opportunities for them and one worker wondered whether CPSs could assist them with more joint training opportunities.

VAW workers want information about when they should make referrals, or when they should consult with CPSs workers. VAW workers want CPSs workers to share

more information about women with them, such as whether a woman has prior child protection involvement, what the expectations are for the woman, and how VAW workers can best work with the woman towards those goals.

VAW workers want to understand information pertaining to the transformation, such as kinship care. Several VAW workers want information that will help them understand the decisions that CPSs workers make regarding custody/access:

... our question was why can't you enforce that? ... those are some of the questions that we in this sector don't really get answers to and it's really just a standard we don't get involved in custody disputes. ... what are their guidelines with ... separated and sole custody families and why that is. ... I hear it all the time that ... they don't want to get involved with custody disputes um but why is that? Is it just a philosophy? Is it mandated?

It is curious that the VAW workers did not express a desire to have more information about the effects that witnessing may have on children, or on how it may affect child development. That information could assist VAW workers to identify children's behaviours that are concerning and assist them with decision making about when to make referrals. I find it equally interesting, that VAW workers would not become involved in custody/access issues as it is an important piece of advocating for the woman. Women may provide VAW workers with information that is valuable to the mothers' custody/access cases.

It is evident that there is an overlap of information that workers from both sectors want to better understand. Sadly, misperceptions and misunderstandings about workers which have been documented historically are still evident today.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this research was to gather the perceptions and experiences of workers from both sectors regarding relationships between workers, workers' perceptions about the collaboration, and workers' opinions about training.

The analysis of data may reveal a specific area that requires further research, however, it is important not to 'reinvent the wheel' but "... to break new ground!" National Violence Against Women Prevention Resource Centre (NVAWPRC, p. 7, 2001)

The strained relationships between workers of CPSs and the VAW sector that were evident in 2000 still exist in 2007. Research pertaining to the collaboration needs to move beyond initial exploratory stages. Rather than repeat findings through subsequent research, we need to discover concrete ways for workers to move forward, and begin to evaluate what measures work, what efforts are unsuccessful, and determine what we can do differently to obtain different results. It would be sad to think that 7 years from now, literature will report the same dissonance between the sectors that has existed for at least a decade.

A tenet of qualitative research is subjectivity. Dachler (1999) discusses how language and prominent discourses shape our understanding of the world and limits alternate possibilities. My position as researcher comes from a privileged, yet biased point of view. Therefore, if participants from different sectors generally replicate the dominant discourses of their workplace, then my past affiliation with CPSs and personal experiences of abuse affects the lens that I use. Consequently, I approached this research in a manner that supported one perspective to a greater degree, than the other. My own

acceptance of the discourse that portrays a mandatory organization such as CPSs, as the oppressor versus that of VAW sector's voluntary services as being morally superior, caused me to initially overlook other possibilities.

Walsham (2006) says that he never mentions power relations:

as something that I plan to investigate, as power is normally not something which is openly talked about with 'outsiders', almost a dirty word in contemporary organizational life. Yet, power is endemic and crucial to all activity, and thus must be addressed by the interpretive research. (p. 328)

Contrary to Walsham's experiences, CPSs workers and VAW workers spoke at great lengths about real and perceived power imbalances, and workers' use or abuse of their power.

I believe that the collaboration has accentuated the previously subtle animosity between the sectors by requiring closer contact between the sectors. Perhaps CPSs workers believe they have to show the VAW sector that they can be empathetic, and perform 'real social work', and perhaps the VAW sector is anticipating that CPSs workers will fail at the attempt. Scrutiny exists from outside CPSs and from within the agency. One worker advised me that:

... we're being scrutinized, that the eye is on us around us everywhere and we had to be very careful in how we do our job because it's under a lot of criticism ... But it shouldn't be under criticism it should be supported. It shouldn't be that everyone's looking for us to fail ... because this is the only way that child protection can work with the VAW sector is to have people ... who are interested in domestic violence and want to educate themselves in the area otherwise we're going to go back to a system where women who are in domestic violence ... are not going to have the support of the Children's Aid Society. ... And I've heard that there's scrutiny coming from some of the women's organizations as well not believing that we can actually give support to women as we say we can ...

I believe this worker's observations articulate a critical illustration of the barriers that exist between the sectors, and exemplify just how difficult the collaboration will be for all stakeholders. The resentment between the sectors was expressed in overt and covert ways. Workers at times felt a sense of satisfaction with their attempt to resist the other sector's use of power with them. Workers in both sectors also spoke about positive relationships between workers, and expressed a desire for further improved relations. Agencies in both sectors need to provide workers with the opportunities to realize this goal. I believe that this study shows that before workers can attempt to improve services through collaboration, serious attention needs to be first directed at the relationships between workers in the sectors. One way to shift workers' perceptions may be accomplished by focusing attention which is currently aimed at individual workers, and highlight macro level influences. External forces controlled by people in positions of power create legislation and agencies' structures. Decision makers benefit from maintaining the status quo by sustaining an individualized blame on the stakeholders.

Stakeholders may have 'bought into' individualized responsibility and a perceived lack of collaboration between the CPSs and the VAW sector may be embedded in an accepted discourse concerning 'moral power'. I believe that there is an accepted mindset about the value of voluntary and mandated services, and the workers who provide the assistance. Moreover, the identity of workers becomes realized by the perceptions of others, and workers then internalize the perceptions and accept them as fact. Voluntary services are thought to be aligned with social work values, as opposed to mandated services and I found that I was defensive about workers' negative views regarding CPSs

workers. I do not generally tell people that I worked for a child protection agency, due to professionals' and the public's negative views.

During interviews, VAW workers were referred to as: care giving; being in a supportive role; safety planning; offering resources; counselling; advocating for women and children; working from a feminist approach which gives the worker an understanding of societal power imbalances between men and women, CPSs workers and service users, and different classes; and pretty open to CAS and accommodating.

In contrast, CPSs workers are 'villainized' by workers in both sectors. CPSs workers were described as being: direct and really forceful if needed; an enforcer of rules; punitive; threatening; they abuse their power; a boogie man of an agency; hierarchy and CAS make VAW workers feel that they are below them. CAS workers are more educated than the vast majority of shelter workers and this impacts communication. CPSs workers themselves described coworkers in a negative manner. Perhaps CPSs workers have themselves internalized a 'villain' identity.

I believe the dynamics of 'moral power' are evident. Feminist women's advocates and women survivors began the first shelters in Ontario from the mid 1970s through to the 1980s (Morrow, 2003). Although feminists have made huge strides for women's rights, the current drive to legitimize the face of social work, changing legal mandates, and tight funding formulas have eroded the accomplishments of a progressive movement. Governmental changes have limited the shelters' practices and the increased accountability of CPSs workers. Moreover, perhaps individual workers have shifted that

blame into a distinction between voluntary service providers and mandated service providers.

OACASc (2005) literature outlining the collaborative child welfare model for Ontario explains the goal of child welfare, and methods to work towards that goal. However the people who perform that work are referred to as protection workers. My preference of the term 'child protection worker' demonstrates that I also internalized the protection/villain role and at times I identified myself as a child protection '*social worker*' in hopes of redeeming myself. Moreover, the system reinforces this distinction through agency practices. My business cards and my staff identification card identify me as a child protection worker.

