



A Balancing Act When Children Are Young: Women's Experiences in Shared Parenting Arrangements as Survivors of Domestic Violence

Beth Archer-Kuhn¹ · Judith Hughes² · Michael Saini³ · Dora Tam¹ · Natalie Beltrano⁴ · Marni Still²

Accepted: 15 October 2022 / Published online: 28 December 2022
© Crown 2022

Abstract

Purpose The purpose of this paper is to add to the research literature and begin to fill the gap in knowledge about shared parenting arrangements for women with young children and who have experienced domestic violence (DV), in three Canadian provinces; Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario.

Method This paper reports on the qualitative findings from a mixed methods study on shared parenting from women with children ages 4 and under. Twenty women participated in one-on-one individual interviews through electronic platform utilizing Zoom. Thematic analysis is used to analyze the data.

Results Despite efforts to not exclusively recruit women who had experienced domestic violence (DV) from their former partner, all participants identified as survivors of DV and ongoing survivors of DV, specifically, coercive controlling behaviours. Five themes describe the women's experiences of shared parenting with young children: 1) walking a tight-rope; 2) navigating post-separation relationships; 3) emotional realities of shared parenting; 4) shared parenting outcomes; and, 5) structural challenges.

Conclusions This paper not only adds to the significant and longstanding gap in knowledge directly from women with children ages 4 and under in shared parenting relationships, and who have experienced DV, and also helps to inform social service and legal actors. It is timely with the amendments to the Divorce Act in Canada which now includes DV as a factor in determining the best interests of the child.

Keywords Shared parenting · Domestic violence · Young children · Qualitative research

Introduction

After leaving abusive relationships, mothers with young children are typically required to navigate the legal system to create parenting plans for their children. There is a growing/existing body of research demonstrating how mothers are revictimized through complex family law systems processes. Gutowski and Goodman (2020), for example, found that mothers are silenced when lawyers/legal actors caution them not to disclose domestic violence (DV) to protect them

from counter allegations from the opposing side. Meant to be protective, this silencing can be perceived as mirroring the controlling behaviours mothers experienced in the violent relationship (Laing, 2017). Under pressure to maintain relationships between their children and the other parent, mothers may also agree to parenting plans even when these plans do not adequately protect themselves and their children from future harm (Laing, 2017). Mothers have also reported that their former partners draw out legal activities (Miller & Manzer, 2021) to force continued contact, which leaves them open to further intimidation and coercive control by the perpetrator (Gutowski & Goodman, 2020). These situations are made more challenging in Canada because of the shift to court orders for shared parenting (Archer-Kuhn & Beltrano, 2021; Bala, 2014), where children spend at least 40% of their time with each parent.

Through these difficulties, mothers are placed into the position of managing “a very delicate balancing act” of trying to have their concerns about past and ongoing DV taken

✉ Beth Archer-Kuhn
beth.archerkuhn@ucalgary.ca

¹ University of Calgary, 2500 University Dr. N.W., Calgary, Alberta, Canada

² University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada

³ University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada

⁴ University of Windsor, Windsor, Canada

seriously, achieve safe parenting plans, while worrying about being accused of alienation if they attempt to deny or limit the access of the other parent (Laing, 2017, p. 1322). As a result, they must negotiate between keeping themselves and their children safe and at the same time are made to feel responsible for maintaining the other parent–child relationship (Holt, 2017).

The purpose of this paper is to present findings from in-depth qualitative interviews with mothers who experienced violence and abuse from their partners and currently share parenting arrangements with those partners. We highlight women here for several reasons: a) they are more likely than men to be held to account for children’s care and well-being (Boyd, 2017; Hughes et al., 2015); and, b) there is evidence that young children are more likely to reside with their mothers and to continue to provide the majority of child care (Qu, 2004) even though shared parenting arrangements continue to grow in Canada (Bala et al., 2017). This paper includes the experiences of cisgender women in heterosexual relationships because these were the participants who chose to engage in our study.

Literature Review

In Canada, domestic violence (DV) is defined as abusive or threatening behaviour to control and/or harm a partner, and includes physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, financial abuse, and coercive control (Government of Canada, 2021). Coercive control is defined as a pattern of violence or threatening behaviour that causes an individual to fear for their own or their child’s safety (Canada Department of Justice, 2020).

When mothers choose to leave DV relationships, they may experience guilt or shame for breaking up the family (Lux & Gill, 2021; Moulding et al., 2015) in addition to a risk of living with “constant anxiety, abusive episodes and fear” that may impact the ability to care for children (Holt, 2017, p. 2057). Mothers may also experience ongoing stress about the continuing involvement of the offending parent in the child’s life (Fogarty et al., 2019), which can expose children to additional risks, including children being aware of the charged environments as a result of historical DV (Devoe & Smith, 2002, p. 1083); undermining of their parental authority by the offending parent (Fogarty et al., 2019; Galántai et al., 2019; Laing, 2017); neglectful or aggressive parenting (Nicklas & Mackenzie, 2013); a lack of information sharing (Shepard & Hagemester, 2013); difficulty in establishing consistent and stable parenting routines for their children (Fogarty et al., 2019); and the challenge of managing as a single parent, when fathers are not held accountable to provide for their children (Letourneau et al., 2012). Mothers may be made to feel they are to blame for

DV and its impact on their young children (Gutowski & Goodman, 2020; Moulding et al., 2015).

