

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: **BARRIERS TO HELP-SEEKING AMONG
ORTHODOX JEWISH VICTIMS OF
INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE**

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Intimate partner violence is a pervasive issue, and numerous barriers exist for victims who attempt to engage in help-seeking behaviors, often preventing them from accessing necessary support. Previous research has established that victims in minority populations face community-specific barriers that create additional challenges that victims must overcome. Thus, it is crucial to gain a comprehensive understanding of the barriers faced by victims in these communities. The Orthodox Jewish community in the United States is a group with unique cultural and religious considerations that may impact victims who are a part of this population. To gain a comprehensive understanding of what barriers may exist for this group of victims, a qualitative study was conducted. Semi-structured interviews with professionals who worked with Orthodox Jewish victims of intimate partner violence provided insight into the experiences of this population. It was found that community-specific barriers are highly salient for victims and that victims prefer to seek help from within the Orthodox Jewish community. Improved education is necessary to facilitate and improve help-seeking behaviors among Orthodox Jewish victims of intimate partner violence.

BARRIERS TO HELP-SEEKING AMONG ORTHODOX JEWISH VICTIMS OF
INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Victims of crime can be conceptualized as the gatekeepers of the criminal justice system (Hindelang and Gottfredson 1976). The justice system largely relies on the public to report their victimizations to law enforcement and prompt official action. This reliance holds especially true for the crime of intimate partner violence (IPV), as victims of IPV are the most likely party to report their victimization (Waller 1990). According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2017), police received reports of IPV victimization in slightly more than half (56%) of incidents, indicating that almost half of victims choose not to report. Between 2006 and 2015, an estimated 395,000 incidents of IPV went unreported to law enforcement (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2017). This gap suggests the presence of barriers to reporting that victims may face, preventing them from pursuing safety and justice.

Past research has revealed numerous barriers to reporting to law enforcement, as well as to general help-seeking among victims of IPV (Evans and Feder 2016; Fugate et al. 2005; Petersen et al 2004). Identifying and understanding these barriers is crucial to overcoming them, as well as promoting and facilitating victims' help-seeking and reporting. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider variations in reporting behaviors and attitudes among minority communities. Victims from certain communities may face unique hurdles when deciding whether and how to report their victimization; in order to establish a thorough awareness of help-seeking, these diverse concerns must be examined.

Of particular focus in this paper is the Orthodox Jewish community in the United States, which has been underrepresented in the literature surrounding IPV and help-seeking. Research on IPV and help-seeking in this unique community is sparse, leaving researchers and practitioners without an adequate understanding of the cultural attitudes and particular needs of

this population. This lack of culturally specific knowledge may prevent practitioners from properly supporting and addressing the concerns of Orthodox Jewish victims and may contribute to decreased reporting and help-seeking behaviors among this population.

The present study will attempt to address this gap through qualitative interviews with Orthodox-adjacent professionals who are able to shed light on this often-overlooked community. The aim of this work is to gain an in-depth understanding of the help-seeking and reporting behaviors of Orthodox Jewish victims and to contribute to the overall body of IPV research.

The following sections will examine the existing body of literature on IPV, help-seeking, and the Orthodox Jewish community.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence is a form of domestic violence perpetrated by a current or former spouse or romantic partner (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2022). Typically motivated by a desire for control, IPV can take the form of physical, sexual, financial, verbal, spiritual, and/or emotional abuse, as well as stalking (Anglin and Mitchell 2014). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022), 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have experienced physical abuse at the hands of an intimate partner; 1 in 5 women and 1 in 13 men are victims of sexual abuse from an intimate partner.

Whether a one-time event or a chronic occurrence, IPV has severe, life-long consequences for victims (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2022). Physical consequences of IPV can include injury, sexually-transmitted infections, miscarriage, chronic disorders, chronic pain, and gynecological problems (Dillon et al. 2013; World Health Organization 2021). Mental health outcomes associated with IPV include depression, post-traumatic stress, eating disorders, difficulty sleeping, self-harm, substance abuse, and suicide (Dillon et al. 2013; Lagdon, Armour, and Stringer 2014; World Health Organization 2021). IPV is often fatal; data from crime reporting indicate that roughly 1 in 5 homicides in the United States are perpetrated by current or former intimate partners (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2022). Female homicide victims are most likely to be killed by a male intimate partner (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2022).

The detrimental effects of IPV do not end with its direct victims; its harmful consequences spread to the family members and friends of victims as well as to broader society (Riger, Raja, and Camacho 2002). Most immediately, children of IPV victims face a host of

behavioral, emotional, and physical health problems (Hamby et al. 2011). As they age, they are more likely to perpetrate and/or be victimized by further violence, perpetuating the cycle of abuse (World Health Organization 2021). On a wider scale, IPV is tremendously economically taxing; the estimated population economic burden over victims' lifetimes is roughly \$3.6 trillion (Peterson et al. 2018). Of this total, 37%, or \$1.3 trillion is estimated to be paid for by the government. Whether suffered directly or indirectly, the consequences of IPV are extensive and devastating.

IPV Help-Seeking

Help-Seeking Model

The process by which a victim of abuse decides to take action can be conceptualized via a three-stage model of help-seeking (Liang et al. 2005). This model consists of problem recognition, the decision to seek help, and the selection of a help provider. The initial stage, problem recognition, describes how the victim defines abuse and their ability to recognize their current situation as abusive. After this recognition comes the second stage, the decision to seek help. Finally, the selection of a help provider is the third step, referring to the individual or organization that the victim chooses to seek help from, whether it's a formal report or informal disclosure (Liang et al. 2005). Victims become more motivated to progress through this model when they have a robust understanding of the dynamics of IPV, when they are concerned about the safety of their children, and when the abuse they are experiencing reaches a crisis point (Petersen et al. 2004).

Help-Seeking Options

When victims decide to disclose their abusive situation, there are various types of resources from which they may choose to seek help. Informal resources include friends and family; this form of disclosure is typically first for victims of abuse, although research on this is somewhat mixed (Goodkind et al. 2003; Othman, Goddard, and Piterman 2014; Rose and Campbell 2000). Victims often turn to friends first, for emotional support, and family later on, for material support (Evans and Feder 2016). Informal social support from friends and family also improves victims' willingness to subsequently seek formal help (Liang et al. 2005). For the purposes of this paper, quasi-formal resources will be defined as formal, non-law enforcement resources such as social service agencies, shelters, and hotlines, and formal resources will be defined as law enforcement-related resources. This distinction addresses the population of victims who may choose to seek help from an official resource without wanting to involve the police. Research indicates that many victims rely on informal help-seeking means prior to accessing formal resources; this pattern often maps onto the escalation of abuse in severity (Goodman et al. 2003; Othman et al. 2014; Rose and Campbell 2000). As abuse intensifies, particularly when it is physical in nature, formal resources like the police are more likely to be utilized (Coulter et al. 1999).

Barriers to Help-Seeking

Barriers to disclosing and seeking help for IPV can be broadly separated into two categories: internal and external barriers. Internal barriers refer to person-specific, often psychological reasons to avoid disclosing abuse. The most fundamental internal barrier is denial of the occurring abuse and/or normalization of the abuse (Evans and Feder 2016; Fugate et al. 2005; Heron and Eisma 2021; Othman et al. 2014; Petersen et al. 2004). These barriers often co-

occur with emotional barriers like guilt, shame, and low self-esteem, which are ubiquitous in the literature as some of the biggest hurdles to disclosure (Evans and Feder 2016; Francis, Loxton, and James 2017; Heron and Eisma 2021; Othman et al. 2014; Petersen et al. 2004; Ringel and Bina 2007; Robinson and Spilsbury 2008). Furthermore, the fear of being judged or of not being believed prevents victims from disclosing abuse to others (Heron and Eisma 2021).

External barriers are obstacles outside of the victim's immediate control. One of the most prominent external barriers to reporting represented in the literature is the fear of one's children being removed by children's services (DeVoe and Smith 2003; Evans and Feder 2016; Heron and Eisma 2021; Othman et al. 2014; Petersen et al. 2004; Robinson and Spilsbury 2008). A similar barrier is the fear of retaliation by the abuser if they learn of the disclosure (Felson et al. 2002; Fugate et al. 2005; Heron and Eisma 2021; Petersen et al. 2004; Robinson and Spilsbury 2008). For victims to receive services or make a more formal disclosure, they must have some degree of knowledge about the resources available to them. A lack of awareness of accessible services can inhibit help-seeking (Othman et al. 2014). Even when victims know about available resources, lack of time and money to seek those services can prevent a motivated victim from reaching out (Fugate et al. 2005). Financial dependence on the abuser is an additional external barrier that can dissuade victims from taking action; they fear that if they leave the relationship, they will be unable to support themselves and/or their children (Heron and Eisma 2021; Othman et al. 2014; Petersen et al. 2004).

A great deal is known about general barriers to help-seeking among victims of IPV; however, less is known about how those patterns are modified in different communities or minority groups. In particular, the Orthodox Jewish community has several distinctive features that may amplify the aforementioned barriers or create new ones. The following sections will

discuss this community in depth, as well as the existing research on help-seeking behaviors among minority groups, including Orthodox Jews.

Orthodox Judaism

Orthodox Judaism is a subset of Judaism characterized by its strict observance of Jewish law and belief in the divine origins of the Torah (Grodner and Sweifach 2004). For Orthodox Jews, every aspect of daily life is influenced by religious practice, including how to dress, what to eat, and where to live. Most Orthodox Jews live within walking distance of a synagogue, since driving on Shabbat is prohibited; this geographic necessity creates tight-knit neighborhoods in close proximity to religious schools, kosher supermarkets, and synagogues. Rabbis are significant figures in Orthodoxy, acting as communal leaders, confidantes, religious authorities, and advisors on topics both religious and personal. Consulting a rabbi before making any major life decision is common practice among Orthodox Jews, particularly among the more stringent subgroups where rabbis have a tremendous amount of influence among their communities (Grodner and Sweifach 2004).

As of 2020, Jews make up 2.4% of the general American population; 9% of this population identify as Orthodox Jews (Pew Research Center 2021). Primarily concentrated in the Northeastern United States, this population is composed of several subgroups which range in level of observance, insularity, and philosophies. Haredi Jews, often termed ‘Ultra-Orthodox’ or ‘Yeshivish,’ are the largest of these subgroups (Pew Research Center). This community typically eschews engagement with the secular world, preferring to self-segregate (Heilman and Cohen 1989). For the purposes of this paper, Hasidic Jews will be referred to under the umbrella term of Haredi, due to the high degree of overlap in customs between Haredi and Hasidic Jews. On the other end of the spectrum, Modern Orthodox Jews combine traditional religious practices and

observance of Jewish law with the secular world (Grodner and Sweifach 2004). Among this community, it is common for members to attend secular universities, engage in the non-Jewish business world, and generally maintain a more open attitude toward the secular world (Heilman and Cohen 1989).

Although many differences exist between varying Orthodox subgroups, they do share a great degree of similarity in perspectives and practices. Traditional gender roles are prominent among Orthodox Jews; the separation of the sexes is common from childhood and occurs in schools and synagogues (Ringel and Bina 2007). Women are traditionally responsible for household duties such as childrearing and housekeeping, while religious study and prayer are considered the male domain (Grodner and Sweifach 2004; Ringel and Bina 2007). In some Haredi communities, wives are commonly the breadwinners as well as homemakers, since many husbands devote themselves to Torah study instead of employment. However, this varies significantly by community; among Modern Orthodox Jews, it is more common for the husband to be the breadwinner, or for both spouses to be well-educated and work outside of the home (Wolfe Fine 1995). Overall, the broader Orthodox Jewish community adheres to traditional perspectives of the varying roles of men and women (Grodner and Sweifach 2004; Ringel and Bina 2007).