Perhaps my emphasis on the use of words seems irrelevant or unimportant, however, I began this study by expressing the idea that language is an important tool in shaping perceptions. People's interpretations and attitudes are influenced by social constructions and cause changes in how people act based on their perceptions (Burr, 1995b; Pare, 2004).<sup>7</sup>

A VAW worker related a message by a CPSs worker may have been said in a jest, however, the underlying message was not humorous. "Oh great, it's the shelter calling again" or "oh it's you again". Another VAW worker expressed her resistance towards a CPSs worker. The CPSs worker advised her that she needed to call a woman

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<sup>7</sup> The Ontario Child Mortality Task Force was established in 1996 by the OACAS and the Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario. As a result of the investigation of 100 child deaths in 1994 and 1995 combined over 400 recommendations were made to improve CPSs in Ontario. Some of those recommendations were: increased accountability, standards for the assessment of risk, workload standards, and standards for the management of child protection cases. In the 1998 report Protecting Vulnerable Children, the focus of the CFSA clearly changed from supporting the family to protecting children (all information adapted from King et al., 2003).

and the VAW worker advised me ‘but I stay cool, I’m not a mandatable service, you can’t make me you know’. You may ask if it really matters if expressions of anger are directly or indirectly aimed at a worker, as long as service users are not aware of it. Women who have been abused are masters at gauging subtleties in people’s mannerisms and statements. Children also become hyper vigilant and are adept at sensing people’s emotional states and unspoken messages. These are finely tuned skills that develop for survival. Participants relayed many statements that contained subtle or hidden messages and other statements included obvious hostility. This will affect women’s and children’s feelings and reactions towards workers.

There is a general recognition by practitioners of power use and misuse by CPSs workers, although only one VAW worker spoke at length of her own use of power. Another VAW worker made a quick comment about power, however she did not elaborate on how this might affect her daily practice. The CPSs workers who now work exclusively with abused women and their families, made a distinction between roles, and aligned themselves with the positive value of a voluntary and woman-centred approach.

The idea of ‘empowering’ women at a time when they are in crisis and have experienced trauma was discussed. Two issues of an empowerment approach concern me. Clark (1989, cited in Miley, O’Melia, & DuBois, 1998) articulates one challenge in the application of an empowerment approach. Clark states that one must consider whether a woman can access resources that will facilitate options. Without that consideration it “is simply a mockery of empowerment” (Clark, p. 271). ‘Empowerment’

beyond an individual level extends to structural barriers and realities, which also subjugates women's power in society.

The second issue of empowerment that troubles me is the consideration of crisis theory and trauma. It is important for workers to have an understanding about 'When is the appropriate time to assist a woman?' and 'When is it appropriate to encourage a woman to do on her own?' A CPSs worker's observation alludes to her belief that this theory at times is not considered, and an 'empowerment' approach is used inappropriately. Perhaps further training needs to incorporate the tenets of crisis theory?

Front-line workers from both sectors view the collaboration as a 'top-down' initiative. The idea that the collaborative initiative was a top-down approach and is therefore not easily executed by front-line workers is in keeping with a critique of social workers in general. The workers are the 'experts' who impart their wisdom on service users without people's input. In this instance, some front-line workers feel that those people who would be most affected by the change were not consulted. VAW workers do not have an understanding that the collaborative initiatives are in part a result of current changes to child protection mandates.

Perhaps another illustration of the difficulties with collaboration is the sectors' inability to problem solve disagreements. A dispute arose over whether CPSs workers should be on-site at shelters and when the issue could not be negotiated some stakeholders pulled out of the plan. I am unaware of whether alternative plans were considered.

I think it is interesting that although VAW workers are troubled by CPSs workers' requests for more specific information about women, they advised me that it would be helpful if CPSs workers would share more information with them. VAW workers think it would be helpful to know if a woman has a past history of involvement with CPSs. They also want to know what goals the woman needs to accomplish and details about the plan of service. I think it is interesting to note that VAW workers can ask women to sign a release of information form that will allow workers from the sectors to share information. I'm wondering if VAW workers don't ask women to sign a release so that CPSs workers appear to be intrusive 'villains'.

I think there is a general misunderstanding about CPSs involvement with families. Although CPSs function is mandated by the CFSA, the majority of work with women and children is done on a voluntary basis. In that instance, women must also give their consent to share information with the VAW sector. The only circumstances that would warrant unauthorized disclosure of information would be if there were imminent concerns about a child's safety. Even when CPSs workers are court involved and the relationship and goals are mandatory, workers generally try to obtain the women's consent to release information.

I discussed training with participants regarding what information they want to know about the 'other' sector, and what information they want the 'other' sector to know about them. All participants agreed that ongoing mandatory training is essential. The information that they want included in the curriculum is not all that dissimilar than the information that is included in the draft joint training manual from 2000, with the

exception of recent changes to CPSs. There is an interest in having more emphasis in training on each others' roles, and an explanation of why CPSs workers make certain decisions in their work with abused women and their children.

Workers in both sectors described the common ground for collaboration. The accepted recognition is that children are kept safe when their mothers are safe, or women are better able to protect their children when they are safe. I believe the fault in this logic stems from the reality of legally-sanctioned custody/access orders. CPSs workers and the VAW workers can collaborate, and successfully work towards common goals, however the benefits of that work can be erased by court ordered access. Unless there are serious child protection concerns workers can not advise women to disobey a court order. In this instance it is judges' orders that have the potential to harm children. CPSs and the VAW sector may well collaborate with one another although this partnership must include the legal system. Judges need to be made better aware of the dynamics of abuse, the affects on children who witness violence, and the emotional damage that children experience when abusive men put their children in the middle of conflict by using them to continue their abuse towards women.

A root cause analysis is one way to include a structural analysis into training and this method is based on the idea that eliminating root causes will minimize the recurrence of a problem rather than addressing the immediate obvious symptoms. A root cause analysis based on a structural perspective will look to broader societal factors to uncover the causes of problems. The continued need to present woman abuse and possible harm to their children as a social justice problem, and not a personal problem is the ongoing

challenge for social workers. I wonder whether the combined efforts of CPSs and the VAW sector would be more effective way to have woman abuse recognized as a serious problem that requires immediate attention.

## **Areas for Further Research**

In 2001, the NVAWPRC identified a need for research to identify and meet the needs of traditionally under-serviced women. Further research dedicated to how the collaboration may combine resources or create resources to better meet the needs of women and children. Examples of under-serviced populations, includes but is not limited to: women who lack transportation; women without access to appropriate or affordable childcare; women who live in rural areas; women from culturally diverse groups; and Aboriginal women. Moreover, research that includes the perspectives of the women and children who receive services will provide a more comprehensive approach to better serve families.

Participants of this study noted that current training curriculum and the method of delivery is inadequate. All workers feel that training is essential, however also believe that standard cut and dry workshop approaches that do not get updated regularly do not maximize the benefits of training. Researchers could use evaluative research to examine different ways to present training materials. Is there one method, or combination of methods better suited for adult learners? Moreover, does the training have practical application for workers in their day to day work? Further research could also explore whether improved relationships between workers of the sectors, translates into improved services for abused women and increased safety for their children.

There was an interest from workers in both sectors to have open consultation with one another, which utilizes the expertise of each sector. Further research could follow the

process of the current consultation processes, to determine if workers needs change over time, or whether the existing provision of consultation meets the needs of everyone.

One child protection agency has developed a domestic violence team and evaluative research could determine if the team is beneficial and disseminate the research findings of the model to other agencies, locally and across Ontario.

Research involving service users' voices may provide a wealth of information that would be beneficial to both sectors. Moreover, research undertaken by service users with other service users may also yield data that only an insider could obtain. Certainly an insider may approach research with a unique perspective which could lead to fresh data and innovative recommendations.

## **Implications for Practice**

Education provided to workers in the sectors has limited usefulness when it is not presented in a manner that interests workers, has a lasting impression on workers, or is applicable to worker in their day to day practice with abused women, their children, and abusive men. In 1999 Beeman et al., recommended that cross training be instituted.

There was existing curriculum for CPSs workers to help them better understand the dynamics of woman abuse, although Beeman et al., state that there was no specific cross training material at that time. In late 2000, the Ministry of Community and Social Services of Ontario published and circulated a draft CAS/VAW joint training manual. Some workers attended the training, however many workers did not. During my employment with CPSs from 2001 to 2006, I was aware of two joint training opportunities and attended both sessions because of personal interest.

First and foremost, agencies must demonstrate a commitment to ongoing mandatory training for workers. Financial resources allocated for training, and resources such as time allocation, to allow workers to participate in a formalized joint working group will also demonstrate dedication to ongoing collaboration. Ongoing commitment needs to maintain enthusiasm, and evolve, rather than fade over time.