When parenting arrangements require mothers to have contact with perpetrators of violence, they may be put at-risk of post-separation violence (Nielsen, 2018), such as coercive control. Coercive control may be perpetuated through parenting time. These behaviours include using the children to obtain information about the mother’s activities (Callaghan et al., 2018; Holt, 2017), or hurting mothers by restricting contact between mothers and their children (Holt, 2017). Other coercive behaviors may include restricting of children’s activities, which may impact children’s social skills, confidence and development (Katz, 2016). Other forms of post-separation DV include unsafe communication (Lux & Gill, 2021), and financial abuse (Buchanan et al., 2014; Galántai et al., 2019; Haselschwerdt & Hardesty, 2017; Laing, 2017; Nikupeteri & Laitinen, 2015).

Without an ability to safely communicate with the other co-parent, mothers may have concerns about their children’s well-being when the child is in the care of the other parent (Shepard & Hagemester, 2013). Based on a review of trial decisions in Ontario family courts where there were reports of DV, Morton et al. (2021) found that evidence of safety concerns, such as charges or unsafe communication was minimized and often referred to as *conflict* or *communication problems* where subsequently judges granted shared parenting in almost half of the cases. The authors suggest that when there are concerns around DV, such as unsafe communication, parents are unable to successfully share parenting. Financial abuse may also impact mothers’ ability to care for children post-separation (Galántai et al., 2019; Laing, 2017; Letourneau et al., 2012; Lux & Gill, 2021; Natalier, 2018; Shepard & Hagemester, 2013), and limit mothers’ ability to participate in the court process (Haselschwerdt & Hardesty, 2017; Lux & Gill, 2021).

When women experience DV and engage with criminal court systems, they may be further revictimized by the process (Backes et al., 2020). These experiences may continue if mothers engage in the civil court process. Some mothers who engage in the family court process, may feel forced to agree with shared parenting arrangements (Gutowski & Goodman, 2020), making conscious decisions to accept concessions, agreeing to arrangements they feel are not in the best interest of their children, to prevent further impact on young children (Laing, 2017; Khaw et al., 2021; Miller & Manzer, 2021). Yet it is these concessions that may impact mothers and children’s safety (Gutowski & Goodman, 2020).

When DV is disclosed in the court process, the safe parent can encounter potential legal challenges in efforts to maintain primary care of the child (Meier & Sankaran, 2021), as DV can be minimized in court systems (Feresin et al., 2018), or perpetrators may make counter-allegations (Douglas, 2018; Galántai et al., 2019). Several studies have

identified that mothers may be silenced in family court systems, encouraged not to disclose DV (Feresin et al., 2018; Gutowski & Goodman, 2020; Khaw et al., 2021). Additionally, the presumption of the “friendly parent” may create biases in parenting arrangements where one parent may present as cooperative with legal process, yet may interfere with the other parent’s relationship with the child (Walker, 2020).

The research literature reveals a number of challenges for post-separation women who have experienced DV. Post-separation, mothers may be held to a higher standard of parenting than fathers’ where they are held responsible for ensuring their children’s safety from and exposure to DV (Feresin et al., 2018; Miller & Manzer, 2021; Hughes et al., 2015). Hughes et al. (2015) find that women experiencing violence shoulder inappropriate blame for the impact of the violence on their children, from both the child protection services and from the family law system. A woman is constructed as an unfit mother by the very systems that are designed to protect her. The court process may be used to *police* mothers; to supervise and control the mother’s parenting (Miller & Manzer, 2021). Mothers of young children may focus on protection and stability (Buchanan et al., 2014; Fogarty et al., 2019), forgoing their own well-being in favour of their children. Holt (2017) suggests that mothers may sense a lack of trust in their relationship with their young children when sending their children for parenting time with the offending parent. If mothers feel their children are unsafe in parenting arrangements, their own mental health may be impacted (Gutowski & Goodman, 2020; Holt, 2017; Pinto et al., 2019). Mothers may experience feelings of fear for their own and their child’s safety (Holt, 2017), and guilt, as they may blame themselves for their children’s difficult or challenging behaviours returning from parenting time (Laing, 2017) and children’s increased anxiety (DeVoe & Smith, 2002). Mothers may also perceive their young children as having difficult temperaments (Edhborg et al., 2020), where their children’s routines, such as sleeping and eating times, are impacted when children transition between two home environments (DeVoe & Smith, 2002).

In addition to the concerns raised by researchers about the developmental needs of children ages four and under (McIntosh & Chisholm, 2008; McIntosh et al., 2010), further challenges of shared parenting have been raised with respect to young breastfed children (Sweet & Power, 2009). Sweet and Power (2009) suggest that legislation that puts the needs of parents above the needs of children is not adhering to the intent of the best interests of the child when the child’s need to be with their mother to be breastfed is overruled by the legislative requirements to achieve equal parenting time.

Direct and indirect exposure to DV has been identified as potentially harmful to children (DeVoe & Smith, 2002; Ver Steegh & Dalton, 2008; Wolfe et al., 2003); this may include impact to their emotional well-being and developmental

milestones (Elizabeth, 2017; Harper et al., 2018; Jaffe et al., 2008). In Canada, child protection services may become involved with families who experience DV when there is risk of maltreatment, including physical and/or emotional harm (Public Health of Canada, 2019). Child protection systems are responsible for assessing the safety of the child, and supporting the non-offending parent to ensure the child’s ongoing safety and well-being (Meier & Sankaran, 2021). Yet the non-offending parent, often the mother, may experience the intervention as unhelpful if they are being constructed as an unfit parent when they are unable to protect children exposed to DV (Gutowski & Goodman, 2020; Hughes et al., 2015).