IPV in the Orthodox Jewish Community

Estimates of the prevalence of IPV in the American Jewish community are few and far between, with even less research specifically focusing on Orthodox Jews. Available research puts the prevalence of IPV in the greater Jewish community at 15-25%, a rate commensurate with the general population (DeVoe, Borges, and Conroy 2001; Freedman 2005). These estimates also find similar rates of IPV between different denominations of Jewish practice, such

as Conservative or Orthodox Judaism; however, these estimates are limited in size and scope (DeVoe et al. 2001; Light 2006). Although these estimates are limited, particularly considering the insular nature of this community, they do suggest a rate of IPV in this population at least on par with that of the general population, warranting further inquiry (DeVoe et al. 2001).

Historically, there has been a great degree of denial about abuse in the broader Jewish community as well as within the Orthodox community. Stereotypes of Jewish families as warm and wholesome, and of Jewish men as non-violent, bookish, and good husbands have led to the widespread attitude that abuse is something that only occurs in other communities (Guthartz 2004). One study found that Orthodox rabbis were more likely to believe that IPV was not a significant problem in their communities than Reform or Conservative rabbis (Cwik 1997). Although there has been greater recognition of abuse in recent years, a recent analysis done in Australia found that Jewish victims of abuse still encountered denial of abuse and pressure to not speak out about their experiences within their communities (Truong et al. 2022).

Complicating matters for Orthodox female victims is the religious divorce process within the Jewish community. To get divorced, men must present their wives with a Jewish legal document called the Get, a document that enables women to get remarried (Cares and Cusick 2012; Grodner and Sweifach 2004). If the Get is withheld, the couple is still considered married under Jewish law. When this occurs, the woman is classified as an Agunah, a chained woman, and any children she has with another man are illegitimate and they themselves cannot marry within the Jewish community (Cares and Cusick 2012; Murugan 2022). Withholding this document is known as Get refusal, and is a common tool of manipulation and further abuse in the Orthodox Jewish world, allowing abusive husbands to maintain control over their victims. In some cases, the Get is used as a bargaining chip for men to argue for preferable divorce terms

(Chesler 2021). While pre-nuptial agreements to prevent Get refusal have become more common in Modern Orthodox communities in recent years, this is still a relatively new practice, and an uncommon one for more traditional communities (Chesler 2021; Murugan 2022). For those women, the possibility of becoming an Agunah is a harrowing reality that may play a role in preventing victims from seeking help or attempting to leave the abusive relationship.

One additional unique characteristic of IPV in the broader Jewish community is the length of time it takes Jewish women to leave abusive relationships. On average, Jewish women take 5-7 years longer, or about twice as long, to leave abusive relationships than non-Jewish victims (National Resource Center on Domestic Violence 2007). One estimate found that while non-Jewish women typically stay in relationships for 3-5 years after abuse begins, Jewish women stay for an average of 8-10 years (Kuperstein 1989). Research has noted a tendency among Jewish women to wait to reach out for support until the abuse they're experiencing has reached a crisis point, which may partially explain this deviation from the norm (DeVoe et al. 2001). Although research on this phenomenon is limited, as much of it is drawn from small, non-random samples, a clear pattern has been established in the literature that Jewish women stay in abusive relationships longer than the average woman.

Specific Barriers to Help-Seeking

Help-seeking among minority groups

While research focusing on barriers to help-seeking in the Orthodox Jewish community is limited, there is a large body of work discussing this topic in relation to other minority and faith communities. Help-seeking behaviors have been found to vary drastically based on culture and ethnicity, as pertains to both formal and informal help-seeking (Raj and Silverman 2007). First and foremost, language and/or cultural barriers may prevent minority victims of abuse from

turning to non-culturally specific organizations for support (Raj and Silverman 2007; Robinson and Spilsbury 2008). Victims who are not fluent in English may not know where to receive services, or may not have access to interpretative services if they do reach out for help (Barron 2004; Robinson and Spilsbury 2008). Perhaps as a result of this, abused immigrant women are less likely to make formal reports than non-immigrant women (Raj and Silverman 2007).

One common theme throughout the literature is the concern held by minority women about stereotyping and marginalization. These victims report feeling stigmatized and perceived negatively by the healthcare professionals to whom they reported their abuse, in addition to feeling that their culture and needs were misunderstood (Robinson and Spilsbury 2008). Similarly, many racial and ethnic minority victims who have been abused by a member of their own racial group do not report this abuse, as evidenced by the underreporting of sexual assault among Black women victimized by Black males (Tillman et al. 2010). This ‘gender-race quandary,’ wherein victims are protective of their community and are wary of reporting one of its members to the authorities, is exacerbated when the community in question is distrustful of law enforcement and other institutions (Hickman and Simpson 2003; Tillman et al. 2010).

Community attitudes toward abuse are particularly influential in the help-seeking behaviors of its members. Denial that abuse occurs within the community has been identified as a powerful deterrent for victims to address or report their experiences (Mulvihill et al. 2022; Petersen et al. 2004). This relationship has been investigated within various faith and racial minority communities with similar results (Cares and Cusick 2012; Mulvihill et al. 2022; Petersen et al. 2004; Truong et al. 2022). Public opinions about reporting IPV have been empirically correlated with the reporting habits of both primary and secondary victims, indicating the salience of community attitudes for victims (Gracia and Herrero 2006).

The final community-specific barrier to help-seeking reported in the literature is the concern among minority victims for their and their families' reputations (Andersson et al. 2009; Raj and Silverman 2007). In tight-knit, insular communities, particularly where there is a stigma around abuse and/or divorce, victims may fear the repercussions of help-seeking. Among South-East Asian immigrant women, one particular concern was if reporting abuse would impact their children's marriage prospects (Raj and Silverman 2007). Thus, victims from marginalized communities often experience a double bind of stigma: externally, from extra-communal resources, and internally, from their own communities.

Help-seeking among Orthodox Jews

Research on the help-seeking and reporting behaviors of Orthodox Jews in America is limited, but the literature that does exist emphasizes several key community-specific considerations. In one qualitative study based in the United Kingdom, Jewish victims of abuse identified feeling unable to comfortably receive services anywhere (Burman, Smailes, and Chantler 2004). While they reported a preference for receiving help from within their own communities, they had concerns about potential breaches of confidentiality or being recognized while receiving services. Secular service organizations provided confidential help, but victims worried about experiencing discrimination or culturally illiterate services, as well as the possibility of discrediting their community (Burman et al. 2004). Some Orthodox Jewish victims have expressed reluctance to seek help from a non-Jewish service provider for fear that they may promote divorce, which carries a degree of stigma within the community (Ringel and Bina 2007). Practical considerations related to observance may compound this apprehension; at a secular organization or shelter, an Orthodox woman may not be able to access kosher food,

properly observe Shabbat, or receive religious counsel (Gillum, Sullivan, and Bybee 2006; Guthartz 2004).

This unfavorable attitude towards outside support is reflected in the responses some rabbis had when disclosed to by victims in their communities. Many had negative perceptions of non-Jewish domestic violence organizations and counseled their congregants accordingly (Ringel and Bina 2007). This is especially significant since religious victims tend to reach out to faith leaders for support prior to or instead of secular resources (Bent-Goodley et al. 2012; Gillum et al. 2006; Nason-Clark 2004). This behavior pattern has been established for Orthodox Jewish victims as well, as they have been found to turn to rabbis for guidance prior to or instead of other professional support (Ringel and Bina 2007; Sweifach and Heft-LaPorte 2007). For an Orthodox Jewish victim who approaches her rabbi for help, a warning against disclosing to a non-Jewish agency would be highly influential.

The aforementioned stigma around IPV and divorce in the Orthodox Jewish community generates further resistance toward help-seeking. Privacy is an important consideration for this population, and unsavory or deviant issues within the family such as abuse are generally kept quiet (Cwik 1995; Grodner and Sweifach 2004; Murugan 2022; Ringel and Bina 2007). One primary concern is damaging the marriage prospects of children; the Orthodox community utilizes a structured matchmaking system in which the reputation of the family is a major consideration (Band-Winterstein and Tuito 2018; Ringel and Bina 2007). Children of divorced parents or from families where abuse is known to have occurred may struggle to find a match when it comes time for them to marry. As such, victims may feel as if staying silent and remaining in an abusive situation is a burden they must bear to preserve their reputation and their

children's futures (Band-Winterstein and Tuito 2018; Guthartz 2004; Murugan 2022; Ringel and Bina 2007).

Finally, several religious considerations are relevant to the reporting behaviors of Orthodox Jewish victims. Shalom Bayit, or "Peace in the Home," is the Jewish concept of marital and family harmony and is considered a central tenet to daily life as an observant Jew. While all members of the family have a shared responsibility to maintain Shalom Bayit, research shows that in abusive households, abused women are often made to feel as if they are at fault for its absence (Cares and Cusick 2012; DeVoe et al. 2001). For some women, the lack of Shalom Bayit was a source of shame that prevented them from disclosing the abuse. Others felt like it was required of them to remain in their abusive marriages and work towards this ideal state of household harmony (Cares and Cusick 2012; DeVoe et al. 2001). However, this finding is mixed, as some women found the strength and motivation to leave from the concept of Shalom Bayit, recognizing that their current circumstances did not reflect this state (DeVoe et al. 2001). Another religious barrier to disclosing abuse is the fear of Lashon Hara, or "Evil Tongue," which is the Jewish prohibition against slandering another person. While Rabbinical authorities have judged that this prohibition does not apply to unsafe situations like IPV, the heavy stigma around gossip within the Jewish community has been shown to prevent victims from disclosing abuse (Ringel and Bina 2007). One additional religious consideration is Mesirah, the act of one Jew reporting another's actions to secular authorities under specific circumstances. Originally intended to protect Jews from prejudiced governments, most rabbinic authorities today agree that Mesirah does not apply to reporting legitimate criminal behavior, such as IPV. Regardless, this concept has been shown to influence reporting behaviors of victims of sexual assault and child

abuse (Crisp et al 2018). As such, it is reasonable to assume that it may be a barrier for Orthodox Jewish victims of IPV.

Chapter 3: The Current Study

Prior research has established various barriers to help-seeking and disclosing among victims of IPV. Prominent barriers include denial, shame, fear, lack of social support, lack of awareness of available resources, concern over reputation, and financial dependence. Additional research targeted toward minority communities has identified culturally specific barriers such as language barriers, the desire to protect one's community, distrust of extra-communal resources, community attitudes toward abuse, and fear of discrimination. These obstacles intersect and compound in varied ways for victims, generating complex sets of circumstances that each individual must navigate as they seek help.

There has been a limited amount of research analyzing the help-seeking behaviors of Orthodox Jews; what research there is explores the unique considerations of this community. Cultural characteristics of Orthodoxy include acceptance of traditional gender roles, a strong emphasis on family harmony, reliance on Rabbinic authority, varying degrees of community insularity, and stigma against divorce. Specific concerns that Orthodox victims of IPV encounter are the importance of family reputation, particularly for children's marriage prospects; the possibility of Get refusal; the religious prohibition against slander; and fear of discrediting or shaming their community. While these barriers have not been studied extensively, their influence on victims is clear, as it has been established that Jewish women take about twice as long as non-Jewish women to leave abusive relationships. As long as these barriers are not comprehensively understood, they cannot be properly addressed and dismantled and thus they will continue to stand in the way of victims receiving the support and resources that they require.

This study intends to delve into the help-seeking behaviors of Orthodox Jewish IPV victims in the United States, with an emphasis on the barriers they face. The goal is to gain a

comprehensive understanding of what Orthodox Jewish help-seeking in response to IPV looks like: the barriers that interfere with this process, the religious and sociocultural factors unique to Orthodoxy that create, exacerbate, or otherwise contribute to these barriers, and any variance among different subgroups of Orthodoxy, for example, Modern Orthodoxy vs. Haredi Orthodoxy. Further, this study aims to determine if these culturally specific barriers are more salient than general barriers to help-seeking. Finally, this study intends to analyze how these cultural considerations impact the three-stage model of help-seeking and if there is a particular stage during which community-specific barriers are more influential.