It is a well-recognized fact that child protection agencies have high staff turnover rate and one VAW worker advised me during an interview that her workplace also has a high rate of staff turnover. Jeffrey (2003) notes that a change of workers in the working group would not necessarily hinder the process, as newcomers to the group will provide new ideas. Again, agency commitment with time and budget allocation is crucial to

successful ongoing collaboration. It is challenging to educate new workers, when the population continues to change. New workers have varying amounts of knowledge about woman abuse, and the possible effects that witnessing has on children.

I discussed possible areas of research regarding education curriculum, and the importance of the method of delivery. I believe that an additional challenge to the education of workers is to find an innovative method that will have an impact on workers, and provide them with a forum to contribute input to meet workers' needs. Training is also an appropriate platform for workers to redirect individualized issues to a larger scope and to explore how this discourse may have led to workers' present challenges and concerns with matters relating to the other sector. It is an ideal opportunity for genuine communication and problem solving to overcome grievances. Ultimately this provides an ideal opportunity for workers to utilize their social work skills with one another.

I believe that women and children pick up on the subtle and overt expressions of tension between workers, and this will affect relationships between workers, parents and children. If our goal is to better engage women and children, workers must first engage one another in amiable working partnerships. Jeffrey (2003, p. 3314) notes that there is a "serious deficiency" understanding how workers' "character and temperament" influence the dynamics of cross-disciplinary relationships. Participants from both sectors certainly confirmed this notion from repeated mention that the quality of their relationships with workers from the 'other' sector depends on the workers. Literature and participants of this study have discussed families' involvement with multiple sectors in the community. Information on woman abuse is especially important to law enforcement, and family

court judges. VAW sector workers who participated in this study expressed concern about the actions or inaction of CPSs workers regarding custody/access issues. Certainly in my practice, I also experienced a great deal of frustration. When I was unable prove imminent or serious child protection concerns as a result of a child's custody/access arrangements with the abusive father, I was unable to advise a mother to ignore a binding court order. Moreover, when information is presented to the courts there is a lack of recognition of the tactics that abusive men use with their children, and the emotional harm children experience.

In Hamilton, there is a unified family court system, and mothers can obtain restraining orders and peace bonds in family court. Therefore, knowledge concerning woman abuse and the potential harm to children needs to be disseminated to lawyers involved in family court matters, and family court judges and the criminal court system. In areas where there are no unified family courts, women must work within the criminal court system. Therefore, education must also be present to criminal court judges. The combined, or individual work of CPSs and the VAW sector, may be dismantled by a court order, made by a judge who has little understanding of the problem.

## **Recommendations for Collaborative Education**

This research addressed training ideas with front-line workers with less focus on the involvement of service users' in the planning of the curriculum in part due to the fact that I did not interview service users in this study. Participants of the study articulated their belief that abused women have a wealth of knowledge and expertise. Their involvement in the research and training preparation and delivery will utilize this untapped resource.

Training materials and its method of delivery are equally important. Workers from both sectors find current standard training sessions somewhat ineffective and they would prefer information to be delivered in an innovative manner. The OACAS employs and instructs the educators who present new worker training for CPSs workers. The joint CAS/VAW training has also been provided by the OACAS. Therefore, if the OACAS continues to deliver this training to workers then I would need to present my recommendations to the OACAS so that alternative methods of training may be considered and incorporated into the curriculum. Moreover, it will be important to have a 'train the trainers' workshop that will incorporate popular education methods.

There are effective methods of providing information to adults rather than standard educational models. Adult education principles operate on the premises that adults learn best when particular conditions exists. Adults learn best when: they see learning as valuable; the goals are clear; personal experience is valuable and utilized; the knowledge can be applied to personal experiences; new facts can be connected to what is

already known; there is direct and frequent feedback; people feel respected and listened to; and can have input into the educational methods and curriculum (Arnold et al., 1991).

Freire was a Brazilian educationalist who is remembered for being an influential thinker about education. He made a number of important theoretical innovations that have had a considerable impact on the development of educational practice and on informal and popular education (Smith, 2005). Popular education starts with the experience of the learner and leads to action for change (Reardon, n.d.). Popular education begins with debate focusing on the problems and searches for answers to the conflict between individuals. Reardon says that a starting block for social change is when people can reflect on their values, have concern for a more equitable society, and be willing to support others in the community.

Social justice lies at the heart of education in a democracy, and it requires us to understand and evaluate how societies are constructed as well as the ideals the structures seek to fulfill (Communication Arts & Sciences (CAS), 2005). By uncovering and understanding dominant discourses in our work environments we open up the possibility for change. Popular education may be one forum that will provide workers with the opportunity to air their grievances and problem solve. Popular education can provide workers with tools to improve relationships with one another and to the services that are provided to women and children.

Joint CAS/VAW training needs to be directed at supervisors as well as front-line workers. Workers in both sectors work in consultation with a supervisor at times of critical decision making. Supervisors have the ability to assist workers in their practice in

a manner that honours a cooperative working relationship between workers and between workers and the service users. The supervisors' roles include skills that differ from front-line workers and perhaps training at this level would operate separately from general training.

Training will benefit all staff. As one CPSs worker pointed out, although there are specialized workers, woman abuse may still be experienced by families who are involved with CPSs for separate issues. It is important that those workers also have the knowledge to assist their daily practice. A VAW worker stated that only full-time shelter workers receive training and generally part-time weekend staff does not. Part-time workers may also encounter situations that require collaboration with CPSs workers, may witness concerning behaviours with children, or a woman and/or children may disclose a child protection concern.

I would recommend that a two-day joint training be formulated in a popular education style. The theme would centre on 'A Day in the Life of', and include the perspectives of CPSs workers, VAW workers, women who have been abused, and children who witness. Some of the methods used in the training will include, interactive exercises, role playing, small group work, feedback, problem solving, and the articulation and mediation of differences. The concept of power relations between all stakeholders will be woven throughout the experiential exercises. More specific recommendations for training are found in Exhibit H.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

I have had a difficult time writing this conclusion. My struggle is rooted in the realization of the misunderstandings and ill feelings that exist between the workers of both sectors. Moreover, it saddens me to hear that workers responsible for implementing new initiatives believe that people from within their sector as well as the 'other' sector are waiting for them to 'fail'.

I chose to research the collaboration between CPSs and the VAW sector because it is a topic close to my heart. I have intimate experience with both sectors, and through my practice found that I have been unsatisfied with how I was expected to work with some families. Like the participants of this study, I have hope for the collaboration. This collaboration may facilitate harmony between the sectors if it is nurtured, and kept active. Certainly the onus should not be placed on abused women and children to remedy their predicament, however they have valuable insights and wisdom to offer.

The focus of child protection interventions have shifted back and forth between child safety and family preservation (Editorial, 1996; Finholm, 1996; Gardner, 1996; McLarin, 1995; O'Laughlin, 1998; Paterson, 1999; Reder et al., 1993; Seebach, 2000; Watson, 1997 all cited in OACASc, 2005). The transformation of CPSs recognizes the value of collaboration between sectors, and it aims to bring the focus back to a point where children are safe within the family, when possible. Collaboration between CPSs and the VAW sector is not a novel idea, and was introduced in 2000. Currently the dedication and strong beliefs of a few individuals have taken its implementation farther than the past efforts. The history of collaborative efforts 7 years ago is unknown to

newer workers in both sectors and that experience needs to be built into training curriculum so we do not merely repeat 'more of the same'.

Historically CPS and the VAW have not done research on the collaboration to explore and evaluate what measures have been helpful and methods have been impractical. Abusive men, who wreak havoc with women's and children's lives, are at the core of the problem. Moreover, recognition that abusive men may manipulate their children through legal custody/access orders needs to be addressed as a child protection concern with men as the target of intervention. Education must move beyond CPSs and the VAW sector to include law enforcement, the legal system, and the many social service agencies that have a direct impact on the quality of life that women and children experience due to their partner's abuse.