In Canada, shared parenting has become the dominant child custody policy debate that underpins legal judgements and service delivery (Bala et al., 2017; Statistics Canada, 2012). A review of court files between 2010–2012 by the Department of Justice Canada affirmed that: a) in 75% of custody and access arrangements, parents had joint legal custody (20% mother sole custody, 3% father sole custody); and, b) in 21% of the situations, children shared at least 40% of their time with each parent (Bala, 2014). This shift to joint legal decisions and shared parenting comes without consensus and with little knowledge about the indicators that determine the success of joint custody, particularly in families when children are under the age of four (McIntosh & Chisholm, 2008; McIntosh et al., 2010) and families in which DV is occurring (Jaffe, 2014; blinded for review) where concerns of mental health and addictions may be present. While some research has brought attention to the challenges of shared parenting for young children (McIntosh & Chisholm, 2008; McIntosh et al., 2010; Nielsen, 2018), these study designs and methodologies fail to account for different family formations, including demographic factors and the presence of DV, particularly with the mental health issues that this study aims to address within the Canadian context.

Given that much of the literature and research above is from multiple jurisdictions we systemically sought women in the Canadian system (across three provinces) where there are presumptions for shared parenting and where women have these arrangements. Even when courts order shared parenting and there is fluidity in child residency, mothers tend to continue to provide the majority of child care, hence the focus on mother influence.

Despite presumptions for shared parenting (Nielsen, 2011), little research has been conducted hearing the mother’s voice on the impact of shared parenting; literature is particularly scarce when shared parenting happens in situations of DV and when mothers have children under the age of four. The impact of shared parenting on children ages four and under is lacking in research studies leaving a large gap in our knowledge. This is significant given the shift to shared parenting orders in Canada (Bala et al., 2017). Given that much of the literature and research above originates from

multiple jurisdictions, we systematically sought women in the Canadian system (across three provinces) where there are presumptions for shared parenting and where women have these arrangements. The purpose of our study was to better understand the experiences of mothers of young children (ages 4 and under) who have experienced DV and who are in shared parenting arrangements.

Methodology

This paper reports on the qualitative findings from a larger explanatory mixed methods research design. Our study used a survey to collect quantitative data (blinded for review). At the end of the survey instrument, we asked the participants to indicate their willingness to also complete an individual interview. The qualitative interview guide was developed as we analyzed the results of the quantitative survey, and as a strategy to better understand the experiences of the women through one-on-one interviews. The robust and extensive qualitative findings are shared in this paper. In the qualitative portion of this study, we explore mothers' experiences in shared parenting arrangements when the participants had experienced DV and were also caregivers of young children, ages four and under. The study received approval from the ethics review boards [names of university ethics review boards removed for blind review].

Recruitment

Recruitment of participants originally was intended to be face-to-face at family court and community agencies, which serve mothers and young children, and mothers who have experienced DV (and those who have not experienced DV) in each of three Canadian provinces (Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario). We had hoped to compare the DV group with the non-DV group, however, only women who experienced DV engaged with our survey and subsequent individual interviews. Additionally, although over 500 people viewed and began completion of the survey, only 93 surveys were completed, with 100% identifying as experiencing DV. Face-to-face recruitment has long been considered critical in developing effective recruitment strategies for mothers who have experienced DV (Bender, 2017; Dichter et al., 2019). The pandemic hit at the time that we were preparing for recruitment, and we switched to on-line recruitment through advertising on our project Facebook page in addition to relying on a spectrum of our community partners (pediatricians, family lawyers, childcare providers, elementary school teachers, mothers' shelters) to bring awareness about our study. Potential participants provided their contact information for our research assistant to schedule an interview.

Sampling

Most participants ($n=20$) were over the age of 31 ($n=13$) with seven women between 21–30 years old. Half of the women reside in Alberta ($n=10$), six in Ontario, and four in Manitoba. Four women indicated that their children were between 1 or 2 years old at the time of the interviews, while the rest ($n=16$) indicated that their children were between 3 or 4 years old. The majority of participants had more than a high school education with ($n=18$) earning a college or university education, and only two having some post-secondary education. Approximately half ($n=9$) of the women earned less than \$40,000, while eight ($n=8$) earned between \$40,000–\$59,999, and three ($n=3$) with an annual salary of over \$60,000. The majority of participants identified as Caucasian ($n=15$), three identified as Metis, one identified as Hispanic, and one identified as Status Indian. All participants described experiences of coercive control during their shared parenting arrangement.

Data Collection

Individual interviews were held via the online platform, Zoom. Research assistants, doctoral social work students, conducted the interviews which lasted between one and one-and-one half hours in length. Interviews focused on questions related to participant experiences with shared parenting on: day-to-day functioning, benefits and limitations, co-parenting, supports, disputes, communication, sense of self as a parent, and finances. For example, a general question about shared parenting was: What has been your experience of shared parenting with your young child and with the other parent? A more specific question about co-parenting was: How do you and your co-parent make decisions about your young child's well-being?

Data Analysis

Individual interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. An inductive approach was used for coding, meaning we developed the codes from the data rather than a pre-existing coding frame. Thematic analysis was used to analyze narrative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). In this form of data analysis, the researcher organizes the data into codes, categories and themes with the goal to seek patterns in the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). For example, two research assistants coded the data and created categories independently, then came together to agree on themes, which were subsequently reviewed, discussed and agreed upon with two researchers from the larger research team. We examined the data shifting from codes to categories to themes, instead of from codes to themes and sub-themes, and provided a further layer of reflection and organization of the data (Braun &

Clarke, 2006). This allowed for description and interpretation, while keeping the codes close to the data and participant meaning. Inter-rater reliability was used to reinforce the trustworthiness of the findings. Two research assistants mined for the themes across all transcripts. Specific participant quotes were chosen to represent the identified themes.