There are several notable gaps in the existing body of research that this study will address. Much of the previous research on IPV in the Orthodox Jewish community has been conducted outside of the United States: in Israel, and in other Western countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom. (Burman et al. 2004; Mulvihill 2022; Truong et al. 2022; Tuito and Band-Winterstein 2021). While there is likely considerable overlap between, for instance, British Orthodox Jewish victims and American Orthodox Jewish victims, the experiences of these populations in their respective societies may differ in key ways. Of the research conducted in the United States, much is focused on a particular subset of the Orthodox Jewish community, typically the Ultra-Orthodox community (Grodner and Sweifach 2004; Ringel and Bina 2007; Tuito and Band-Winterstein 2021). The Modern Orthodox community and the broader Orthodox community as a whole are rarely considered, leaving little room for an analysis of potential intra-Orthodox disparities in attitudes, behaviors, or barriers to help-seeking. Finally, no known study has explored the three-stage model of help-seeking in regard to the Orthodox Jewish community. This particular perspective has yet to be considered in the literature

and may lead to important insights about socio-cultural impacts on the decision-making process and timeline of help-seeking.

Chapter 4: Methods

This qualitative work draws from semi-structured interviews with three individuals who have a high level of expertise and familiarity with the Orthodox Jewish community, including this community's response to and perspectives on IPV and help-seeking.

Sample Selection

This research was conducted with individuals who were deemed to have a high level of expertise and familiarity with the Orthodox Jewish community as well as how IPV presents and is experienced within this community. A purposive sample was sought, with the intention of with half of the sample composed of Orthodox Jewish community members and leaders, such as rabbis and their wives, called rebbetzins. The remainder of the sample was intended to be comprised of individuals selected for their professional experience with IPV in the Orthodox community, such as victim advocates and mental health professionals. These two groups of participants were intended to be sampled in order to gain insight into the issue of IPV in the Orthodox Jewish community from two distinct angles: that of those who live in the community, and that of those who work with it. In addition, using two different groups would create an opportunity to directly analyze any contrasting attitudes or beliefs among community members versus practitioners.

While this purposive sample was sought, the researcher was unable to recruit any Orthodox community members and leaders for the study. The only individuals who agreed to be interviewed were IPV professionals. Thus, the final sample was composed entirely of practitioners from social service and domestic violence agencies which explicitly served the wider Jewish, as well as Orthodox Jewish, community.

Individuals selected for this study were found within the Northeastern United States, with a particular focus on the Greater Washington, D.C. area. Practitioners were recruited from online Jewish resources and public employee directories of relevant organizations, and with snowball sampling from those initial contacts in order to ensure that there were enough participants. The final sample consisted of three practitioners, including one social worker and two victim advocates. All three were Jewish women under the age of 50 years old. One participant identified as a Reform Jew, and the remaining two identified as Orthodox Jews. Two of the participants were based in the Greater Washington, D.C. area and worked for a domestic violence agency with specialized training around Jewish issues. However, the organization was not exclusive to Jewish victims and survivors. The third participant was based in the New York area and worked for an organization that specifically targeted the Orthodox Jewish community. Eligibility criteria required practitioners to have worked or engaged with the issue of IPV in the Orthodox Jewish community for at least 2 years to ensure they had the necessary level of insight into this population.

Procedures

Participants were recruited by email, after which an interview time was agreed upon at the convenience of the participant. Informed consent was received for the interview and its recording. In order to fully explore the subjective experiences of practitioners with IPV in the Orthodox Jewish world, semi-structured interviews were conducted over Zoom. The interviews each averaged 45 minutes. Recordings of the interviews were uploaded to a secure platform and later transcribed for analysis. Participants' data were anonymized through the use of unique identification numbers which were attached to each interview to ensure confidentiality.

Questions

A series of open-ended questions were asked of each practitioner to guide the interview. Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, follow-up probing questions were permitted. Questions were intended to capture the factors that impact the help-seeking behaviors of Orthodox Jewish victims of IPV. Several questions were drawn from the work of Ringel and Bina (2007).

Domains

The questions asked of practitioners were open-ended; however, several main domains were addressed. The driving inquiries centered on characteristics of IPV in the Orthodox Jewish community; what the typical help-seeking process looks like for Orthodox Jewish victims; barriers to help-seeking, both formal and informal; and what can be done to promote help-seeking among Orthodox Jews. These domains provide a well-rounded framework for understanding this multi-layered issue.

Analytic Strategy

Following the transcription of the interviews, thematic analysis was conducted, as patterns across interviews were identified and coded, primarily using deductive coding, with room to allow for other themes to emerge. Codes represented patterns across interviews, and these codes were eventually sorted into identified themes and sub-themes, which were categorized by relevant overarching domains.

Chapter 5: Results

Following interviews with practitioners, four broad domains were identified. These were 1. the characteristics of IPV in the Orthodox Jewish community, 2. the process of help-seeking, 3. barriers to help-seeking, and 4. promoting help-seeking. In each domain, a number of themes and sub-themes emerged, providing a deep insight into the multi-layered nature of IPV in the Orthodox Jewish community.

Characteristics of IPV in the Orthodox Jewish Community

Practitioners were questioned about their general perspectives on how IPV manifests in the Orthodox Jewish community, as well as how the community typically views and responds to IPV. Several characteristics unique to Orthodox Judaism were brought up by practitioners, providing a window into the community.

Prevalence

All three practitioners unanimously agreed that IPV occurred in the Orthodox Jewish community. According to one practitioner:

“I would say that my perspective is that it happens quite a bit, and that we hope our efforts can help that diminish.”

While no practitioner felt comfortable giving a numerical estimate on the rate of IPV within the community, one mentioned that she did not believe the rate varied much between Jewish denominations. When asked if any particular age group was over-represented among the Orthodox Jewish victims they served, one practitioner noted that she most often worked with younger married victims:

“I had a few clients who were all like married very young ... because either the marriage was sort of arranged in a sense, and they didn't, you know they're at a very young age, so

I've sort of witnessed it in that regard from a professional sense of treating it, and I think a lot of the folks I've worked with at [agency], who were part of the frum [religiously observant] world were probably like under 40, I would say.”

Another practitioner agreed that the 24-39 age bracket has the largest pool of victims, but all age groups, from 18 to over 60, are represented in the victims they serve. Therefore, all three interviews demonstrated the occurrence of IPV within the Orthodox Jewish community, with the bulk of the victims seeking services being younger, usually married, women.

Community attitudes

Attitudes held by the Orthodox Jewish community toward the concepts of IPV and abuse were mentioned by practitioners and were emphasized as highly influential for victims and other community members. A general tolerance for abuse among some subgroups of Orthodoxy was brought up by one practitioner, which she explained as:

“Willingness to ... just sort of accept it as marriage and sort of power through.”

Two practitioners discussed the community’s historic tendency not to openly talk about IPV and other sensitive issues, which, although improved, persists to the present day. One practitioner explained her attempt to place informational signs about IPV in the bathrooms of an Orthodox Jewish school as follows:

“When I first started, this was like 5 or 6 years ago now ... part of my internship was to go around to the different shuls [synagogues] and bring them our new bathroom signs that we had just redone and call places that didn't have them and like ask them if they'd be willing to hang them up or hand out our flyers, or whatever, and we couldn't ever get [Orthodox Jewish day school] to hang up our signs, I guess. Like, when I first came to [agency] that was historically a challenge. They just wouldn't put our signs up. And I kept trying really hard to get in touch with someone and I finally got in touch with someone who said I could bring them over. So I did. I dropped them off at the front desk like with the secretary. But I guess somebody at the school stopped it, so they never- they never actually made it into the girls' or boys' restrooms. So that was kind of an example of a little bit of a harder push against bringing us in, which, I guess, obviously reflects on talking about these issues. And historically, we've always had a really hard time.”

A similar anecdote was shared by a second practitioner, who described a colleague's past inability to introduce an IPV-related curriculum into an Orthodox Jewish high school. This practitioner noted, however, that the same school has since implemented a similar curriculum. She explained that this change was indicative of shifts within community attitudes:

“I definitely think that in the past, you know, 10 to 15 years, we've gotten a lot better as a community about being able to talk about it. But there's still plenty to be done.”

Overall, the lack of willingness to be transparent and forthright about issues of abuse and IPV among the Orthodox Jewish community was highlighted in each practitioner interview.

The Get process

Two practitioners brought up the Get and Jewish divorce proceedings as a unique factor implicated with IPV in Orthodox Jewish communities. One practitioner explained Get refusal as follows:

“Within the Orthodox Jewish community, to obtain a Jewish divorce, the husband has to be the one who actually gives the woman the divorce and allows them to be divorced through a Get- the Get process. Not having a Get prevents the woman from then being able to go and date, or potentially marry in the future, or just truly like break ties from the abuser. So that is, in my mind, that's like a mixture of civil and religious, like spiritual abuse, because it's- it is a divorce. But it is within Judaism.”

A second practitioner agreed that Get refusal was a salient issue in the community, which blends religious courts, known as Batei Din, with the secular legal system:

“I think there is often messaging of, ‘Jews handle Jewish issues,’ you know, which marriage is. It also happens to be, yeah, a secular legal issue. But we handle those in Jewish courts, and you know, the Beis Din system is zero percent integrated.”

Thus, Jewish divorce proceedings present a unique factor implicated with IPV in Orthodox Jewish communities. Get refusal is a relevant issue that combines religious and civil aspects and can prevent victims from fully breaking ties with their abusers.

The influence of gender roles

The relevance of the gender roles that are characteristic of Orthodox Judaism to IPV was mentioned by each practitioner. As summed up by one practitioner:

“We’re, you know people who just- you have a fairly gendered religion.”

Varying roles for men and women are typical in Orthodox communities, as explained by one practitioner:

“I have seen through my experiences a lot of times with the women that I work with who are part of the Orthodox Jewish community, taking care of their children, that is their primary role, having children and taking care of them is the thing that they need to do... There is that separation of like the breadwinner, the moneymaker versus the home caretaker, and that's a specific cultural piece that is- that comes up a lot in the work that I've done with clients.”

Another practitioner agreed, and connected disparate gender roles to Shalom Bayit:

“I don't necessarily think this is as common in more of the Modern Orthodox world, but in a more right-wing setting, I think there's often more of a concept to just... sort of like stick in your marriage, and for the wife to keep a nice home... very specific gender roles are often very common in some Orthodox dynamics. So yeah, like the wife is responsible for, like, keeping a peaceful home and Shalom Bayit, and these like broader concepts that we hear about.”

Practitioners explained that gender roles often guide the status of women within the larger community, as well as the home:

“Within Orthodoxy, in terms of customs, there's so many, I think, beautiful religious customs that are, you know, specific for women and specific for men. So I think both genders, definitely have... these beautiful customs that are specific for them that guide their lifestyle. And I think that does trickle into marriage. So I think, in particularly more

right-wing settings those gender roles become, like, more and more sort of strict and more deeply rooted in guiding, like, everything from just how the services go, like in my shul, we obviously sit separately, but there's a small Mechitza [partition], I can see through to the men's section. Whereas some shuls I've been to... you literally can't see the men's section, like you're totally walled off. So I think that itself shows that men's roles and women's roles are very, very different, and, like they each have their assigned sort of positions in some communities, and I think... anything can be beautiful, and it can also be twisted to cause harm.”

As mentioned by the above practitioner, the existence of the Mechitza, the barrier that separates men and women during prayer, reflects the separation between the sexes in Orthodox Judaism. All three practitioners discussed this separation, as well as the general expectations that this concept places on men and women within the Orthodox Jewish community. These differential gender roles can be influential for victims and contribute to how they conceptualize IPV.

Subgroups of Orthodoxy

Special care was taken to ensure that the Orthodox Jewish community was not assessed as a homogenous group; rather, practitioners were questioned about the disparate subgroups that constitute the whole. Two of the three practitioners were especially knowledgeable about these subgroups, and explicitly discussed the inherent inaccuracy of surveying the broader community without noting its distinct components:

“That's why it's so hard to answer questions that just say Orthodoxy because there's so many groups that are so different.”