The collaboration requires creative programs, some of which have been initiated, and I sincerely hope efforts continue. The education that we provide to people at all organizational levels is imperative to ensure lasting change. Training can provide a safe forum for workers to openly express their opinions and give them an opportunity to move beyond any misunderstandings and misperceptions that still exist between the sectors. I believe that knowledge and improved relationships between the sectors will benefit the women and children that they work with. The paramount goal is to provide increased safety for women, and reduce the impact of trauma that abuse may have on their children. Clearly the problem needs to be viewed through a structural lens and recognized as a symptom of societal dysfunction.

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## Appendix A - Ethics Proposal

### McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)

FACULTY AND GRADUATE

Application to Involve Human Participants in Research

[Behavioural / Non- Medical]

**Please refer to the McMaster University Research Ethics Guidelines and Researcher's Handbook, found at [http://www.mcmaster.ca/ors/ethics/faculty\\_guidelines.htm](http://www.mcmaster.ca/ors/ethics/faculty_guidelines.htm) prior to completion and submission of this application. If you have questions about or require assistance respecting completion of this form, please contact the Ethics Secretariat at ext. 23142, or [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)**

**This FORM is LOCKED. It is better to fill in the entire FORM with the FORM LOCKED. If you remove the LOCK, you risk losing your data, unless you save your data often. With the FORM LOCKED, you can fill in TEXT and the CHECKBOXES. With the FORM UNLOCKED, you can not CHECK the CHECKBOXES. To remove or activate the LOCK, on the WORD MENU go to VIEW, TOOLBARS, FORMS. Click on the ICON of the LOCK.**

Send this form and all accompanying material in quadruplicate if being submitted in hard-copy. If submitting by e-mail, send the application plus attachments, and forward the original signed signature page to the Ethics Secretariat, Office of Research Services, Room 306 Gilmour Hall, ext. 23142, [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca).  
If you want to change a previously approved protocol, please complete the "Change Request" form [http://www.mcmaster.ca/ors/ethics/faculty\\_forms.htm](http://www.mcmaster.ca/ors/ethics/faculty_forms.htm).

Date: Feb. 16, 2007	Application Status: New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Change <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal <input type="checkbox"/>
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#### SECTION A – GENERAL INFORMATION

1. **Title of the Research Project:** Partnerships and Collaboration: Child Protection and Violence Against Women's Services
2. **Investigator Information**

	Name	Dept./Address	Phone No.	E-Mail
<b>Faculty Investigator</b>				
<b>Faculty Co-Investigator(s)</b>				
<b>Student Investigator(s)</b>	Karen P. Ward	School of Social Work	(905) 525-0779 hm. (905) 977-8640 cell	karenpward@sympatico.ca wardkp@mcmaster.ca
<b>Student Faculty Supervisor</b>	Sheila Sammon	School of Social Work	ext. 23780	sammon@mcmaster.ca

3. **Proposed Date** (a) of commencement: March 2007 (b) of completion: August 2007

4. **Indicate the location(s)** where the research will be conducted:

McMaster University   
Hospital  Specify Site  
Community  Specify Site Child Protection offices or Women's shelters in  
the community  
Other  Specify Site

5. **Other Research Ethics Board Approval**

(a) Is this a multi-centred study?  Yes  No  
(b) Has any other institutional Ethics Board approved this project?  Yes  No  
(c) If Yes, there is no need to provide further details about the protocol **at this time**, provided that  
**all** of the following information is provided:

Title of the project approved elsewhere:

Name of the Other Institution:

Name of the Other Board:

Date of the Decision:

A contact name and phone number for the other Board:

A copy of the application to the other institution together with **all** accompanying  
materials

A copy of the clearance certificate / approval

**If all of the above information cannot be provided, please complete the balance of  
this application.**

(d) Will any other Research Ethics Board be asked for approval?  Yes  No  
*If yes, please specify*

6. **Level of the Project**

Faculty Research  Post-Doctoral  PhD.  
 Masters  Faculty/Hospital Research  
 Other (specify)

7. **Funding of the Project**

(a) Is this project currently being funded  Yes  No

(b) If No, is funding being sought  Yes  No

(c) Period of Funding: From \_\_\_\_\_ To: \_\_\_\_\_

(d) Agency or Sponsor (funded or applied for)

CIHR  NSERC  SSHRC  ARB  
 NIH  Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**8. Conflict of Interest**

(a) Will the researcher(s), members of the research team, and/or their partners or immediate family members:

(i) receive any personal benefits (for example a financial benefit such as remuneration, intellectual property rights, rights of employment, consultancies, board membership, share ownership, stock options etc.) as a result of or connected to this study?  Yes  No

(ii) if Yes, please describe the benefits below. (Do not include conference and travel expense coverage, possible academic promotion, or other benefits which are integral to the conduct of research generally).

N/A

(b) Describe any restrictions regarding access to or disclosure of information (during or at the end of the study) that the sponsor has placed on the investigator(s).

N/A

**SECTION B – SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH – *Please be as Clear and Concise as Possible***

**9. Rationale**

Describe the purpose and background rationale for the proposed project, as well as the hypotheses(is)/research questions to be examined.

The Child and Family Services Act guides the legal mandate of child protection social workers, and the Ontario Risk Assessment Model and Eligibility Spectrum, which were introduced to child protection agencies across Ontario in 1998, serve as a common assessment tool (Ontario Association Children's Aid Societies (OACAS)a, Eligibility Spectrum, 2000). The risk assessment model and eligibility spectrum, which have been used consistently by all Children's Aid Societies in Ontario since that time, incorporated family violence as a risk factor for child welfare intervention and when the model was revised in 2000, 'caregivers' were deemed responsible for "protecting their children from encountering adult conflict in the home and from suffering serious physical or emotional harm/illness from the violence" (OACASb, Eligibility Spectrum, ¶ 45). As a result, Ontario child protection agencies were overwhelmed with referrals and the Ontario Incidence Studies of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect in Ontario reported an 870% increase in substantiated emotional maltreatment reports largely as a result of exposure to domestic violence (Trocmé, Fallon, MacLaurin, and Copps, 2002).

I have worked in a Hamilton child protection agency from 2001 through to 2006 when I took an educational leave to complete a Masters of Social Work degree. Since 2002, my role included working with families on an ongoing basis after child protection concerns were verified and a large part of my work was carried out with women who had been abused by their intimate partners. My practice experience exposed me to ways that parents resist Society interventions, which included pretending to follow the Society's prescribed goals. Therefore, I began to question whether I was putting women and children at increased risk of harm by driving the abusive relationship underground with so called 'voluntary plans of service' or involuntary measures. Accordingly, I am interested in examining the concepts of partnerships and collaboration between child protection services and the Violence Against Women sector in relation to woman abuse.

Risk assessment models are based on risk elements that are supported in the literature, and tend to require that each report of child maltreatment be investigated and assessed in the same manner, whereas a differential response would require child protection services to tailor interventions to fit the unique issues of a report and the unique needs of a family (Hallberg, 2006). When a social worker has assessed that children are at 'moderate risk' of harm, the differential response model puts emphasis on collaborative service delivery both with the family and with community services (Hallberg, 2006).

Presently Ontario's child protection services are undergoing transformation and the current move to a collaborative child welfare model is meant to have social workers draw on their unique knowledge, experiences and skills to engage parents in promoting the well being and protection of children and collaborate with community agencies/resources to ensure a parent can access help to appropriately care for their children (OACAS, 2005, Collaborative Model Overview in Newsletter Format). This goal includes the violence against women sector and will ultimately impact how social workers intervene with parents and children as well as how organizations will work together to ensure abused mother's and their children's safety. From my practice experience, I observed that preliminary attempts for collaboration between the two sectors, which was initiated in 2000 was unsuccessful and the two sectors worked mainly independently of one another.

Therefore, the purpose of my study is to explore the experiences of workers from both sectors in relation to the current collaborative initiatives and will explore which measures are helpful in providing services to abused mothers. More specifically, I will explore workers' accounts of the process of collaboration from the social workers who are directly involved in implementing the initiatives in both sectors.