Findings

Five key themes emerged from the interviews with mothers in shared parenting arrangements: 1) walking a tight-rope; 2) navigating post-separation relationships; 3) emotional realities of shared parenting; 4) shared parenting outcomes; and, 5) structural challenges. Each theme is comprised of categories that will be contextualized using direct participant quotes.

Walking a Tight-Rope

Walking a tight-rope is the first theme that emerged from the mothers' interviews. Using this metaphor, these mothers expressed how managing shared parenting arrangements with their former partners required them to maintain a constant balancing act. Being on a 'tight rope' meant that they balanced their own well-being, which includes their mental health and safety, to ensure their children have their needs met and are kept safe. Two categories make up this theme: a) contact while experiencing abuse; and, b) managing violence through timing.

Contact while experiencing abuse One aspect of the *tight rope* balancing act was ongoing contact with the other parent through shared parenting arrangements, while simultaneously experiencing ongoing abuse from that parent. For some mothers, the relationship before separation and after are very similar as noted here, "I feel like it's really difficult in many respects to even understand what the *new* relationship looks like" (P1). Domestic violence can loom heavily over the relationship even when shared parenting is the parenting plan as expressed by this mother, "Having a relationship that has domestic violence and abuse, like that's very much going to impact that [shared parenting]. That isn't separate and apart from the parenting piece" (P2).

Mothers say sharing parenting with a violent former partner makes it difficult to ensure they and their children are safe and this mother questions whether she is able to manage the balance on her own, "So it's that fine balance that I cannot say that I've achieved. I'm trying very hard to protect both my son and myself and sometimes I don't feel like I'm doing it" (P3). Some mothers seek support from community service providers.

I thought he was a danger to my children. To our children. I thought he put them at risk unnecessarily. He did lots of things like hurt them physically, left them unattended. So many things that I've had to deal with over and over again with them. Child and Family Services and the police and everything (P5).

Managing violence through timing Shared parenting in situations of violence means women have a constant concern of managing safety as we see here,

I feel like it's very difficult to chat with him because as soon as I open up any channel of communication, it now puts me at risk of him becoming abusive back towards me. So how do I have this channel of communication, so I know what's going on with my son but not allow [ex-partner] back into my life? (P3)

Sometimes mothers have to navigate when they believe it is safest to have conversations with their former partner to ensure current and future safety of themselves and their children. For example, discussions when the children are not present, and carefully worded written communications as described by this participant,

So, I plan it by timing it. I try to time it in like, if it's going to impact his behavior. I try to time it, you know, maybe when the girls aren't there, because I don't want them to be impacted if he has some sort of reaction. And I sit down and I write it and I'm very careful with how I say things and what I say, because I know that everything that comes out could end up in the courtroom, so I have to be very careful, all of the time (P6)

Other times, managing violence through timing means that their abusive former partner uses time as a means to child access, providing limited notice to the mother. Here, she must carefully consider her response to her former partner in terms of the likelihood of a violent reaction from them as explained here, "And if he will give me one day notice and I say no within less than 12 h, he'll freak out and get really angry with me" (P5).

Navigating Post-Separation Relationships

Navigating post-separation relationships in situations of DV with shared parenting was uniformly described as difficult by these mothers. Four categories make up this theme including: a) power and control; b) differences in parenting; c) obstacles; and, d) communication.

Power and Control Post-separation relationships in situations of DV reflect the former partner enacting power

over the mothers, which is experienced in various ways. Women continue to feel controlled by their former partner when in shared parenting arrangements despite their prior decision to leave the abusive relationship, as this mother explains, “Yeah because the children are the control piece right? After they can't control you, they control you through the children” (P7). For one mother the continued control is experienced through how she must accommodate her former partner's needs. This mother describes the day-to-day power her former partner enacts over her, “Even though me and my ex-partner aren't together, my life still revolves around his life. Like [he] gets a new job so I have to change everything in my life” (P8).

Another mother described how her former partner maintains power over her by deliberately unsettling and making her angry and then using her reaction to discredit her, “He tries to push buttons a lot, because I'm pretty emotional and he is completely not, so I got a lot of like, you're totally unstable and you're being crazy” (P9). A final mother expresses that her former partner uses threats and actual legal means to control her, “He also likes to sue me quite a lot.” (P4).

Differences in Parenting Differences in parenting is described as a loss of consistency, security, and a common understanding in parenting. Mothers share that their experiences with shared parenting in situations of DV means that the inconsistency in parenting is difficult for the children, as seen here,

he just refuses to co-parent on any level, so there's no consistency from one house to the next...there's a lot of inconsistency, which we know is not good for [children] them. Um, there's no willingness to find a common ground at all (P6)

Another mother expresses this same sentiment this way, “Because kids thrive on routine and stuff. And when it's totally all over the place all the time it's hard for them” (P8).

When one parent has more power than the other, the mothers experience no opportunity to find common ground as parents, resulting in varied rules in each household, and leaving the children to adapt, “When you're shared parenting, my opinion doesn't matter anymore ... it's either butting heads or it's different at dad's house versus mom's house” (P1).

Obstacles Restriction of finances was a common experience for the mothers and one form of coercive controlling behaviour used by their former partner, for example, one mother indicates, “I won't give you any money unless you

do these things” (P10). The mothers expressed how challenging it is to be solely responsible for the financial care of the children when their former partner chooses not to provide financial support, as we see here in this quote, “But I can't afford to pay for everything by myself, especially when he doesn't actually financially contribute” (P5).

Some women said that they didn't realize that restricting finances was a form of DV or coercive control. Even after learning this from support systems, they said it can take time before they believe that they and the children have a right to financial support.