The major distinction these two practitioners made within the overall Orthodox Jewish community was the Modern Orthodox vs. Ultra-Orthodox, or Haredi, divide. Both practitioners noted the increased challenge in outreach to Ultra-Orthodox communities:

“And historically, we've always had a really hard time. We've always had a strong relationship with [Modern Orthodox Jewish day school] for the most part, but, like the [Haredi Jewish day school] and some other shuls... that are leaning more towards the right-wing side of Orthodoxy, have definitely not really wanted to bring us in for any

type of training, or coming to our events, like there's just been a lot more push back, or maybe not returning our calls.”

However, both practitioners agreed that there was positive movement within more insular subgroups:

“Our education development has been able to go into [Haredi Jewish men’s college] for a men's program. So there's definitely, you know, movement. I would say that getting into the boys’ schools is something we're still working on... it's definitely harder to get into those programs, though again, I think there's been there's that movement.”

In terms of variance among Orthodox subgroups and help-seeking behaviors, one practitioner made sure to point out that she served victims from all across the spectrum of Orthodoxy:

“If I just think about like the call volume that we get, we're definitely getting calls across all spectrums of Judaism and Orthodoxy, all the way from your most modern, to Yeshivish, to Hasidic [sic].”

The second practitioner agreed, but added that some subgroups might be more readily inclined to seek help:

“I think in the Modern Orthodox community... people ... might be more willing to seek services than in a more right-wing setting.”

While the Modern Orthodox and Haredi subgroups of Orthodoxy were most prominently discussed among practitioners, they were not the only subgroups mentioned. One practitioner brought up certain subgroups that do not neatly fall into either category and are often overlooked:

“If we just look at the breakdown of, you know, Orthodoxy in Modern versus Yeshivish, you're missing part of the picture, which is that we've also been fairly successful at getting into communities like the Syrian community, we're working kind of on rebuilding some connections that we previously had that kind of tapered off with the Bucharian community, Persian community. So that also has kind of expanded in recent times.”

Overall, two out of three practitioners extensively discussed various subgroups in Orthodox Judaism and emphasized the necessity of breaking down “Orthodoxy” into smaller, more accurate categories in order to gain a genuine picture of the intricacies of the community.

The Process of Help-Seeking

The three-stage model of help-seeking consists of problem recognition, deciding to seek help, and selecting a provider, whether that be an informal, quasi-formal, or formal resource. Practitioners were asked about each aspect of this process in order to determine the application of the model to the Orthodox Jewish community.

Recognizing IPV

According to practitioners, the problem recognition stage of the help-seeking model is impacted by the unique characteristics of the Orthodox Jewish community. The lack of education and knowledge about IPV and the dynamics of abuse was cited by all three practitioners as a major impediment to this stage. As one practitioner explained:

“Individual situations are always going to vary, but just a common theme among some folks I've worked with- there is a lot of hesitancy to seek service, and then, I think there was an... eye-opening experience that some of the clients had when I worked with them, just when they started learning about abuse, like the psychoeducation that we can provide to help them understand, like the power and control dynamics that they were experiencing and the cycle of abuse, because we do so much education when we're working with our clients. So I think clearly they knew that there was something unhealthy or potentially abusive happening in their home. That's why they came to [agency] or somebody referred them to [agency]. But then there was so much to learn from us about, like all the different tactics that their spouse was using against them, and all the different examples of abuse that they were experiencing for so long that they didn't realize were abuse until we sort of help them realize it. So I think there's definitely like a- in my experience. There's been a lack of knowledge about power and control dynamics and abuse and sort of like roles in the home.”

Several practitioners noted the difficulty among Orthodox Jewish victims to differentiate between abusive, unhealthy behaviors and typical, healthy spousal conflicts:

“I think there is... a lack of education around intimate partner violence versus what is considered typical spousal... behaviors and ... so there's a lack of education around, there's abuse, and then there's just general spousal disputes and things.”

One practitioner pointed to the reluctance among Orthodox Jewish schools to educate students about IPV as one major reason why victims and other community members may not have an awareness of this issue. She referenced her colleague's inability to present an educational curriculum to an Orthodox Jewish school, as previously discussed:

“Because if we can think back to the fact that, like I said, it was, would have been 2010 when we couldn't get into the Modern Orthodox school with a source sheet-based curriculum. That means that people who were in high school in 2010 didn't have the language, and those are the people now who are probably married, young families, etc. And obviously, anyone older than that doesn't necessarily have the language ... But I think a lot of it does come back to language- I mean just lacking the language to make sense of their experience.”

Without an adequate grasp of the dynamics of IPV or the proper language to describe abuse, victims may be prevented from labeling their own experiences as abusive. One practitioner discussed the disorientation this can cause for victims:

“Yeah, I think there's a moment of doubt, of, is this actual intimate partner violence? Or is this just the struggles of being married? And I think there's a moment where the victim has to decide that this is too much for them to handle or is not what is typically expected in a relationship.”

Additionally, victims may be reluctant to classify a situation as abusive, and may refrain from using the term, sometimes even identifying another issue as the root cause of a dynamic, even after seeking help:

“And some people don't really want to share a lot, or you can tell that they don't really know how to articulate what's going on, but they're kind of implying that, like something unhealthy is happening, but they don't really want to label it as abuse.”

One practitioner shared that the Orthodox Jewish victims she works with sometimes describe an abusive dynamic as really being a Shalom Bayit, or another non-IPV issue, particularly if the abuse in question is not physical:

“We see so often that survivors wish it was a Shalom Bayit issue, even if they intellectually maybe know it's not, because then it could be fixed...I think that there's still- despite, you know, the tremendous movement with, you know, education and awareness that all types of abuse are abuse, people will still call and say “I'm not sure if you're the right place for me, because I'm not being abused.” And then, as we talk, you know, it'll become clear that they're not experiencing physical violence ... but other types ... So I think that is a factor that is really confusing to people, and also just means that when they come to us, we kind of balance, when is it appropriate to provide the language that might actually be very validating? And when would that language be overwhelming to introduce? ... You know, I think we definitely hear a lot of people who come in describing anger issues, or describing ... a clear textbook cycle of abuse- escalation, you know, calm phase, you know, all of that. All the factors will be there, but because they don't have- they lack the language.”

Overall, the accounts of practitioners demonstrated a clear lack of awareness among Orthodox Jewish community members of the dynamics and patterns of IPV. Even when a victim is aware that a relationship is atypical, and that “something is wrong,” they may have trouble labeling it as abuse and may use another designation to describe the problem. Often, accurate recognition and labeling of IPV only occurs once a victim has discussed the situation with an external resource, and perhaps received psychoeducation around abuse. As described by practitioners, Orthodox Jewish victims often choose to seek help concurrently with, or prior to, accurate and complete problem recognition. Clearly, the lack of education and understanding in the Orthodox Jewish community inhibits proper independent recognition of IPV among victims.

Informal help-seeking

The challenge of definitively labeling IPV may propel victims toward seeking help from informal sources, such as friends and family. One practitioner discussed the challenge that comes with identifying as a victim of IPV:

“I think when you seek help through friends just in more casual conversation or unofficial channels ... you don't feel like you have to identify as a victim or survivor, you're not officially becoming a client. You're not officially receiving services from some type of domestic violence program. You're just sort of seeking advice and resources, and I think that that's what makes it more comforting because I think that's a big piece of it. Like identifying- for anyone, in any community, identifying as a victim is really hard. And I think I've seen that in the Orthodox world, that's a big challenge, is nobody wants to identify as a victim. So it doesn't feel that way if you just sort of have a casual conversation, and, like, seek resources from friends.”

The same practitioner noted that among the Orthodox Jewish victims she had served, informal help-seeking was extremely common, especially initially:

“I think people are going to be much more willing to sort of go to their friends, or like personal support system for advice and support before, you know, going to a place like a family justice center, or, you know, and getting a protective order- they're gonna probably take more of an insular support system as opposed to using community resources.”

A second practitioner agreed that informal help-seeking was common but noted that this did not occur across the board. She saw many initial help-seeking efforts directed toward rabbis within the community. This sentiment was corroborated by another practitioner:

“I have seen people turn to their rabbis or other leaders within their specific community, either within their synagogue or the congregation.”

The idea that many Orthodox Jewish victims turn to their rabbis for informal help-seeking was echoed by another practitioner, who explained why victims may turn to rabbis:

“We definitely see people who've gone to rabbis... because oftentimes, you know, especially, you know, in certain communities, the rabbi is kind of the everything, right? You go to your rabbi if you're struggling in your marriage, go to your rabbi if you're

emotionally struggling, struggling because of fertility issues, you go to your rabbi if you're struggling with financials-like the rabbi often fills all those roles ... So I think Rabbis in so many communities, from the Modern all the way to Hasidic [sic], and you know, and everything in between, are seen as a source of support.”

The response these victims got was mixed; all three practitioners discussed positive experiences that they or the victims they served had undergone with rabbis. One brought up a client’s experience with her rabbi after disclosing her IPV victimization:

“[T]he rabbi was always willing to help the client with ... around one of the High Holy days, helping with a meal, because the client was still going to services, and for her, it was easy enough to avoid the abuser. But for the meals afterwards, it was typically like she would have had it at home with her husband. So the rabbi made sure that she had a place to go. And so ... that was a really beautiful moment of the rabbi kind of taking control and taking care of how to be supportive. So that was really wonderful.”

Other practitioners explained how some supportive rabbis had encouraged victims to seek more formal services, such as the agencies where the practitioners themselves worked:

“Yes, we've so from the professional perspective we've had rabbis call [agency] with their client a handful of times, like, they'll call us on speaker phone, and the client is, or the congregant is sitting there. And because the congregant knew that they wanted to seek help, but they were sort of like scared to call us alone- it's scary to call a service provider alone, you know- so I've seen rabbis who have been amazing, and sat with the client, and they've been the one to first speak to say, you know, ‘Hi, I have this congregant with me. She could really benefit from your services. I just think she needs [agency]. I'm not sure exactly what help she needs specifically, but I know that she needs [agency]’s help. Can you talk to her?’ ... We definitely have worked with lots of people in the community that are very proactive and wanting to make sure that they have the appropriate language to help congregants when they come to them because I've had rabbis admit that they don't know what to say about IPV. And they don't really know how to advise them, or what type of support to give. So they want to learn.”

The lack of knowledge among rabbinical leadership about IPV, as noted by the previous practitioner, was a commonly discussed topic in all three interviews. Practitioners described having rabbis admit to them that they didn’t know what to say in response to a disclosure of abuse; one practitioner’s personal rabbi told her that he had hardly received any formal

rabbinical training on topics of abuse and IPV. As a result, rabbis may rely on other tools they have at their disposal and may come at this issue from inappropriate angles, as explained by one practitioner:

“But I think any rabbi, you know, barring having additional training, is going to go at this from a Shalom Bayit angle. That's their framework. That's what they know. And so that can be incredibly dangerous. They can often provide very harmful guidance because it's just not- it's not their area of expertise, and they just don't know what they don't know.”

Perhaps this lack of understanding contributes to the sorely lacking responses many victims receive when they turn to their rabbis for support. One practitioner shared a frequent response victims she works with receive from their rabbis:

“I had a client who told me her rabbi advised her not to separate from her partner. So there is definitely, unfortunately, because it pains me to give these examples, common situations that I've at least seen with, unfortunately, clergy for sure. Rabbis telling congregants, you know, just sort of power through it, work through it, come to marital counseling, but not to leave their partner, yeah.”

She went on to recount a particularly disturbing story that had happened to one client:

“We had a client a long, long time ago when I first started, who was in an abusive marriage. And she had been sort of like seeking help from the rabbi. The rabbi knew, and some sort of violent incident happened. I think it was on Sukkot [Jewish holiday], so she took her kids and walked to the rabbi's house just to get out of her house and go somewhere safe. And the rabbi basically told her like, how could you leave your husband alone on Sukkot?”

While two practitioners described the most common negative reactions from rabbis as normalization and downplaying of abuse, one practitioner disagreed:

“I've seen less of the rabbi saying that this is a normal thing that you would have to put up with, and more of them being passive about it ... And that, I think can be just as damaging ... saying like, ‘This isn't something that- you know, I'm not going to deal with this. So go figure it out somewhere else.’”