I am proposing a qualitative study, with a purposive sample and through the use of grounded theory will explore the experiences of social workers through the initial stages of the new collaborative initiatives. I will explore what information for training will best assist workers in both sectors to have a better understanding of how we can keep abused women and their children safe. Anti-oppressive practice is a framework which addresses social divisions and structural inequalities and ultimately embodies a person centered philosophy (Dominelli, 1996). As an egalitarian value system it is concerned with reducing the

harmful effects of structural inequalities upon people's lives and provides a way of structuring relationships between individuals that aims to empower users by reducing the negative effects of social hierarchies on their interaction and the work they do together (Dominelli, 1996). An anti-oppressive approach will not only be helpful in understanding the relationship between workers and the people that they work with but can also serve to guide the relationships between workers from different sectors through the process of partnership and collaboration.

My purpose for speaking to the workers from both sectors is to explore what knowledge or information would better help workers understand how we can improve upon our services to women who have been abused by an intimate partner to help ensure their safety, which will ultimately result in the safety of their children. How can we work with these women in a way that will not further victimize them and what information do workers in the field need to have?

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Trocme, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B. & Copp, B. (2002). *The changing face of child welfare investigations in Ontario: Ontario incidence studies of reported child abuse and neglect (OIS 1993/1998)*. Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare, Toronto, ON. Retrieved December 6, 2006 from <http://www.cccw-cepb.ca/DocsEng/OIS93-98.pdf>.

## 10. Methodology

Describe sequentially, and in detail, all procedures in which the research participants will be involved (e.g. paper and pencil tasks, interviews, surveys, questionnaires, physical assessments, physiological tests, time requirements etc.)

**N.B. Attach a copy of all questionnaire(s), interview guides or other test instruments.**

I will use research methods based on grounded theory analysis using a constructivist approach (Charmaz, 2002). Constructivist grounded methods provide the researcher with guidelines to study; social and social psychological processes; to direct data collection; to manage data analysis; and develop an abstract theoretical framework to explain the studied process (Charmaz, 2002). More specifically, I plan to complete multiple sequential interviews, which form a stronger basis for creating a "nuanced" understanding of social processes (Charmaz, 2002) using open-ended questions. Participants will be sought from multiple environments in the child protection system, and from multiple environments in the Violence Against Women sector. Initial interviews will last approximately 60 minutes, and if necessary I may subsequently contact participants to clarify any confusion I may have with information that they have provided to me, or to confirm that I have accurately represented their position. The participants will first be asked to provide a narrative of their experience as a worker in their specific sector with abused women, and will also be asked to provide an account of their experiences with the collaborative efforts with the 'other' sector. Areas that I will explore through the narrative are outlined in the attached copy of my interview guide.

**References:**

Charmaz, K. (2002). Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. In J.F. Gubrium, & J.A. Holstein, (eds), Handbook of interview research: context & method. (pp. 311 – 330). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

**11. Experience**

What is your experience with this kind of research?

I have had no previous experience in conducting this type of research but as a social worker, I have extensive experience in conducting in-depth interviews with a wide range of people from diverse populations. I have intimate knowledge of the dynamics of woman abuse and have worked in a child protection environment for five years. In addition, my faculty supervisor has experience in qualitative research, and in-depth interviewing with a view to social justice.

**12. Participants**

Describe the number of participants and any salient characteristics (such as age, gender, location, affiliation, etc.)

I am planning to seek a sample of 8 participants. My study will include an equal number of participants who are employed in a child protection setting and participants who are employed in the shelter system. Participants who are employed in a child protection setting will have some experience working directly with abused women and may or may not have had joint involvement with the Violence Against Women sector. Participants who are employed in the Violence Against Women sector will have experience working with women who have been abused who have had experience with child protection services. While I expect that most participants will be female, I will not discount any male participant should he want to be involved with the study. Any participant chosen for this study must be over the age of 18 years of age. Accordingly, the sample will be purposive as I will seek out participants from both sectors that have had some type of experience with the opposite sector.

13. **Recruitment**

Describe how and from what sources the participants will be recruited, including any relationship between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g. instructor-student; manager-employee).

**N.B. Attach a copy of any poster(s), advertisement(s) or letter(s) to be used for recruitment.**

I will be recruiting participants from workers, who are employed in child protection agencies and workers who are employed in the Violence Against Women's sector.

I have been employed by the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton from April 2001 through to September 2006 and I am currently on a one-year leave of absence from the agency so that I may complete my Masters Degree in Social Work. Therefore, I may know some of the participants.

Recruitment process: I have made initial contact with some members of the Collaboration Agreement team in each of the aforementioned environments and have expressed my desire to undertake research. Each of the parties was receptive to this research and additionally felt that there is a current need for research to explore the training needs of both sectors in order to facilitate ongoing collaborative efforts and best serve women who have been abused by an intimate partner without revictimizing her or her children help reduce the harmful effects that children experience when they witness abuse in the home.

The voluntary nature of participation will be stressed with all potential participants. I will request that participants not disclose the proper name of a client to me during the interview process and ask that should they refer to a specific 'client' they should use a pseudonym and first name only.

I also anticipate that a participant employed in an agency may have some concern about the level of confidentiality of the information that they share, or worry about the possibility of being identified by specific information that they have shared. Accordingly, interviews will be arranged with the participants with confidentiality and anonymity in mind, as well as the researcher's comfort and safety. The participant will be asked to select an interview site, such as an office at McMaster University, a meeting room at their agency site, or other location as suggested by the participant that is private, safe and comfortable for both parties.

14. **Compensation**

**Yes    No**

(a) Will participants receive compensation for participation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
In-Kind		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Other (specify)

(b) If yes, please provide details.

N/A

(c) If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with compensation?

N/A

**SECTION C – DESCRIPTION OF THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH**

**15. Possible Risks**

1. Indicate if the participants might experience any of the following risks:

a) Physical risk (including any bodily contact or administration of any substance)?  Yes  No

b) Psychological risks (including feeling demeaned, embarrassed worried or upset)?  Yes  No

c) Social risks (including possible loss of status, privacy and / or reputation)?  Yes  No

d) Is there any deception involved?  Yes  No

e) Are any possible risks to participants greater than those the participants might encounter in their everyday life?  Yes  No

2. If you answered **Yes** to any of a – e above, please explain the risk.

b) Psychological risks: Asking participants to speak about their experiences of tension or frustration with the historical and current collaborative initiatives between the two sectors may be difficult for participants in both sectors. Participants may find the questions embarrassing, unpleasant, stressful or otherwise upsetting.

My study will involve workers from the child protection sector and woman abuse services. Child protective services have the legal mandate to intervene with families to protect children, whereas the Violence Against Women sector operates from a woman-centred approach and on a voluntary basis. Consequently, the VAW sector would argue that CPS's mandated power affords them a greater ability to pressure the government for funding and has power which does not exist within the VAW sector (OAITH, 2003). There are challenges when different sectors come together to collaborate and power is not held equally amongst all of the parties. Therefore, I expect that there is the potential for a participant to feel a heightened sense of powerlessness when discussing any challenges that they are facing with the new initiatives.

In addition, I expect that the majority of participants will be female and may have a personal history of abuse. Feelings could be "triggered off" during our conversations.

c) Social Risks: Participants may have concerns that through the research process, their opinions may be misrepresented or presented in a way that would lead them to be viewed in a negative light by their agency or by workers of the 'other' sector if their identity was exposed. In addition, a worker may feel discomfort with disclosing their practices to a colleague.

References:

Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH). (2003). In the best interests of children and mothers: A proposed child welfare response to violence against women. Retrieved November 17, 2006 from [http://www.oaith.ca/pdf/In\\_the\\_Best\\_Interests\\_of\\_Children\\_and\\_Mothers.pdf](http://www.oaith.ca/pdf/In_the_Best_Interests_of_Children_and_Mothers.pdf), 1 - 28.

3. Describe how the risks will be managed (including an explanation as to why alternative approaches could not be used).

b) Psychological Risks: I have extensive experience interviewing individuals and families and responding to them during periods of crisis or emotional upset. I am equipped with the skills to conduct in-depth interviews, and the capacity to decide when and how to delve into sensitive areas. If a participant is in need of counselling or support, I will encourage them to access the most appropriate community service for further support if necessary.