And there were these counselors and they'd be like, he was abusive, he was financially abusive, he left you destitute, he took all of your money, he left you in bankruptcy...And that aspect of it took so long for me to finally acknowledge and accept (P11)

Another significant obstacle that these women experienced in shared parenting arrangements involved the responsibility to protect their children and at the same time the responsibility to honour the court order or agreement in situations of child safety. For example, women said their former partners struggle with issues of addiction leaving them with the ongoing question of the child's safety while in their ex-partner's care as expressed by this mother, “he needs to be sober and that's something that he is not putting much work into... that priority piece like putting his sobriety first so that she's [child] safe” (P12).

The women said that the necessary communication between two parents in a shared parenting arrangement is another way for their former partner to express violence toward them and they have to navigate that during the written and verbal interactions. For example, these two women share that written communication through email does not ensure their safety from violence, “I would say probably 50/50 to email me like a normal concern versus like an angry diatribe rant” (P13), and here,

I dread every piece of correspondence that I send ... even if it's about time that worries me. And because I don't know how it will be received, what mood I'm going to get from him. Sometimes it's like perfectly fine...and then it'll be an explosion. There's no predictability (P4)

Some women have found that they require the support of a mediator to help manage the post separation communications to stop the toxic responses that they receive from their former partner, “And we communicate only via email that way and when that doesn't work, we go to mediation. Unfortunately, it [mediation] costs a lot but communication is really toxic otherwise without that person assisting us” (P5).

Emotional Realities of Shared Parenting

When mothers experience coercive control from the co-parent there are greater risks to the mother and child's emotional well-being. Four categories comprise this theme: a) disconnect; b) shaming and guilt; c) fear; and, d) anxiety.

Disconnect Mothers say they must pick battles and find ways to disconnect emotionally while experiencing ongoing DV and coercive control. One mother expresses, “I don't think it's healthy to give him that control to put me back in a place of vulnerability” (P3). Because shared parenting during ongoing violence is so difficult, women experience their disconnect in a number of ways. For example, this mother allows time to dissipate the emotional impact, “I never communicated my feeling and if I feel anything like at all I sit on it for, until I don't feel anything, so sometimes it takes days” (P13). Other mothers expressed a disconnect with the whole notion of shared parenting when they consider their realities of how parenting is carried out with an imbalance of parenting responsibilities, as we see here,

stressful, frustrating, unconventional, always changing. Um, yeah, it's, I know the term shared parenting, but I feel like it's, I'm doing everything and he's just a second person who equally shares her love but does nothing (P12)

Shaming and Guilt Many of the mothers expressed feelings of guilt as they receive constant reminders from their former partners that they are not a ‘good enough’ parent. This first mother speaks of shame, “I don't think it's right if he says this is how you are as a parent. He shames me” (P10). While these next two mothers reflect the self doubt that can come from the ongoing shaming they experience, “At times I really question and have a lot of self-doubt and I feel guilty and I don't think I'm doing a good job” (P14), and, “I doubt myself every day. I don't think that I'm doing a good job” (P12).

Fear Fear is a common feeling expressed by these mothers. The ongoing nature of violence from their former partner is expressed in general and in specific terms as we see here, “[he would] yell at me in front of the kids when we were having any type of exchange and [he] came into my condo building, kicking open an elevator door, [the children] were like hiding behind me” (P13). Remembering past and experiencing ongoing violence from their former partners leaves the mothers frightened to send their child alone to be cared for with the child's safety unknown, “I'm also so scared to let this man have access. Because he lives alone so when that door closes, no one but him and God knows what happens behind

it. And for someone that has a history of being abusive towards me ... I'm so scared for what happens to this kid” (P3).

The fear expressed by the women went beyond the acts of violence and spoke to the trauma they experience from the violence, “There was a power dynamic problem...he could come into a room and look great. I don't come off well, right? Because I'm terrified. I'm shaking” (P7). The fear leaves this mother terrified and shaking; without this fear the partner in contrast seems more fit to be a partner and maybe not even abusive to outside persons.

Anxiety Similar to the fear experience, many women spoke of the anxiety from the day-to-day interactions of shared parenting with a former partner who is violent and exercises coercive controlling behaviors. Anxiety about having enough money to provide for the children, “He's like, super adamant that he's not going to pay anything. So that's part of my, I think I have anxiety about the support aspect” (P9), and will the other parent ensure the children are safe while in their care, “And even when I broach like, Are you going out with [the child]? Is [the child] wearing a mask? He wasn't doing any of the precautions. So that makes me really anxious because that's the unknown” (P3). The anxiety builds over time and can be overwhelming for the women, manifesting in anxiety attacks, “I really used to struggle though. I would have anxiety. I had anxiety attacks all the time when they were gone” (P5).

Shared Parenting Outcomes

This theme represents what mothers expressed about the outcomes of shared parenting both for their children and for themselves. The categories are: a) child development; and, b) mother's mental health.

Child Development There are a number of complicating factors that influence the impact on the children including their young age and development, as well as the environment of ongoing violence. This mother expresses how their young child has responded to shared parenting, “The clingy is very real. ... he cannot let me go” (P15). The shared parenting arrangements may have been made to accommodate the parents, yet young children are not always able to manage the emotional requirements that may be imposed by the child's other parent.