The negative responses victims often receive from rabbis, as disclosed by all three practitioners, can prevent victims from engaging in further help-seeking:

“[I]f a victim goes to a rabbi and says that they're being abused, or that they have concerns, if that rabbi then says, ‘This is normal. This is just part of being in a marriage. This is something that you have to deal with in order to get through it, make your marriage stronger,’ then there's that moment of, ‘Well, who am I as not a rabbi to say otherwise? If the rabbi, who has studied all of the texts and all of the traditions and history says that this is okay, what am I, as someone who might not have done that, or is maybe new to the community, who am I to say otherwise?’ So it can prevent victims from reaching out to support systems that would then ... say that this is not correct ... and there are ways to either remedy the situation or leave the situation.”

Informal help-seeking as carried out by Orthodox Jewish victims of IPV is a common practice and is often the initial action step a victim takes. Reaching out to friends, family, or community members is typical, as is seeking support from rabbis. However, practitioners disclosed that the reaction to the disclosure of abuse was often undermining and dangerous, leaving victims without the support they were seeking.

Quasi-formal help-seeking

Practitioners were also asked about Orthodox Jewish victims seeking help from quasi-formal sources, such as social service agencies, shelters, and hotlines. They shared that historically, agencies have struggled to connect with Orthodox Jewish communities, especially as pertains to IPV:

“I think there's becoming an increasingly better relationship in terms of providing social services in the frum [religious] world for all types of needs, but not as much with IPV. So I think like in general, I think some folks in the more right-wing world are working with nonprofits a little bit more than they may have previously. But I think IPV- working with IPV survivors, even in a social services setting, is still- like we're still getting there. We're still trying to build our roots and get people to feel more comfortable coming to us.”

As a result, practitioners reported that victims are less likely to initially seek services from quasi-formal sources. Rather, these avenues are sought when initial help-seeking, often informal, proved unsuccessful or insufficient. As one practitioner shared:

“And then, if [informal help-seeking] does not either provide like relief for them or if that lay leader or rabbi or person says this is something that we need to go outside for, then I see people, victims, reaching out to external agencies, whether it's [agency] or other religion-specific or just generally trauma-informed places. So it's- I definitely have seen it as a ‘Stay within your community, don't tell outsiders what's going on unless it's absolutely necessary,’ and then using resources and referrals from inside of the community than going out to someone else to say ‘I need help with this.’”

As noted by the above practitioner, victims in the Orthodox Jewish community are more interested in seeking services from culturally specific agencies. A practitioner who works at an agency specifically focused on the Orthodox community offered an explanation:

“By and large, the survivors who reach out to us who are interested in some sort of ongoing support exclusively want that support within the community. They want a frum therapist, they want a frum therapy clinic. They want a space that they don't have to then teach their therapist, teach their group facilitator about mikvah, about what Shabbat meals look like about, you know, any of that, and I would say that's a key distinction.”

Victims prefer quasi-formal resources that are familiar with their needs and don't need to be educated about culturally and religiously significant concepts and practices. As a result, practitioners noted that Orthodox Jewish victims turn to culturally-specific resources more than general agencies.

Formal help-seeking

The most extreme help-seeking option a victim can take is involving law enforcement. All three practitioners emphasized that Orthodox Jewish victims are typically opposed to this form of help-seeking, and avoid it except in the most extreme of circumstances:

“I think that there are so many people who reach out that have absolutely no interest in calling 911. It feels very uncomfortable to many of the survivors ... most people that call [hotline], that would not be something they would automatically think about. We obviously communicate to people that in an imminent danger ... we are not the right place to call. Sometimes people would rather call Shomrim or Hatzalah than 911 as well, even though they obviously are different.”

The reluctance toward seeking formal help was noted by all practitioners, especially among more right-wing, Haredi communities. As explained in the previous quotation, victims may instead choose to utilize the services of community-specific groups, such as Shomrim, an Orthodox Jewish community patrol, or Hatzalah, an Orthodox Jewish volunteer-based ambulance service. Practitioners explained that victims in this community are reluctant to turn to secular authorities for a multitude of reasons; one reason given was stigma from these outside sources:

“The assumptions that I have seen or heard clients talk about as reasons why they don't want to go through more formal or bigger sources is that they think that law enforcement will think that they're ... uneducated.”

Finally, one practitioner brought up the idea that victims may not be comfortable involving law enforcement without asking a rabbi if the action was appropriate:

“I think there's you know, a lot of people who would only do it if they asked a Sheila [question] first. So I would say, there's tremendous hesitation there ... most people who reach out are more, you know, more hesitant to use those resources.”

There are a variety of reasons why victims may avoid formal help-seeking; turning to secular authorities is often a last resort for victims who feel trapped or physically endangered.

Barriers to Help-Seeking

The third domain was centered around barriers to help-seeking for Orthodox Jewish victims of IPV. A wide array of barriers was discussed, including general barriers that can affect

victims from all communities, and barriers that are specific to victims from the Orthodox Jewish community.

General barriers

When questioned about barriers that prevent Orthodox Jewish victims from help-seeking, practitioners reported many barriers that are found in the general population of victims as well.

For instance, the complex emotions that factor into disclosing abuse were touched on by one practitioner:

“You obviously have the internal pieces of that, right, people love their abusers, and that is well documented, and people, you know, have hope that they will change, and all of those things are certainly just as present in the Orthodox community as any community.”

Connected to this, two of the practitioners discussed the victims’ desire to shield the abuser from harm, especially in jurisdictions with mandatory arrest laws:

“[S]he wants to get out. She doesn't want to be experiencing this anymore. She wants help, but she definitely doesn't want to report him, she doesn't want to get the police involved. She doesn't want him to get arrested, doesn't want him to lose his job, you know, doesn't want anything bad to happen to him legally. She just wants to not be harmed anymore. So I think that's- and I've seen that in other dynamics with clients overall, but definitely with Orthodox clients, like wanting to leave the abusive situation but you don't want your partner or ex-partner to go to jail. You don't want them to lose their job, you know, you don't want them to have legal ramifications. You just want to feel safe.”

Some of these general barriers were exacerbated by cultural considerations in the Orthodox Jewish community, such as the common fear among victims of losing custody of their children:

“Most of the time the women that I've worked with don't have income. They don't have their own jobs, so they don't want to go to a social services agency because they're worried about their children being taken away from them because they aren't the ones who have the income to support the children.”

Financial barriers related to not having an income were frequently brought up by practitioners; these were especially salient given that community gender norms often relegate women to the home:

“[S]ome of the extra barriers... certainly, in certain communities, you know, and, generally speaking, the further the right you get, whether the women have any marketable skills or work experience...”

These economic barriers faced by victims were heightened by the unique financial burden posed by Orthodox Jewish practice:

“And also just if you think about right, you know, financial considerations- Jewish day school, kosher meat, makes a standard income disappear very quickly ... that person may not be able to afford leaving in a way that they might otherwise.”

Another general barrier discussed by practitioners was a lack of support from family, friends, and the community:

“So what I see a lot with the friends and family approach is that they know both parties. They know both the victim and the abuser, and so they have their own idea of what's going on in the house. They know the history between the couple. They know them individually ... so it adds an extra layer of the other- the friends and family know the abuser, and they say, ‘Oh, but he can't possibly be like that. They can't possibly be doing something like this,’ or, ‘Oh, maybe, but that's just part of it. You all will get through it.’ There's- it's again that stigma ... So there's the personal side of it, of- they're not- the support system isn't able to separate the victim from what's actually happening.”

As with economic factors, this barrier is often amplified by the attitudes present in the Orthodox Jewish world:

“You know any of the stereotypes of like- the person is, we have a lot of people who are, who are abusers, who are very active, and they're Hatzalah volunteers, they're a Gabbai [prayer coordinator], they're on the Shul board, they're this, they're that. And I think, because of the way our community has some of those very- we're built around Chesed [good deeds], we're, you know, we're built around people donating and dedicating their time and money. And I think that you know, people have a lot of trouble understanding how somebody could be all of those things and abusive at home.”

As explained by the above practitioner, many victims are not believed upon disclosure of IPV victimization, and the stereotype that Jewish men, particularly those involved in the community, do not abuse their wives persists. This, along with other general barriers, prevents Orthodox Jewish victims from seeking help. Intra-communal factors can exacerbate many of these barriers, making help-seeking even more difficult, as summed up by one practitioner:

“I think that right, somebody who has access to funds, supportive money, supportive family, a community that can handle right a single parent, it's going to be much easier. It's not going to be easy, [but] it's going to be much easier.”

Overall, practitioner interviews revealed numerous general barriers that prevent Orthodox Jewish victims from seeking help, all of which are common among victims in other communities as well. However, cultural considerations within this population, such as intra-communal attitudes and gender roles, can exacerbate these barriers, making it more challenging for these victims to seek the support they need.

Community-specific barriers

Compounding the general barriers that Orthodox Jewish victims face when attempting to seek support are a number of hurdles that are specific to their unique community. When discussing this set of barriers with practitioners, two classifications arose: cultural barriers and religious barriers.

Cultural barriers

One major cultural barrier widely discussed by practitioners was stigma, both from within and outside of the Orthodox Jewish community. One practitioner emphasized that victims she worked with were apprehensive about seeking help from extra-communal resources for fear of being stereotyped:

“It all goes back to the stigma and the assumptions that outside agencies might have, especially around the Orthodox Jewish community... And a lot of this is like the cultural side of the Orthodox Jewish community, but that in and of itself is then a barrier to going to the formal places for assistance, because they have their own set of rules and regulations, and expectations for survivors, victims, or caregivers. And if someone doesn't reach those, then they might not be helped, or they might be looked down upon. And the worst thing that someone can do is ask a victim, you know, ‘Why didn't you leave earlier,’ or, ‘Why are you letting this happen,’ when in culturally specific communities they have their own customs and reasoning behind things.”

Victims do not only encounter stigma when seeking help outside of their community; abuse, divorce, and other related topics are often looked down upon within these spaces. According to one practitioner:

“It takes a lot for them to reach out for assistance, especially because there is the stigma, I think, around divorce or separation, or just understanding that a marriage is not going to be perfect.”

Upon disclosing IPV victimization, a victim may be shunned or outcast from their community, as described by the same practitioner:

“One of the major [barriers] that I've seen as well, is just having the community kind of turn against the victim, or look at the victim in a different way, because ... typically within congregations themselves, as well as specific synagogues, it is already a close-knit community. So if one person makes an allegation against another person, or if an abuser says, ‘Oh, the victim's trying to split up the family,’ then that can create a stigma or some judgment around the victim, and then they don't feel safe or comfortable being in their own synagogue or their own congregation.”

A second practitioner added that the strongly ingrained importance placed on marriage within the community can contribute to pressure on victims to remain quiet in the face of abuse:

“[U]pholding the value of marriage is something that I've seen uniquely in the Jewish community, and that for sure exists in other cultures, absolutely. I think we all know that. But like from my experience, I've mostly seen it in my work with Orthodox clients.”

A primary concern for victims of IPV is the effect that this communal stigma can have on their children:

“Shanda [disgrace] or shame- I think there's a lot of feelings of worry when it comes to just what that will mean for their status- theirs and their children, I think.”

One major impediment noted by a practitioner involved the Shidduch system, a matchmaking system used within Orthodox Jewish communities, in which the reputation of a family can play a large role in an individual's marriage prospects. As a result, taboo topics like divorce and abuse can be extremely detrimental:

“A lot of the messaging that becomes internal is also coming from the community right? So messaging about whether or not their kids will be at a disadvantage when it's time to get married, in the Shidduch world, whether it's a concern of who's going to sit with my kid on the other side of the Mechitza [partition]. So whether it's- it can start about, “What will people think about me?” Whether it's like all of those factors, are both external and internal. They're external, in that they're messaging that's coming from the community or the family or friends. And then they become internal as people start to process and explore what that would, how that would impact their choices ... The Shidduch piece is a big one. I think people are tremendously concerned, that, you know, their children would be disadvantaged coming from a home that had had domestic violence.”