As noted earlier, I am recruiting participants who work in a counselling role with other individuals. Being experienced workers themselves, participants will have access to peer support, some have access to EAP benefits, and are aware of resources that are available to them in the community should they require further assistance.

The voluntary nature of participation will be discussed with participants ongoing and they will be reminded of their right to withdraw from the research before, after their interviews.

c) Social Risks: The interviews will be arranged with the participants' confidentiality and anonymity in mind and should participants be more comfortable being interviewed away from their direct work environment, I will arrange my interview with them in a private office at McMaster University, or other location as suggested by the participant that is private, safe and comfortable for both parties.

I will put posters up in several child protection agencies, and several women's shelters. See attached copy of said poster. Any worker in this facility would be free to contact me without anyone else in the agency or shelter having knowledge of that contact.

I will explain to participants that I understand how complex many of the issues are pertaining to the current collaborative efforts between the two sectors. I can let participants know that I too struggle with some of the same concerns that they are experiencing.

#### 16. Possible Benefits

Discuss any potential direct benefits to the participants from their involvement in the project. Comment on the (potential) benefits to (the scientific community) / society that would justify involvement of participants in this study.

The participants may benefit from knowing that their ideas and concerns have been heard. In addition they may benefit from knowing that they are making a contribution to the knowledge and combined expertise that a collaboration and partnership will require from the two distinct sectors.

Participants may appreciate my commitment to sharing their experiences knowing that my intent is to work towards the creation of collaborative training, which will allow both sectors to gain a better appreciation and understanding of the other's expertise. Participants from the two sectors may feel a better sense that there is acknowledgment that both sectors strive to ensure that women who are abused by their intimate partners and their children are safe, and that through our involvement we have treated them in a respectful manner that will not revictimize the women.

Ultimately, I hope to explore ways that we can help workers in both sectors through training that will result in improved client service.

## SECTION D – THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS

### 17. The Consent Process

Describe the process that the investigator(s) will be using to obtain informed consent, including a description of who will be obtaining informed consent and a script of what they will say, if anything.

At the beginning of the initial interview I will explain to the participants the purpose of the research and carefully review all aspects of the consent form with them. Should the participant require assistance with reviewing the consent form, I can read the information to them or suggest that the participant bring someone they are comfortable with to read the information to them. I will then ask the participant if they have any questions or concerns about the process and will carefully answer each of their questions. Once I have been able to address all of their questions or concerns I will ask the participant to sign the consent form. At the beginning of any subsequent contact for clarification purposes, I will review the participant's right to withdraw from the study should they decide to not continue their participation.

I will ensure that participants are aware that they will be tape recorded during their interviews and that I will also be making brief notes during the interviews.

Indicate how consent will be documented. Attach a copy of the Letter of Information if applicable and the consent form if applicable. If there will be no written consent, explain why not and describe the alternative means that will be used to document consent. Attach the content of any telephone script that will be used in the consent process (if applicable)

For information about the required elements in the letter of information and the consent form, please refer to "Instructions for the Preparation of an Information Letter/Consent Form": [http://www.mcmaster.ca/ors/ethics/faculty\\_checklists\\_instruct.htm](http://www.mcmaster.ca/ors/ethics/faculty_checklists_instruct.htm)

Please see attached copy of the consent form and letter of information.

### 18. Consent by an authorized party

If the participants are minors or for other reasons are not competent to consent, describe the proposed alternate source of consent, including any permission / information letter to be provided to the person(s) providing the alternate consent.

N/A

### 19. Alternatives to prior individual consent

If obtaining written documentation of participant consent prior to commencement of the research project is not appropriate for this research, please explain and provide details for a proposed alternative consent process.

N/A

20. **Debriefing (Participant feedback)**

Explain what feedback/ information will be provided to the participants after participation in the project. (For example, a more complete description of the purpose of the research, access to the results of the research).

***N.B. Please provide a copy of the written debriefing form, if applicable.***

I will provide all participants with a summary of my study.

21. **Participant withdrawal**

a) Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project. Outline the procedures which will be followed to allow the participants to exercise this right.

I recognize that a participant has a right to withdraw from this study at any point in the process. The participant's right to withdraw from the research will be respected at all times during the process of this project and will be clearly outlined in the consent form as well as in the information letter. Additionally, I will discuss this right with each participant at the beginning and end of each interview. Should this process prove to be unexpectedly difficult for the participant, she or he will be reminded of their right to withdraw from the study anytime up to the final draft of the thesis in July 2007.

b) Indicate what will be done with the participant's data and any consequences which withdrawal might have on the participant, including any effect that withdrawal may have respecting participant compensation.

In the event that a participant should exercise their right to withdraw from this study, audiotapes, transcripts and any written work pertaining to the participant will be destroyed.

c) If the participants will not have the right to withdraw from the project, please explain.

N/A

**SECTION E – CONFIDENTIALITY**

22. a) Will the data be treated as confidential?  Yes  No

b) Describe the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity of participants or confidentiality of data both during the conduct of the research and in the release of its findings.

I will not keep any identifying information in the written reports of the project. All identifying information will also be removed from the interview material and fieldnotes.

I will ask all participants not to disclose the name of any individual that they may refer to in an interview and suggest that they use a first name pseudonym should they refer to the name of client or coworker in the event that I know of the individual.

- c) Explain how written records, video/audio tapes and questionnaires will be secured, and provide details of their final disposal or storage.

All written records and audio tapes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office and I will be the only person with access to this information. After one year, all audio tapes will be destroyed. I will keep my field notes and transcripts for two years, however, no identifying information will be attached to any of this information. By September 2009 my field notes and transcripts will be shredded and disposed of appropriately.

It is my understanding that should I want my study to be representative I would need to have interviewed a required number of participants to reach saturation, therefore, I would like to keep the transcripts for the stated two years so that I may have the option of continuing my study to acceptable standards of saturation.

- d) If participant anonymity/confidentiality is not appropriate to this research project, explain, including providing details of how all participants will be advised of the fact that data will not be anonymous or confidential.

N/A

## SECTION F -- MONITORING ONGOING RESEARCH

### 23. Annual Review and Adverse Events

- a) Minimum review requires the completion of a "Renewal/Project Completed" form at least annually. Indicate whether any additional monitoring or review would be appropriate for this project.

**It is the investigator's responsibility to notify the REB using the "Renewal/Project Completed" form, when the project is completed, or if it is cancelled. [http://www.mcmaster.ca/ors/ethics/faculty\\_forms.htm](http://www.mcmaster.ca/ors/ethics/faculty_forms.htm)**

N/A

- b) **Adverse events** (unanticipated negative consequences or results affecting participants) must be reported to the REB Secretariat and the MREB Chair, as soon as possible and in any event, no more than 3 days subsequent to their occurrence.

### 24. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

(Use an additional page if more space is required to complete any sections of the form, or if there is any other information relevant to the project which you wish to provide to the Research Ethics Board.)

N/A

25. **POSTING OF APPROVED PROTOCOLS ON THE RESEARCH ETHICS WEBSITE**

[http://iserv.mcmaster.ca/ethics/mreb/public/mreb\\_approved.cfm](http://iserv.mcmaster.ca/ethics/mreb/public/mreb_approved.cfm)

- a) Effective January 1, 2006, it is the policy of MREB to post a list of approved protocols on the Research Ethics website. Posted information usually includes: title, names of principal investigators, principal investigator department, type of project (i.e. PhD; Faculty; Masters etc)
- b) You may request that the title be deleted from the posted information.
- c) Do you request that the title be eliminated from the posted information?  Yes  No
- d) The ethics board will honour your request if you answer **Yes** to the above question 25 c) but we ask you to provide a reason for making this request for the information of the Board. You may also use this box for any other special requests.