With little people, little problems feel bigger. And I mean emotionally, there's a whole emotional side... like the kids have never been allowed to call me when

they're there. And if we try to call dad when they're here, he doesn't answer the phone. So, it's been hard to kind of create like one life for [these] little people (P7)

Mothers expressed that the children return from time with their other parent looking stressed, expressing through their behaviour the unsettledness and insecurity that they experience. Here is how one mother has observed her young child over the last year and a half since the shared parenting arrangement began,

She was 18 months when we separated...she's three and a half now...when she comes back, I get all of the, like, transition breakdown, emotional release stuff, coming home to the safe place. So, um, a lot of our time is spent kind of like recovering from whatever, recoup[ing], putting her back together (P6)

Another mother has observed similar outcomes in her child's behaviour in terms of the stress he experiences and how his responses are more aggressive,

You can see like he does get stressed out by and I do think like he, when he comes back, the mornings after he comes back from his dad's place are challenging, you could tell he's like he pushes a little bit more, like he kind of doesn't want to listen, like he's three so... there's little things where I can tell like is stressful to him (P9)

Mother's Mental Health Mothers shared that they experience trauma while enduring ongoing contact with the other parent, which can have an impact on their own ability to parent, as these mothers indicate, “these situations impact us as people and then impact how we parent at times, especially if there's been this contact that's like not good...triggering a past experience” (P2), and “I struggle with PTSD from what happened there. And I mean a lot of things. But it's a constant stressor. I get sick just hearing my email notification” (P7).

The outcomes of violence can have long lasting impacts on the mothers. Shared parenting means they will need to sort out some strategies to cope with their past experiences if they are to successfully navigate ongoing contact through the shared parenting relationships, “I'm definitely going to need to do some therapy just on my own. Just to kind of get some coping strategies and be able to move past this and how do I protect myself from this hurt?” (P3).

Structural Challenges

Professionals from the legal and social service fields are often involved when shared parenting arrangements are created. Four categories describe mothers' experiences navigating these systems when they have young children and have experienced violence, including: a) mom blame; b) mom silenced; c) litigation abuse; and, d) lack of accountability.

Mom Blame Mothers said they felt blamed by the professionals when they tried to express concerns about their experiences of violence from their former partner. This mother shared an example of feeling blamed by a judge, “The judge didn't give me first right of refusal because he created a case that I'm a, like a micromanager” (P6). This next mother spoke of feeling blamed by a child welfare worker when she asked about how they will intervene in future concerns of child safety,

When this happens next time, what are we going to do about it? And it was a gentleman [child welfare worker], and he sort of said, if you work on being a better friend with [co-parent], I don't think you'll have these problems (P3).

Mom silenced Mothers describe how they have been silenced from talking about the violence as they try to navigate the legal and social service systems,

I have been 100% silenced in the legal system... It's been very traumatizing... I feel like I've never been allowed to be like, we have a power dynamic here. There is very clearly a power dynamic. And why is that not a problem for anybody (P7).

In this next example, the mother is silenced when the court simply refuses to acknowledge violence without physical evidence, “And the court was like, Oh if he's such a bad father, why can't we see it? And I'm like, He's an abusive, manipulative man” (P3). Some mothers have looked to the community for support and still they can feel their experiences are unheard and they were offered little by way of support, “I've almost always had to have the police or Child and Family Services or a mediator intervene. And to be honest, I don't think it's always heard” (P5). A common expression from the mothers is a desire to be heard and to have their concerns validated and acted upon so that they and their children can be safe, “Yeah, the legal system is not working for us at all. I just want to get in front of the judge. I just want to be heard. Because what's going on now is not the best for my kids, it's not the best for me” (P8).

Litigation Abuse A number of women said the coercive controlling behaviours of their former partner include, ongoing litigation where they present one way to the court and quite another to the mom,

And then to have authorities and the court system not believe that, it's been stressful... To have him come to court and look like a rational, reasonable man and then he's threatening me when we leave the courthouse (P3)

The mothers say that litigation is just another means for their former partner to enact coercive control over her, which is supported through the legal system, “And the way my lawyer explained it is that basically he can do whatever the *blank* he wants and he'll just like... I'll keep getting called back to court, keep getting called back to court” (P8). Using litigation abuse, their former partner is permitted countless recurrences in court regardless of their follow through of a prior agreement or order, whereas, the mothers say they are expected to follow the agreement, “And so I think that if he followed the agreement that would go a long way towards building trust. Because if I did the same thing, I would be penalized for it” (P7).

Lack of Accountability Mothers expressed concern about the lack of accountability within the legal system, as those in positions of power make decisions, yet, they are not held responsible for the outcomes. For example, DV has not been understood well in relation to shared parenting arrangements as this mother explains, “I do think there needs to be more education, again on even for that parenting coordinator to understand, because there seems to be this very widespread belief that there are separate issues [domestic violence and shared parenting]” (P2). Further, this mother expressed that the child's developmental needs have been ignored in favour of shared parenting arrangements,

When there is a primary caregiver in place prior to a separation, that needs to be the absolute first and foremost consideration when a parenting plan is made... Because breaking that primary attachment with a caregiver with, like suddenly, and without any co-parenting was very damaging to my three-year-old, like emotionally and physically. I think that that experience for her will have lifelong effects (P6)

Lastly, once shared parenting orders are made, there are no mechanisms in place to ensure that the needs of children are being met, as this mother expresses, “There's no one out there making parents do a good job of coparenting for the sake of their children” (P7).

Discussion

Based on analyses of the in-depth experiences of these 20 mothers, we derived five themes that together illustrate the difficulties encountered by mothers with young children in shared parenting arrangements with partners who enact abusive and controlling behaviours. These women made choices to leave their partners to separate them from the daily physical abuse or control that was exercised in the relationship. Shared parenting arrangements that are regularly imposed in Canada family law systems require that these women maintain continued contact and attempt to communicate about their children with these former partners. This emerged saliently through the interviews as a central theme, *walking a tight rope*. This metaphor described the difficult balancing act that these mothers maintained to adhere to the required relationship (co-parent, themselves and children). The balancing act is necessary within shared parenting arrangements where children spend substantial time in two households and where mothers manage the continued controlling tactics and unpredictable behaviour of that other co-parent even after the formal relationship ends.