Community messaging around IPV and divorce is especially significant given the level of sex segregation inherent to Orthodox Jewish practice, particularly in more right-wing communities.

A single-parent household does not neatly fit into this strict mold, as described by one practitioner:

“I think the kind of unique features are the way that the community maybe doesn't make such great space for people who are survivors ... I think one of the things we often talk about is how there are certain simple changes that some communities have been better about than others around, like father-son [Torah] learning versus parent-child learning, and who gets to go to those activities and those events versus you know, a son who is Bar Mitzvah who does not have a father who is active in that part of their life, doesn't have somebody to sit next to when they go to shul. So I think a lot of those things come into play in a way that don't in maybe less gendered communities.”

Previously discussed cultural barriers for Orthodox Jewish victims include the lack of education around IPV and discouragement from rabbis to address IPV. Both of these barriers were addressed by all three practitioners; the impact the latter attitude can have on victims' help-seeking behavior was described by one practitioner:

“So there's- being a rabbi in the community is such an important position, and that can really determine if someone says, ‘I deserve this,’ or, ‘This is something that is just normal, and I need to deal with it,’ versus, ‘This is not normal, and I deserve better,’ and then working towards a solution for whatever that might look like for them.”

Cultural barriers for Orthodox Jewish victims reflect the double bind of stigma experienced by minority victims; stigma surrounds them on all sides, deterring help-seeking behaviors.

Religious barriers

As Orthodox Jewish religious practices permeate all aspects of daily life, it is unsurprising that help-seeking efforts are impacted by religious considerations for victims in this community. One such religious barrier universally described by practitioners was Shalom Bayit:

“[Shalom Bayit] is ... a big tenant, really, that a lot of the clients I've worked with have talked about, and it always comes up of, ‘I want to have peace in my home. And yet how can I, if this is how I'm feeling?’ And so a lot of the work that I've done with clients is figuring out, how can we help them attain that while also keeping them safe ... that has been a way that abusers have been able to keep abusing their victims, while also preventing them from reaching out for help. Because it's that idea that if we can't have Shalom Bayit, then there's something wrong with you, the victim, and you need to be the one who makes this happen versus the abuser doing the actual abuse.”

One practitioner added that victims often contemplate if leaving their abuser is a violation of Shalom Bayit:

“I think it comes back to the same piece about kind of, how does Shalom Bayit fit into this conversation, because there's this question of, ‘Am I breaking up a family if I make that phone call?’”

A similar religious barrier that may prevent victims from disclosing abuse is Lashon Hara. While one practitioner had not seen this concept come up with victims, the other two agreed that it was a prime concern they had come across in their work. One explained why this seemingly simple concept was so impactful for victims:

“I think that goes into like all these concepts like, why you wouldn't want to report, or why you might not want to talk to social services. Yeah, like I think it sounds sometimes silly for other service providers to hear it if they don't understand, like, the deep, the deep-rooted significance of Lashon Hara, like when you grow up hearing that as such a serious thing, because it's hard to translate that to some other folks who haven't grown up in the Orthodox community because it's not like- it's not just gossip. It's like this deep-rooted concept of speaking ill of your own people. Yeah. So I think we definitely have had clients also, who, even though they're seeking services, they might not be as open about the details of what has happened, which, obviously people don't need to tell us every detail. But some folks come to us, and they're extremely forthcoming with information, right? And they tell us every graphic detail of every incident that's happened. And then, like I'm thinking of one Orthodox client I worked with, like, I don't think I ever knew any details of what happened. I obviously knew there was IPV happening, or she wouldn't have come to [agency], and that she needed- she was in the process of leaving her husband and needed assistance. But, like she never talked about what actually went on in the home, and I think that probably goes to Lashon Hara. And it probably also just goes to privacy, like just keeping things that happen in your home very private between you and your partner. Yeah, I think like privacy in general, like Lashon Hara for sure, but also just keeping things very private.”

Another practitioner described the ways in which Lashon Hara can be a barrier against disclosing IPV:

“I think that people do worry about kind of what they are allowed to say, what they're not allowed to say, even a survivor about their own partner may worry that they can't speak ... about their partner ... Lashon Hara definitely comes up as, ‘I can't speak to my friend about this, because I'm speaking Lashon Hara.’”

Thus, Lashon Hara can prevent victims from reporting abuse both to support systems within the community and to outside resources. Help-seeking from external agencies becomes more complicated when victims consider Mesirah:

“I definitely think that you know the concept of Mesirah, as much as it maybe is less prevalent, you know, in outspoken language now than it was, maybe, you know, 10, 20, 30 years ago, is still a thread that runs through things. And the idea, right, that people don't want to involve secular authorities.”

Two out of three practitioners discussed Mesirah and the hesitation among Orthodox Jews to turn to law enforcement as an additional religious barrier to help-seeking. One practitioner described the use of this concept for situations of child abuse, and explained how this in turn has carried over into attitudes about IPV reporting within the community:

“I definitely think that also the entire kind of idea of child welfare has had, you know, there's been a lot of, over time, rabbis, who have kind of come out and said like, ‘You can't do that without checking with an authority first’ ... so obviously I can appreciate that hesitancy as well.”

More practical, lifestyle-related barriers may also come up for Orthodox Jewish victims who are considering whether, and how, to seek help. These considerations were brought up more often by the two non-New York-based practitioners, where culturally specific shelters and resources are less readily available. For instance, the necessity of having access to Kosher food and being able to observe Shabbat in a shelter environment was stressed by these two practitioners:

“There's so many [considerations], like, sometimes I feel like it can almost feel like a different religion, like if you work with, you know if you're working with someone who's Orthodox versus someone who might identify as like Reform or something. It can be so different, like the dietary code or dietary restrictions, is a huge factor like when we're working with clients who might need to be in a shelter, or they need food assistance and they need, you know, grocery store gift cards. If somebody's eating kosher, only kosher food like we're gonna want to make sure that they have a gift card to [kosher grocery store] or a local kosher grocery store. Kosher food is a lot more expensive, you know. We might want to provide them with a little more financial assistance for food, because, like a \$50 [kosher grocery store] gift card, honestly doesn't go as far as a \$50 Giant gift card. Staying in a shelter- you can't eat the food at the shelter if it's not kosher right? So like even just that piece alone is a huge difference from like a victim advocacy perspective. So from my professional perspective, when we're helping people with like basic needs and relocation assistance, there are a lot of factors that are different, like food. Just the religious observances- like Shabbat. Like a [county] women's domestic violence shelter, isn't Shomer [observant] Shabbat friendly. There's so many pieces that when you dig

deeper into all the different religious customs of an observant or Orthodox Jew, it makes you understand why they might not be as willing to seek services from like social service agencies or shelters, or other nonprofits . . . if you start to understand all the customs that are guiding an everyday life of an Orthodox Jew, it kind of makes sense like why it is harder to seek services from like secular organizations or even Jewish nonprofits that don't understand Orthodoxy because there's so many aspects that literally guide every single thing that you do every day- food and dress and holidays and Shabbat, and all these different things like- I don't know I can go on in more detail, but I know you know all these things. But I think like that's the biggest thing that stands out to me. I think, like food and Shabbat, and also ways of dressing, because when you need resources, you might you know go to a clothing center or be staying in a shelter, they're helping provide you with clothing and stuff, but they might not have, you know, modest clothing or things like that.”

Another practitioner discussed the challenge of housing relocation after leaving one’s abuser.

Since Orthodox Jewish communities often exist in physically close-knit neighborhoods, it can be challenging for a victim to find new housing where they can walk to their synagogue on Shabbat:

“[T]here are a number of communities where even the Jewish institutions don't have any shelter or kind of- they have grants and waivers, and funding from the government to rehouse survivors. But there's not a single place within a Jewish community, within walking distance to the shul for that person to use those vouchers and the waivers, so that also, you know, is another factor of just like ‘If I leave I have to- I have to leave the community.’”

The final religious consideration brought up by practitioners was the Jewish divorce process and Get refusal. As discussed with the first domain, Jewish women remain legally attached to their husbands without a Get, and Jewish law prevents them from remarrying or having children with another man. Get refusal and the fear of becoming an Agunah were discussed by two practitioners:

“[A]nother big piece is the Get, right? People are worried that they're going to get stuck as an agunah.”

The reluctance among Jewish courts, or Batei Din, to comprehensively address this issue or coordinate responses with each other became a source of confusion and consternation among survivors:

“So the fact that there isn't more coordination among Batei Din among which ones understand domestic violence, and which ones don't, how people pick what, you know, what Bais Din, I think until that has settled, I think there's a lot of challenge there, because there are, you know- so much of help-seeking is a legal question, right? What happens to my children if I separate? What happens to my finances if I separate? What happens to my house? If I separate will I be stuck in this community because I have to stay close to my abuser? Those are all legal questions.”

Interviews with all three practitioners painted a comprehensive picture of the complex, interlaced barriers that can prevent victims from reporting abuse and seeking support. In addition to the general types of barriers that impact victims, Orthodox Jewish victims must navigate an array of religious and culturally specific barriers.

Promoting Help-Seeking

The final domain focused on changes that could be made to improve help-seeking and reporting behaviors among Orthodox Jewish victims of IPV. Three major themes were prominent in practitioners' responses.

The role of education

The one theme that was present in each interview was the importance of education in promoting help-seeking behaviors. Each practitioner agreed that increased IPV education among the Orthodox Jewish community was an essential element of creating change:

“[G]eneral education within the community, both from a young age, and then also for adults, of what is ... the difference between being in a marriage that might not be the happiest, or might have their own struggles, versus being in an intimate partner violent relationship, like there- there is a difference, and sometimes that difference is minute.

And it's hard to tell. But there are typically going to be signs of when a relationship is abusive, versus when it's just, maybe not the right relationship. Or maybe there are hurdles that people have to go through. So, having that education both in real-time, and then preventative education around what a healthy relationship does look like is, I think, going to be the most beneficial.”

The idea of preventative education was emphasized by another practitioner who discussed implementing educational curricula in Jewish day schools:

“[W]e really hope that maybe not next year, maybe not in 10 years, but our Education Department, like the more that we go into high schools, the more that people have the language 10, 20 years from now that they just don't right now ... So the hope is that, right, as people who have had access to the education go through their next phases of their life, hopefully, that will start to change. But I think a lot of it does come back to language- I mean just lacking the language to make sense of their experience. So I think that that is, you know hopefully, you know, what our Education Department will continue to be successful with. I think when people have the language to make sense of it, they then have a better idea of where to turn and what to say when they seek help. People know about- you know, generally, [agency] in our history has done a pretty good job with marketing. But I think also people- again, this idea of what does abuse mean? They'll be like, 'Oh, yeah, you're the abuse hotline,' but they don't necessarily know what, what-who makes sense to call that?”

One practitioner noted that this education should ideally be created with the cultural and religious nuances of the Orthodox Jewish community in mind. As she explained, any curricula and training programs should be culturally sensitive:

“[E]ducation ... would be more ... curated to someone who's part of the Orthodox Jewish community, versus general education around the cycle of violence and power and control. It's different because it would be specifically for the Orthodox Jewish community.”

Finally, another practitioner discussed the need to educate clergy as well as the general community:

“So I really think education is the biggest thing ... at the end of the day it's always going to boil down to educating, not just communities, but it- particularly like the leaders of the community, so the clergy in particular ... I think honestly training the leaders and training the Rabbis and Rebbetzins of the community would be a huge, like, would make a tremendous impact ... giving them more, not just knowledge, but the skills to help, to

actually provide assistance to congregants, and like the language to use to be supportive and appropriate.”

The necessity of increased and improved education around IPV was a major theme and avenue of change for practitioners. Preventative, as-needed, and clergy-specific education were all brought up as essential methods of promoting the help-seeking and reporting of IPV within the community.