N/A

**SECTION G – SIGNATURES**

**Faculty Investigator Assurance:**

*“I confirm that I have read the McMaster Research Ethics Board Guidelines for Research with Human Participants and I agree to comply with the conditions outlined in the Guidelines”.*

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**Signature of Faculty Investigator**

**Date**

**Faculty Supervisor Assurance: For undergraduate students and graduate students where the supervisor is the primary supervisor for a thesis:**

*“I confirm that I have read the McMaster Research Ethics Board Guidelines for Research with Human Participants, and I agree to comply with the conditions outlined in the Guidelines. I have read the application and proposal and deem the project to be valid and worthwhile, and I agree to provide the necessary supervision of the student(s) and to make myself available should problems arise during the course of the research.”*

---

**Signature of Faculty Supervisor**

**Date**

---

**Signature of Graduate Student**

**Date**

**Faculty Supervisor Assurance: For graduate students where the supervisor is not the primary supervisor, and where the research is not for a graduate thesis:**

*"I confirm that I have read the McMaster Research Ethics Board Guidelines for Research with Human Participants, and I agree to comply with the conditions outlined in the Guidelines. I have read the application and proposal and deem the project to be valid and worthwhile, and I agree to make myself available for consultation should problems arise during the course of the research."*

---

**Signature of Faculty Supervisor**

**Date**

---

**Signature of Graduate Student**

**Date**

## Appendix B - Letter of Information



McMaster University

February 11, 2007

### Letter of Information

#### **A Study of Partnerships and Collaboration: Child Protection and Violence Against Women's Services**

**Student Investigator:** Karen P. Ward  
Graduate Student: Masters of Social Work  
Cell (905) 977-8640

**Student Faculty Advisor:** Sheila Sammon  
Department of Social Work  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
(905) 525-9140 ext. 23780;

#### **Why am I doing this research?**

Child protection services in Ontario are presently undergoing a change. The shift to a collaborative child welfare model is meant to have workers draw on their unique knowledge, experiences and skills to engage parents in promoting the well being and protection of children. Agencies and organizations are expected to join forces to ensure that a parent can access help to appropriately care for their children. These changes will impact workers' interactions with parents and children.

Child protection agencies and Woman Abuse Services will be expected to work together to ensure that a woman, who has been abused by an intimate partner, is safe. Moreover, the safety and well being of her children are also a concern. Despite attempts in 2000, to have child protection agencies and the Violence Against Women sector work together, the two sectors worked mostly in isolation.

Therefore, in this study I plan to explore the experiences of workers from child protection services and the Violence Against Women's sector and I hope to learn how we can best assist workers in both sectors to have a better understanding of the other sector's unique knowledge and expertise. I will ask participants from both sectors about what information would be helpful for them to know about the other sector and what information they would like workers in the other sector to have that will allow them to better provide respectful services to women, who have been abused. How can we best protect children from the harmful effects of witnessing abuse in the home?

Ultimately, I hope to learn how workers in both environments can connect and work together to support women who have been abused in a way that will help ensure their safety and not further victimize these women, which will ultimately result in the safety of their children.

### **What will happen during the research?**

You will be asked to participate in one or possibly two interviews, both of which will be scheduled at a time and location that is convenient for you. I will be talking with all of the participants of this study myself. The initial interview will last approximately 60 minutes and the second contact will allow me to clarify any questions that I may have regarding any of the information that you provided to me. With your permission, the interview will be tape recorded so that I can accurately represent your thoughts and ideas. I will also make brief notes during the interview.

I will ask you open ended questions during the interviews. More specifically, I may ask you questions about:

- What is your work experience is with abused women or children?
- What is your involvement with the 'other' sector?
- What is your understanding of the collaboration?
- What do you want the 'other' sector to understand about your role?
- What information would best help child protection workers better understand the dynamics of woman abuse?
- What information would best help workers in the Violence Against Women sector better understand the child protection mandate?
- What language, terms, or phrases, are helpful or unhelpful with women who have been abused?
- What is the biggest area of deficiency between the two sectors?
- If you could make one change in either or both sectors what would that change be?

Your consent is voluntary and I will review this with you on an ongoing basis during the process. Should you decide before, during or after the interviews that you no longer wish to continue to take part in the study, it is your right to withdraw from the study at any time. In the event that you choose to withdraw from this study, I will destroy all audiotapes, transcripts and any written work pertaining to you up until the final draft of the thesis in July 2007.

### **Are there good things and bad things about the research?**

It is not likely that there will be any harm, risk or discomfort associated with this study. You do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer.

If you choose not to continue with the interview it is your right to withdraw at any time. If you become upset or decide that you need further support or assistance, I will provide you with contact phone numbers where someone will be able to respond to you.

### **Potential benefits**

I hope to clarify each sector's needs and experiences so that we can gain a better understanding about each sector's expertise. Moreover, I hope that what I learn will help clarify how we can combine our knowledge and expertise through partnership and collaboration in a manner that will benefit workers in both sectors and develop training so that workers in both sectors can respond to women who have been abused in a respectful manner that will not revictimize them or their children. I hope that we will assist women to decrease the impact that witnessed abuse has on their children. Ultimately I hope that a solid bridge will

be built between the two sectors that will allow a flow of information between the two sectors and perhaps aid in providing a direction for future training materials.

**Who will know about what I did in the research?**

Anything that you talk about in the study that could identify you will not be published or told to anyone else, unless I have your permission. I will respect your privacy. I will not share your name or any identifying information with coworkers or staff at your agency, or organization. To the best of my ability, your identity will be kept anonymous and your interviews may take place away from your work environment.

Should you refer to a specific client or worker in our interview, I will ask that you not disclose the individual's name to me, and instead use a false name in the event that I 'know of' that individual.

All written records and audio tapes will be stored in a secure filing cabinet in my home office and I will be the only person with access to this information. After one year, I will destroy all of the audio tapes. I will keep my field notes and transcripts for six years, however, no identifying information will be attached to any of this information. By September 2013 my field notes and transcripts will be shredded and disposed of appropriately.

**b) Legally Required Disclosure:**

i) Should I receive information pertaining to the abuse or neglect of a child, I am legally bound to report this information to the appropriate agency.

ii) I would also be legally required to disclose information if I felt that someone planned to harm themselves or to harm another individual.

iii) Information obtained will be kept confidential to the full extent of the law and I will treat all information provided to me as subject to researcher-participant privilege.

**Can I decide if I want to be in the research?**

Your participation in this study is voluntary and it is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you decide to participate, you can decide to stop at any time, even after signing the consent form or any time up until the final draft of the thesis, in July 2007.

**What if I change my mind about participating in the study?**

If you decide that you no longer wish to participate in the study, there will be no consequences to you. Should you withdraw from the study; any data you have provided to me up to that point will be destroyed, unless you indicate otherwise. You do not have to answer any of the questions that you do not want to, and you can still be in the study.

**Information About the Study Results:**

At the conclusion of this study, I will provide you with a summary containing the results of my research.

**Rights of Research Participants:**

If you have any questions or require more information about the study itself, please contact myself, Karen Ward at (905) 977-8640, or Sheila Sammon, Student Faculty Supervisor at McMaster University School of Social Work, (905) 525-9140 ext. 23780.

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

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat  
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142  
c/o Office of Research Services  
E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)

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**CONSENT**

I have read the information presented in the information letter and understand the relevant information about a study being conducted by **Karen Ward**, of McMaster University. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study, and to receive any additional details I wanted to know about the study. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, if I choose to do so, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

I agree to participate in the research study by participating in a research interview. Further,

- A) I agree to the taping of the interview \_\_\_\_\_  
B) I prefer that the interview not be taped \_\_\_\_\_

---

Name of Participant

In my opinion, the person who has signed above is agreeing to participate in this study voluntarily, and understands the nature of the study and the consequences of participation in it.