A second key theme, *navigating post-separation relationships* captured these experiences as the mothers described how the need to be in continued contact with the co-parent to manage the shared parenting arrangements provided multiple opportunities for their former partners to control them. The mothers describe the various ways this has occurred, including insisting that mothers accommodate to their needs and schedules, changing rules and routines for children, returning to court multiple times, refusing to contribute to pay for children's needs or activities, and unpredictable and angry communication. These post-separation patterns are reflected in various research literature (Gutowski & Goodman, 2020; Laing, 2017; Letourneau et al., 2012; Miller & Manzer, 2021). Poignant for this group of mothers is the young age of their children, 4 years old and under, which means that they will be required to live with and manage these difficulties and coercive control until their children are much older. What's more, the children themselves must endure these unhealthy environments.

What is crucial to understand is that even with the efforts of these perpetrating partners, it is legal and court processes and custody outcomes, particularly shared parenting arrangements, that provide the tools through which coercive control can be extended (Feresin et al., 2018; Galántai et al., 2019). The theme, *structural challenges*, describes how these mothers felt silenced by legal actors and systems that refused to recognize or acknowledge the violence which has occurred, and the ongoing control and manipulation from their former partners.

Ultimately, many of these mothers concluded that the family law legal system is not accountable, as they are left to struggle within these arrangements risking their own continued well-being and that of their children.

Similar themes and metaphors are described in an Australian study (Laing, 2017) of 22 women who experienced a form of secondary victimization, as they were discouraged from voicing allegations of DV into post-divorce decision-making because courts and judges will not hear these experiences, leaving these women to decide what should and should not be disclosed to achieve safe parenting arrangements. At the same time, the women had to ensure that they do not become viewed as an *unfriendly parent* who is trying to undermine or sever the relationship between the children and the other parent (Meier & Sankaran, 2021; Sheehy & Boyd, 2020). Without recognition of the past DV that was present in the relationship, when decisions about parenting arrangements are made, the mothers in our study stated that they were blamed for the difficulties in the continued relationship with the other parent; further allowing the former partner to use ongoing legal process to continue harassment.

The remaining themes, *emotional realities of shared parenting*, and *shared parenting outcomes* describe the impact of these shared parenting arrangements for the mothers and their young children. Central to these themes were experiences of continued fear and anxiety that arose directly from the continued contact they and their children had with the co-parent. For example, the angry, aggressive, and unpredictable behaviours of that person; these kind of experiences are also documented in post-separation study by Holt (2017). The mothers described fear that resulted from being directly yelled at when exchanging children or concerns about their children's safety when in the care of the other parent. Through the interviews, the mothers in our study also described the impact of these arrangements on their mental health. Anxiety was described as arising from the unpredictable nature of the continued interactions with the other co-parent whether directly in person or by email. The women noted the accumulation of these experiences and the ongoing concerns about their children's direct safety and well-being when in the care of the co-parent. The concerns around post-separation DV and experiencing mental health concerns has been documented by several other studies (e.g., Ellis et al., 2021; Moulding et al., 2015). Importantly, mothers in our study expressed concerns for their children's development. Mothers spoke about the difficulties of young children shifting between different homes and experiencing different parenting styles and how their young children returned from the other parent's home seeming stressed, unsettled, and insecure or clingy. Similar

findings have been documented of children experiencing a range of emotional and behavioural experiences when mothers experience DV (e.g., DeVoe & Smith, 2002; Harper et al., 2018); other studies have found that when children did not witness DV, there was still a negative impact to their developmental well-being (Katz, 2016).

Limitations

Limitations include a small ($n = 20$) number of qualitative interviews. Another limitation of the sample is the lack of ethno-racial diversity, as most women described themselves as Caucasian ($n = 15$) and as having middle or higher incomes ($n = 10$). Although we initially sought to interview women who had experienced violence and abuse from their former partners and those had not, the mothers who agreed to be interviewed had all experienced forms of DV.

Lessons Learned and Implications for Future Research

Our findings add to the now growing body of research and literature that demonstrates the difficulties encountered by women who experienced violence from former partners in the family law system and the shared parenting arrangements that are often imposed. What is clear from our findings based on these women's stories is that courts and helping institutions can support or thwart mothers' efforts to protect their children (Barnett, 2015; Douglas, 2018; Elizabeth, 2017; Miller & Manzer, 2021; Morton et al., 2021). Across these studies, the difficulties for women are described as stemming first from a lack of training for legal professionals on the complexities and dynamics of relationships where DV and coercive control have occurred (Koshan et al., 2020; Meier & Sankaran, 2021; Miller & Manzer, 2021). This lack of specific training and education continues even though family law disputes feature allegations of DV and child maltreatment (Sheehy & Boyd, 2020), with court systems having significant decision-making authority into the lives of individuals bringing these allegations (Miller & Manzer, 2021). Into this lack of understanding, Miller and Manzer (2021) stipulate that the normative assumptions held by those working in these systems, including gendered, raced, and classed parenting ideals, hold mothers more responsible for assuring the well-being of children.

Missing from the research literature are empirical studies of women with children ages 4 and under, in shared parenting relationships and who have experienced DV.