Change in the community

The second realm in which practitioners believed change could be made was the Orthodox Jewish community itself. This theme was only discussed by the two Orthodox-identifying practitioners. The need for this community to listen to and make space for victims and survivors of IPV was stressed; one practitioner believed that this shift would be most effective if initiated by rabbis:

“I really do think that a lot of it starts with clergy speaking about the issue, or clergy bringing us in for trainings. We did a training, maybe like 2 years ago, it was sometime during the pandemic, with a couple of shuls in [city] like [shul], and then a couple other places joined in on the program, and the rabbi started it off and led this beautiful sort of like prayer, and he talked about healing for victims. It was really beautiful. And then we came in and did a training. And then, after that training, a lot of folks who attended reached out to us, like they sent an email to our support email, or they called us either just telling us, thanking us for the training and letting us know that they had experienced victimization in the past, or that they had a friend who was experiencing it, and they were going to tell their friend to call us. It seemed like once the rabbi, you know, introduced us and brought us in, the whole community came together to listen to us and sort of take our work seriously. The congregants felt more comfortable with us, because, like if the rabbi brought us in, they were sure that they could trust us. So yeah, I think, like it really does start with clergy ... in the Orthodox world, rabbis and rebbetzins like, you know, bringing us in and making the introduction ... if the leaders better understand how to not just provide support when clients come forward, but make their shuls more of an open space, like if they talk about this openly, people are going to feel comfortable talking about it.”

As explained by the second practitioner, this evolution in community attitudes and behaviors could have a significant impact on victim help-seeking:

“[I]f people feel safe in their communities ... they'll definitely feel more safe calling an anonymous hotline. If they are made to feel inferior, that they haven't been believed, that they have no hope, that they're kind of helpless, then they may feel like there's nothing added in calling the hotline. So I think it really does speak to just the awareness, the understanding, of what the community can do.”

Part of this development, according to the same practitioner, includes addressing some of the community-specific barriers faced by victims, such as Get refusal and the difficulty of navigating sex-segregated spaces as a single parent:

“I think also if we just naturally eliminate some of the barriers like we talked about, right? How does the community react to a single parent? How does, you know, how do Batei Din react when there is an issue of Get withholding? How do, you know, people treat the legal system? ... If we can change some of those values, those kinds of messaging in the community, I think people will be- it'll be much easier for people to seek help, to make that decision to seek help.”

While the previous practitioner placed a large degree of responsibility for changing communal standards and attitudes at the feet of rabbinical leadership, another practitioner believed individual members of the community held just as much of an obligation to make a change:

“Who is the community? It's made up of individuals, right? And I think that we can both balance, right, it's the responsibility of the community- there's power in community. But the community is made up of individuals, and we can also hide behind the community, right? So I think, when it comes to ... if one person has an idea of how to make something more inclusive, or more safe for survivors, can that person speak up? If they have, are they received right by other individuals who have power to make changes? That change kind of has to happen, top-down and bottom-up ... we don't want to lose the individual in the community, and we don't want to lose the community in individuals, but really being able to see how those need to coexist, right? The individuals that make up the community need to be able to be received, and the community as a whole needs to be able to make those changes.”

Thus, change in the community's behavior and attitudes toward IPV can become change in a victim's help-seeking behavior.

Change among service providers

The final theme related to promoting help-seeking behaviors among victims centered on service providers themselves. Two out of the three practitioners discussed this area and largely focused on providing culturally informed and community-specific care. One practitioner noted that even agencies and organizations focused on serving the Jewish community can lack the proper knowledge and resources needed to best support the Orthodox community:

“I think when I first came to [agency] I was very drawn by the fact that we were a Jewish organization, but we weren't really doing much work in the Orthodox community ... and that's why, like, on a personal note, at [agency] I've tried to do a lot of education around the Orthodox world, because even though we're a Jewish agency, we haven't had a lot of staff that have, you know, grown up, or have a lot of personal experience in the Orthodox community.”

Both practitioners agreed that since Orthodox Jewish victims are more comfortable with and prefer to seek help from culturally specific agencies, having more of these service providers would do a great deal to promote help-seeking:

“[O]ne of the big things is having culturally humble agencies around. [Agency] is really incredible and unique in that we are a Jewish agency so we have the education and the service providers with personal history within the Orthodox Jewish community, so having more agencies, in- especially in places that are hubs for the Orthodox community would be, I think, really helpful and beneficial to just promoting asking for help because having a service provider who's culturally humble can make the world of a difference.”

The two practitioners who discussed service providers mentioned the need for more culturally specific agencies, as well as increased cultural competence and education among existing providers.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Findings and Implications

The aim of this study was to investigate the help-seeking behaviors of Orthodox Jewish victims of IPV, with a particular focus on the process of help-seeking and the common barriers that these victims face. Research centered on this community's experiences with IPV and subsequent help-seeking is limited, preventing a comprehensive understanding of the barriers faced by Orthodox Jewish victims from being achieved. Interviews with practitioners in this area shed light on a variety of research questions, including the relevance of the three-stage model of help-seeking to this community, the timeline of help-seeking, and the influence of general versus culturally specific barriers.

One major finding relates to the applicability of the three-stage model of help-seeking to the Orthodox Jewish community, particularly in relation to the first stage of the model, problem recognition. Whereas in the model, problem recognition typically refers to correctly labeling abuse as abuse, directly leading into the second stage of deciding to seek help, this step is less clear-cut for Orthodox Jewish victims (Liang et al. 2005). Practitioners noted that these victims routinely have trouble making sense of IPV in a way that non-Orthodox Jewish victims often did not; they mentioned the difficulty of distinguishing between abusive and non-abusive conflict, as well as an almost total lack of knowledge of IPV and its dynamics. In addition, the reluctance to identify as a victim appears to be distinctly salient in this community, which may contribute to decreased or delayed problem recognition. The recognition and naming of IPV victimization are often only accomplished with psychoeducation and guidance from a practitioner. Given this starting point, the tendency of Orthodox Jewish victims to merge or flip the stages of help-seeking by deciding to seek help before appropriately labeling their experiences as IPV is

reasonable. This finding gives way to the theoretical implication that the general model of help-seeking has a unique presentation in this specialized population.

There does not appear to be a particular stage of the help-seeking model during which community-specific barriers are most influential. Rather, cultural considerations impact victims at each step of the process. As previously discussed, the lack of IPV-specific education and the heavy presence of stigma within the community contribute to the struggle of victims to properly complete the problem recognition stage. The decision to seek help often comes before complete problem recognition for the above reasons; this stage can also be negatively impacted by a host of barriers, such as a victim's belief that *Shalom Bayit* requires her to remain with her abuser, the concern over damaging children's marriage prospects, or the fear of becoming an *Agunah*. Finally, the decision from whom to seek help is greatly influenced by cultural factors; patterns of informal vs. quasi-formal vs. formal help-seeking differ for Orthodox Jewish victims, as will be discussed below.

The typical help-seeking process for Orthodox Jewish victims loosely holds to the general help-seeking pattern of victims previously established in the literature. For instance, this group of victims typically engages in informal help-seeking prior to or instead of quasi-formal or formal help-seeking. However, this population turns to rabbis for informal help-seeking, instead of, or in addition to friends and family. This finding is congruent with research on Orthodox Jewish help-seeking behaviors but is a pattern not typically encountered in the general population (Ringel and Bina 2007; Sweifach and Heft-LaPorte 2007). The central role of the rabbi in the Orthodox Jewish community was emphasized by participants; as they described, the responses victims receive from rabbis can range from validating and helpful to an outright denial of abuse suffered by the victim. One key finding was the powerful influence that a rabbi's

dismissive reaction can have on a victim, since an inadequate response from a rabbi is influential in deterring a victim's future help-seeking efforts.

The distinction between quasi-formal and formal resources is not typically used in help-seeking literature (Evans and Feder 2016; Rose and Campbell 2000). However, Orthodox Jewish victims' help-seeking behaviors demonstrated an overwhelming preference for quasi-formal over formal resources, particularly when the former are community-specific. This finding points to the importance of breaking down labels such as 'formal' and 'informal' in future research, particularly as pertains to this, and other, minority communities. While Orthodox Jewish victims do display a great deal of hesitancy to seek support from quasi-formal agencies, they are often propelled toward these resources after encouragement from informal sources of support, such as friends or rabbis, another pattern consistent with the help-seeking literature (Liang et al. 2005). The desire to seek culturally specific quasi-formal services largely holds with the literature, although research is mixed, pointing out that some Orthodox Jewish victims prefer to go outside of the community for fear of losing confidentiality if they seek assistance from within (Burman, Smailes, and Chantler 2004). This pattern was not found in the current study, as participants universally agreed that intra-communal resources are preferred among Orthodox Jewish victims.

As previously noted, most Orthodox Jewish victims shy away from formal help-seeking, to what appears to be a greater degree than the general population. Consistent with the greater body of research, these victims are more willing and likely to involve law enforcement when they are in physical danger (Coulter et al. 1999). However, even in such extreme circumstances, some victims choose to rely on community-specific first responders, such as Hatzalah or Shomrim. As the practitioner who made this point was based in New York, whose large Jewish population is able to support such services, it is important to note that an Orthodox Jewish victim

outside of a large Jewish hub would not be able to rely on these options for formal help. Such a victim would be forced to choose between relying on traditional formal outlets or not engaging in formal help-seeking. Reasons provided for the reluctance to seek formal help include stigma from outside providers, which has been supported by research as salient in other minority communities, as well as the hesitation to involve law enforcement without consulting a rabbinic authority, a unique consideration among this population (Robinson and Spilsbury 2008).

Barriers that interfere with an Orthodox Jewish victim's help-seeking process are diverse. Consistent with the literature, general barriers such as the fear of losing custody, the desire to protect the abuser, and financial limitations are all salient for Orthodox Jewish victims (DeVoe and Smith 2003; Heron and Eisma 2021). However, cultural considerations of the community can impact some of these general barriers; for instance, the gender roles that often relegate homemaking and childrearing duties to women leave them without an income and may prevent them from gaining full custody. Culturally specific barriers are also prominent and largely revolve around stigma: from external service providers, but especially from within a victim's own community. The insular nature of the community, along with its emphasis on the sanctity of marriage and the taboo surrounding difficult topics such as abuse, can dissuade victims from disclosing their IPV victimizations. One unique finding related to stigma was the worry among Orthodox Jewish victims that any damage to their reputation may transfer to their children as well, affecting their future marriage prospects. This major concern among victims is consistent with the literature and was affirmed by practitioners as impacting help-seeking behaviors (Band-Winterstein and Tuito 2018; Ringel and Bina 2007). Thus, the double bind of stigma is present for Orthodox Jewish victims and acts as a barrier against reporting and help-seeking.

Religious barriers are impactful for victims' help-seeking as well; as expected, Shalom Bayit is highly influential in inhibiting help-seeking behavior, as victims strive to uphold this Jewish value. While previous research assessing Shalom Bayit has shown mixed results in relation to its impact on victims' help-seeking, results in the current study were consistent in showing it to be detrimental (Cares and Cusick 2012; DeVoe et al. 2001). Lashon Hara is significant as well and can prevent victims from disclosing abuse to others, although results in this study were mixed. The related concept of Mesirah was brought up by the two Orthodox practitioners, likely because their backgrounds allowed them to discern when this controversial, often unspoken idea is at play. Despite some recent shifts away from the open use of this concept in dissuading victims from reporting, it remains present under the surface and in the minds of victims. There is a considerable taboo against reporting another community member to the secular authorities, particularly among the Ultra-Orthodox; as such, despite being almost entirely absent from the IPV literature, the concept of Mesirah deters help-seeking.