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Signature of Researcher or Witness

# Appendix C - MREB Approval

<b>McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)</b> <small>c/o Office of Research Services, MREB Secretariat, GH-305/H, e-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca</small> <b>CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH</b>			
<b>Application Status:</b> New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Addendum <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Project Number</b> 2007 026			
<b>TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:</b> Partnerships and Collaboration: Child Protection and Violence Against Women's Services			
<b>Name(s)</b>	<b>Dept./Address</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>E-Mail</b>
<b>Faculty Investigator(s)/ Supervisor(s)</b>			
S. Sammon	Social Work	23780	sammon@mcmaster.ca
<b>Student Investigator(s)</b>			
K. Ward	Social Work	905-525-0779	wardkp@mcmaster.ca
The application in support of the above research project has been reviewed by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster University Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. The following ethics certification is provided by the MREB: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is approved as presented without questions or requests for modification. <input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is approved as revised without questions or requests for modification. <input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is approved subject to clarification and/or modification as appended or identified below:			
<b>COMMENTS AND CONDITIONS: Ongoing approval is contingent on completing the annual completed/status report. A "Change Request" or amendment must be made and approved before any alterations are made to the research.</b>			
<b>Reporting Frequency:</b>		<b>Annual:</b>	<b>Other:</b>
<b>Date:</b> <i>March 20, 2007</i> Dr. D. Maurer, Chair/ Dr. D. Pawluch, Vice-Chair: <i>[Signature]</i>			

**Research  
Study**

# Research Participants Wanted

**Karen Ward**

**Graduate Student: Masters of Social Work**

**Partnerships & Collaboration: Child Protection  
and Violence Against Women's Sector**

**Collaboration is meant to allow workers to draw on their unique knowledge, experiences and skills. Agencies and organizations are expected to partner to ensure that a parent can access help to care for their children. These changes will impact how the worker interacts with parents and children.**

**If you work with women who have been abused, and you work with women who will or will not access services in the Violence Against Women's sector, I'm looking for you to share your knowledge, experience and skills with me for the purpose of this study.**

**This study has been reviewed and approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact:**

**McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat  
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142**

**c/o Office of Research Services  
E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)**

**Call Karen at: (905) 525-0779 or (905) 977-8640  
Emails: [karenpward@sympatico.ca](mailto:karenpward@sympatico.ca)  
[wardkp@mcmaster.ca](mailto:wardkp@mcmaster.ca)**

**Research  
Study**

# Research Participants Wanted

**Karen Ward**

**Graduate Student: Masters of Social Work**

**Partnerships & Collaboration: Child Protection  
and Violence Against Women's Sector**

**Collaboration is meant to allow workers to draw on their unique knowledge, experiences and skills. Agencies and organizations are expected to partner to ensure that a parent can access help to care for their children. These changes will impact how the worker interacts with parents and children.**

**If you work with women who have been abused, and you have knowledge about women's involvement with child protection services, I'm looking for you to share your knowledge, experience and skills with me for the purpose of this study.**

**This study has been reviewed and approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact:**

**McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat  
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142**

**c/o Office of Research Services  
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**Appendix E – Signed Consent of Transcriber**

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK  
(2007)

McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario

Confidentiality Agreement:

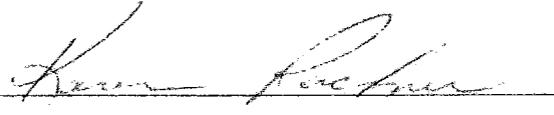
Partnerships and Collaboration: Hamilton Child  
Protection Agencies and the Violence Against Women's Sector

AUTHOR: Karen Patricia Ward  
B.A./B.S.W. McMaster University of Hamilton Ontario (2002)

**Agreement of Confidentiality**

I am writing to record our agreement relating to the above named Research.

Karen Ward will provide me with taped interviews in relation to her research on the Collaboration between Hamilton Child Protection Agencies and the Violence Against Women's Sector. I       Karen P. Rachner       of Hamilton, Ontario acknowledge that all information Karen has provided to me relating to her Research is confidential and shall not be disclosed to any person except to those specifically authorized by Karen or as is required by law. The interview files will be destroyed as per Karen's instructions.

Date: May 15, 2007 Signature:   
Karen Rachner

Date: May 15, 2007 Witness: Karen Ward  
Karen Ward

## Appendix F - Interview Guide

### A Study of Partnerships and Collaboration: Child Protection and Violence Against Women's Services

**Student Investigator:** Karen P. Ward  
Graduate Student: Masters of Social Work  
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Child protection services in Ontario are currently undergoing change. A greater emphasis is placed on collaboration between agencies and organizations to ensure that a parent can access help to appropriately care for their children and these changes will ultimately impact how workers intervene with parents and children. Despite attempts in 2000 to have child protection agencies and the Violence Against Women sector work together, the two sectors worked mostly in isolation. Therefore, in this study I plan to explore the experiences of child protection workers and workers from the Violence Against Women's sector. I hope to learn how we can draw on each sector's unique knowledge and expertise to improve the quality of services that we provide to women who have been abused by an intimate partner, and help women best protect their children from the harmful effects that witnessing abuse has on them.

#### Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your work experiences with abused women or children.
2. What can you tell me about your experience with the 'other' sector?
3. How would you describe the role of the workers in the 'other' sector?
4. What is your understanding of the collaboration or partnership with the 'other' sector?
5. What do you want the other sector to understand about your role?
6. What information would best help child protection workers better understand the dynamics of woman abuse?
7. What information would best help workers in the Violence Against Women sector better understand the child protection mandate?
8. What use of language, terms, or phrases, are helpful or unhelpful with women who have been abused?
9. What is the biggest area of deficiency between the two sectors?
10. If you could make one change to either or both sectors what would it be?
11. What recommendations do you have for collaboration initiatives, training or education?

## Appendix G – Revised Interview Guide

### Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your work experiences with abused women or children.
2. ~~What can you tell me about your experience with the 'other' sector?~~
3. How did you view VAW or CAS workers before the collaboration? How if at all has your view changed with the collaboration? How would you describe the role of the workers in the 'other' sector?
4. What if any are the benefits of the collaboration for the VAW/CAS sector?
5. What positive changes have you seen because of the collaboration? What negative changes have you seen because of the collaboration?
6. What do you think contributed to the changes?
7. What does CAS get out of the collaboration? What does the VAW sector get out of the collaboration?
8. What information would best help child protection workers better understand the dynamics of woman abuse?
9. What information would best help workers in the Violence Against Women sector better understand the child protection mandate?
10. What do you want the other sector to understand about your role?
11. What use of language, terms, or phrases, are helpful or unhelpful with women who have been abused?
12. What is the biggest area of deficiency between the two sectors?
13. If you could make one change to either or both sectors what would it be?
14. What recommendations do you have for collaboration initiatives, training or education?

## **Appendix H: Recommendations for Training**

This training is based on a popular education style.

The first day's training will contain factual information that incorporates existing training material with the addition of the ideas expressed by participants of this study. The main group will split off into smaller groups for planned exercises, and all groups will require representation from both sectors. The first small group exercise for the day will be a root cause analysis<sup>8</sup>. This analysis will define the problem, gather evidence, analyze cause/effect relationships, identify root causes, develop recommendations for solutions, and suggest ways to implement the solutions. The small groups will report back to the larger group with plenty of time for discussion prior to a lunch break.

The afternoon will include small group exercises, which will portray the viewpoints of CPSs, the VAW sector, abused women, and children who witness. Towards the end of the first day, participants will be asked to make suggestions about information that they would like to be incorporated in the training the following day, and an evaluation will be completed before the end of the first day's session.

A portion of the second day will be dedicated to the requests from participants. Women and children's stories can have a tremendous emotional impact on people, and this type of presentation tends to get information across on a different level. Either a woman who has been abused could discuss 'her story', or a documented account could be read to participants. Following the presentation of a true-to-life account, small group

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<sup>8</sup> A root cause analysis is one way to include a structural analysis into training and this method is based on the idea that eliminating root causes will minimize the recurrence of a problem rather than addressing the immediate obvious symptoms. A root cause analysis based on a structural perspective will look to broader societal factors to uncover the causes of problems.

discussion will ensue and later a large group discussion, prior to the lunch break. After the break a real account of what it's like for the child who witnesses could be read to all participants. Participants will again be split up into small groups for planned exercises with time allotted for a large group discussion. The remainder of the afternoon will focus on uncovering any misunderstandings or tensions between the sectors. The issues will be discussed, and then participants will work on solutions. A final evaluation will be completed prior to the end of the training. Subsequent to the training, the evaluations should be incorporated into a summary document, provided to participants of the training, and taken into account for subsequent training.