Practical religious considerations that prevent help-seeking, particularly from extra-communal resources, reflect the daily needs and routines of Orthodox Jews. These include the kosher dietary laws, Shabbat observance, modest dress, and the need to live within walking distance from a synagogue. These barriers are consistent with the existing literature and appear to be most salient for victims who live outside of the major Orthodox Jewish population centers and therefore have fewer community-specific resources, such as shelters with kosher food (Gillum, Sullivan, and Bybee 2006; Guthartz 2004). The final religious barrier to help-seeking is Get refusal; this too reflects the greater body of research focused on Orthodox Jewish help-seeking (Cares and Cusick 2012). If Get refusal is viewed as a tool of further abuse, the fear of it is a culturally specific form of the general barrier of not seeking help out of fear of retaliation

from the abuser. Victims fear the fate of becoming an Agunah if they leave their abusers, a concern compounded by the fact that the religious court system is not unified on such matters. In this sense, the barrier of Get refusal is consistent with the general literature (eg. Heron and Eisma 2021). On the whole, cultural and religious considerations appear to be most salient for victims in the Orthodox Jewish community, whether as stand-alone or exacerbating factors. While general barriers such as financial burdens and the fear of losing custody of one's children are relevant to this population, these too are almost invariably impacted by the wide-ranging community factors inherent to living an Orthodox Jewish lifestyle. Therefore, it can be concluded that community-specific barriers are more significant for victims than general barriers.

Overall, participant interviews revealed that IPV remains a pervasive problem within the Orthodox Jewish community despite wider efforts to openly address it within the past several decades. The general hesitation among practitioners to discuss rates of IPV reflects the difficulty in obtaining accurate estimates of victimization among the Orthodox Jewish population faced by researchers (DeVoe et al. 2001). While practitioners agreed that IPV victimization occurs at all ages, a preponderance of married women under the age of 40 seeking services was noted among participants. This may be a function of the young age at which many Orthodox Jewish women marry, as well as the observed trend of Jewish women waiting longer to seek services. Together, these two factors may lead to the prevalence of help-seeking Orthodox Jewish victims in their late 20s and 30s.

Many subgroups of the Orthodox Jewish community were addressed in interviews, ranging from the Modern Orthodox to more insular Hasidic and Haredi subgroups. The Orthodox-identified practitioners gave the most focus to distinguishing between various subsets of the already small community, likely due to their increased familiarity with intra-communal

dynamics. Some findings of note were the increased resistance toward open discussion of IPV and help-seeking among Ultra-Orthodox communities, and the gradual change in this community regarding greater outreach toward IPV education and service providers. Both of these findings reflect the greater body of research, demonstrating the need for increased and tailored outreach efforts to this population (Grodner and Sweifach 2004; Ringel and Bina 2007). The practitioners did not agree in their assessments of help-seeking among victims in different subgroups. As the practitioner who did not see drastically more help-seeking from one subgroup over another worked at an agency specifically tailored toward Orthodox Jews, it is possible that her experience reflects her unique professional position.

One point of interest that diverged from the literature focused on Orthodox Judaism was the inclusion of Sephardic Jewish communities by the New York-based practitioner, such as the Bucharian and Syrian communities. These communities are minorities within a minority community and typically have their own unique customs and traditions. Since they do not neatly fit into typical Orthodox Jewish denominations, they are largely ignored within the body of research, and the ways in which IPV presents in these communities are as of yet unknown. Targeted interventions designed with the distinct cultural nuances of these communities in mind may be necessary for these groups; education and outreach efforts must devote attention to these often-overlooked subgroups.

There are a variety of ideas on how to improve victims' help-seeking in the Orthodox Jewish community that became apparent in participant interviews. Increased, culturally specific education is key, both for clergy and for the community. Education among the community would likely be most effective if initially instituted as part of school curricula, given the young age at which Orthodox Jews commonly marry. The influence of rabbinical advice on victims' help-

seeking has been continually demonstrated; therefore, structured, universally implemented IPV response training in rabbinic training programs would be effective at promoting help-seeking behaviors. Community-level changes include transforming community attitudes toward stigmatized topics like IPV and divorce, structuring community spaces with single parents in mind, and having clergy promote inclusivity of and support for victims.

The last set of recommendations involves service providers. Culturally specific resources are urgently needed, and agencies, including those that are Jewish, must work to understand the specific needs of the Orthodox Jewish community. As one practitioner repeatedly stressed, Jewish-specific agencies may overestimate the degree to which they are able to effectively serve Orthodox victims, particularly if they do not have any staff who themselves are Orthodox. This was apparent in the current study, as the non-Orthodox-identified practitioner affirmed the similarities between all denominations of Judaism, noting that Orthodox victims should feel comfortable turning to non-Orthodox sources of support. However, both Orthodox practitioners explained that Orthodox Jewish practices create such singular sets of circumstances for victims, with one practitioner explaining that Orthodoxy often feels like an entirely separate religion from other Jewish denominations. Thus, a clear divide between Orthodox and non-Orthodox service providers was demonstrated, underscoring the need for increased communication between Orthodox and non-Orthodox practitioners, as well as the obligation for non-Orthodox Jewish agencies to purposefully improve their understanding of these victims' needs.

Limitations

It is important to note that given the small sample size of the present study, its conclusions are limited in generalizability. The sampled participants were all located in the Northeastern United States, in moderate to major hubs for the Orthodox Jewish community.

Therefore, patterns specific to other regions or rural areas may not be represented in this data. Additionally, while care was taken to ensure that at least one practitioner was familiar with Haredi sects of Orthodox Judaism, most of the experience the practitioners had was with communities that were not highly insular. As a result, patterns and characteristics of help-seeking for those belonging to the most insular sects of Orthodox Judaism were not discussed.

One additional limitation was the inability of the study to interview Orthodox community members and leaders, as was originally planned. While numerous individuals, such as rabbis and rebbetzins, were contacted, none of them agreed to a formal interview. As a result, no direct comparisons could be made between the perspectives of community leaders and practitioners. Nevertheless, the perspectives of IPV practitioners identified in this study can provide a contrast to existing data on Orthodox Jewish community members' and leaders' perceptions of IPV (Cwik 1997; Murugan 2022; Ringel and Bina 2007). Additionally, the Orthodox Jewish backgrounds of two of the practitioners allowed for intra-community perspectives to be explored and contrasted with the experiences of the non-Orthodox practitioner.

Future Directions

The current study set out to explore the help-seeking patterns of an understudied and overlooked community. Although significant findings emerged, further research on IPV and help-seeking behaviors among Orthodox Jewish victims is imperative, particularly in a few specific areas. More attention must be paid to individual subgroups of Orthodox Judaism, as opposed to inappropriately combining disparate communities with different customs, values, and barriers into one category. In particular, the insular Ultra-Orthodox subgroups require more study, as these communities tend to stigmatize divorce and open discussion of IPV as well as exhibiting increased resistance toward help-seeking as contrasted with more Modern Orthodox

or centrist subgroups. In addition, future research should target Sephardic populations such as the Syrian and Persian communities, subgroups which have previously received little attention. These communities exist in a singular space within the Orthodox population, and it is highly likely that the specific cultural aspects present in them create unique barriers for victims.

The three-stage help-seeking model was found to be modified within the Orthodox Jewish community; as such, future research should study this model in relation to other minority communities to determine if this pattern holds elsewhere. Conducting research directly comparing the attitudes of practitioners and community leaders was the original intent of this study and would still be valuable to undertake. Recruiting community leaders, such as rabbis, to participate in a study looking at a taboo topic like IPV can be challenging, as the current study demonstrated, there is a great degree of resistance to discussing it openly. However, this reluctance among clergy reflects the reason why it is so necessary to formally assess their attitudes and behaviors towards this issue. Rabbis and other community leaders play a highly influential role in the help-seeking behaviors of IPV victims; as such, their opinions and actions can have a significant impact on how victims seek help and navigate resources. Therefore, conducting further research to determine and analyze their positions is meaningful and essential.

Finally, the voices of these victims themselves must be heard. In order to best understand and address IPV, particularly in an overlooked community with unique needs, it is essential to gather information directly from the victims themselves. Victims' experiences can provide valuable insight into the barriers they face when seeking help, as well as the effectiveness of different interventions and resources. Research that centers the victims' perspectives is crucial to improving our understanding of IPV help-seeking and developing effective and sensitive resources and interventions that truly meet the needs of this population.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

For victims of IPV, help-seeking can be an arduous and lonely process. The stages of this process range from problem recognition to selecting and utilizing a service provider. At each step, victims are challenged by internal and external barriers that interfere with help-seeking. Past literature has explored the varying experiences of victims from minority communities, including the unique, culturally specific barriers they grapple with. Rarely, however, have the experiences of American Orthodox Jewish victims been studied. This study intended to shed light on the experiences of this small and often insular community; through qualitative interviews with service providers, the unique barriers that impact these victims were identified.

Orthodox Jewish victims of IPV face unique challenges in help-seeking. Interventions aimed at empowering and supporting these victims and their communities require extensive awareness of the specific barriers they face. Additional work is required to best understand the experiences and needs of these victims and to develop culturally specific practices and programming. In doing so, support for Orthodox Jewish victims can be improved, contributing to a more tailored and comprehensive approach to addressing IPV in this community.

Appendix: Interview Questions

1. What is your involvement with the Orthodox Jewish community like?
2. What is your perspective on intimate partner violence in the Orthodox Jewish community?
3. In what ways have you experienced, witnessed, or heard others respond to or treat someone who is a survivor of IPV?
4. From either your own experiences or conversations with others, how do you think Orthodox Jewish victims of IPV typically respond to their victimization? In what ways do they seek help, if they do seek help?
5. Do you think there are barriers to seeking help from family and friends for Orthodox Jewish victims? If so, what are these barriers? Are they specific to the Orthodox Jewish community?
6. Do you think there are barriers to seeking help from formal sources, like law enforcement or a social services agency, for Orthodox Jewish victims? If so, what are these barriers? Are they specific to the Orthodox Jewish community?
7. Do religious or cultural attitudes (Lashon Hara, Shalom Bayit) influence how victims in this community perceive their situations? How so?
8. What is the role of the Rabbi in the Orthodox Jewish community? How might the Rabbi influence the help-seeking behaviors of a victim?
9. How would you respond to a victim of IPV reaching out to you for help? What steps would you take?
10. What can be done to promote help-seeking among Orthodox Jewish victims of IPV?

11. Is there anything else related to IPV and the Orthodox Jewish community that I didn't ask about, or that you wished I asked about?

Glossary of Terms

Agunah- lit., chained woman. This term refers to a woman who has not been granted a Get, and thus is unable to get remarried under Jewish law.

Beit Din- Jewish legal court.

Chesed- lit., loving-kindness. This term refers to good deeds and acts of charity performed within the Jewish community.

Frum- religiously observant.

Gabbai- individual who assists in the running of synagogue prayers.

Get- bill of divorce under Jewish law, granted from a husband to his wife.

Halacha- Jewish law.

Hasidic- adhering to a form of Orthodox Judaism notable for its mysticism and strict observance of Jewish law.

Hatzalah- Orthodox Jewish volunteer-based emergency service.

Kiddush- blessing performed over wine on Shabbat, customarily said by the male head of household.

Kosher- Jewish dietary laws.

Lashon Hara- lit., evil tongue. This term refers to gossip or slander about another person and is prohibited under Jewish law.

Mechitza- a physical partition between the male and female congregants in a synagogue.

Mesirah- lit., turning over. This term refers to the act of a Jew reporting another Jew to secular authorities, under certain circumstances forbidden under Jewish law.

Mikvah- a ritual bath intended for spiritual purification.

Modern Orthodox- a subgroup of Orthodox Judaism characterized by engagement with the secular world.

Ohel- non-profit Jewish social service agency located in New York.

Pikuach Nefesh- lit., watching over a soul. This is the Jewish principle that protecting one's life takes precedence over almost all other religious obligations.

Rabbi- religious leader who is knowledgeable on Jewish law.

Rebbetzin- wife of a rabbi, who often takes on leadership within the community.

Shabbat- the Sabbath, observed by Jews on the seventh day of the week. For Orthodox Jews, no creative work can be performed on this day.

Shalom Bayit- lit., peace in the home. This is the obligation for members of a household to uphold family harmony.

Shanda- lit., disgrace.

Sheila- a question asked of a rabbi to discern the correct course of action under Jewish law.

Shidduch- lit., match. This term refers to the arranged marriage system used by some Orthodox Jews.

Shomrim- an Orthodox Jewish volunteer-based civilian patrol group.

Shul- synagogue.

Ultra-Orthodox/Haredi/Yeshivish- a subgroup of Orthodox Judaism characterized by insularity and strict observation of Jewish law.

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