This study incorporates this group of participants adding to the research literature our understanding of how shared parenting relationships are experienced day-to-day for these women. We believe it is significant that when attempting to recruit for women with young children in shared parenting arrangements, that only those who had experienced DV came forward. It raises for us the question of the level of violence that is occurring in ongoing shared parenting arrangements where DV was occurring pre-separation. Given what we know about the damaging effects of DV on young children, we believe it is critical to further this work exploring women of diversity and with a more robust number of participants.

In March 2021, Canada amended its Divorce Act to specifically include family violence and coercive control when determinations about children's best interests and parenting arrangements are made (blinded for review; Lux & Gill, 2021). This raises questions about the factors a court should consider in this decision-making such as history of the relationship, frequency or severity of violence, and what supports are needed post-divorce. Moreover, Lux and Gill (2021) assert that this inclusion requires that specific screening for DV and coercive control be implemented, yet there is no agreed-upon and empirically validated tool or instrument. Family law professionals will need to understand DV as complex and at times contradictory narratives rather than discrete incidence or events and recognize how perpetrators can and do use the process of the system to continue to harass and control their former partners (Laing, 2017; Letourneau et al., 2012; Lux & Gill, 2021).

Shifts in legislation may not always translate into a shift in the culture of practice (Douglas, 2018); court systems may allow for coercive control to be maintained due to a lack of coordination of systems (Douglas, 2018) or mothers' being silenced about their experiences (Feresin et al., 2018). Existing examination of Canadian judges' decision-making in cases involving allegations of DV demonstrate that there were few cases in which judges demonstrated understanding of the nature of DV or considered these allegations in decisions-making about parenting arrangements (Sheehy & Boyd, 2020). An additional challenge is that these amendments are inserted into divorce legislation that continues to require judges to consider as much parenting time with each parent as is consistent with children's best interests (maximum parenting provision) and the willingness of each parent to facilitate the development and maintenance of the relationships between the child and the other parents (friendly parent provision; Sheehy & Boyd, 2020). The family law system does not have a new bag of tricks – education for judges and others, safer mediation processes. The experience from other jurisdictions (Laing, 2017) is that these limited initiatives did not work in that context.

Although Lux and Gill (2021) emphatically state that shared parenting is not advisable when DV and coercive control has occurred (and is likely to continue), as these behaviors are not in children's best interests, the authors do not offer alternative to this normative arrangement. In order to learn more, we require more diverse samples of women to understand how varied voices and experiences of mothers who have experienced DV continue to navigate the relationships with former partners through shared parenting arrangements. Inclusion of mothers' experiences of shared parenting where violence has not occurred in the relationship, would provide additional data and findings about family situations where these arrangements do work well.

Some authors note the difficulty of systems in which there are separate social and legal systems to address DV that occurs within families, including distinct parts of legal system; civil and criminal courts (Meier & Sankaran, 2021). Victims and offenders are left to navigate individually complex systems that vary in norms about the seriousness and admissibility of evidence of DV (Hughes et al., 2015). Within Canada, these court and family law systems also vary across federal and provincial levels/jurisdictions (Koshan et al., 2020). Whereas child welfare systems address child maltreatment, concerns have been raised about the 'failure to protect' responses to mothers who have abused by partners in this system (Meier & Sankaran, 2021). Alternately, family law systems regularly hear allegations of both DV and child abuse and are tasked to make decisions in children's best interests (Meier & Sankaran, 2021). Family laws systems have incorporated various reforms to address DV, but not explicitly address child maltreatment (Meier & Sankaran, 2021). Meier and Sankaran (2021) conclude that ironically, each court system looks to the other with presumptions in family law systems that child maltreatment will have been investigated in that system and child welfare systems assume that the truth of child maltreatment will be determined in civil litigation. No coordination of criminal courts (charges, undertakings, etc.) with either system presume the other will deal with issues of child abuse/maltreatment.

Conclusion

Mothers in our study revealed that the most significant difficulty of shared parenting arrangements is felt when women and young children are expected to maintain continued and close contact with a co-parent who exercised violence and control within the relationship. Participants in our study said that the perpetrators continue to engage in coercive controlling strategies. Through review of the literature and the statements made by the women who participated in our study, it is evident that coercive controlling behaviours are occurring in shared parenting arrangements for many women. Indeed,

every woman in our study with young children and in shared parenting arrangements continued to experience coercive controlling behaviours from their former partner despite our efforts to also recruit women for whom domestic violence was not present. The impact of coercive controlling behaviours in shared parenting arrangements on women and young children requires further study in relation to women with young children in shared parenting arrangements who have not experienced domestic violence and from diverse women to better inform the legal community on shared parenting arrangements for young children. The findings even from this small sample should however, alert us to the possibility that shared parenting arrangements may not be appropriate or safe in situations where DV occurred pre-separation.

Acknowledgements We would like to acknowledge the generous funding from the Social Sciences Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for the funding to complete this project. We would also like to thank the many women who shared their experiences to help us to better understand shared parenting in situations of domestic violence.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

References

- Archer-Kuhn, B., Beltrano, N. R. (2021). *Shared parenting: Reigniting the debate of presumptions in situations of domestic violence* [Conference Presentation]. AFCC 57th Annual Conference: When a Child Rejects a Parent: Are we part of the problem or part of the solution? (Virtual).
- Backes, B. L., Fedina, L., & Holmes, J. L. (2020). The criminal justice system response to intimate partner stalking: A systematic review of quantitative and qualitative research. *Journal of Family Violence, 35*, 665–678. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-020-00139-3>
- Bala, N., Birnbaum, R., Poitras, K., Saini, M., Cyr, F., & Leclair, S. (2017). Shared parenting in Canada: Increasing use but continued controversy: Shared parenting in Canada. *Family Court Review, 55*(4), 513–530. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12301>
- Bala, N. (2014). *Shared parenting: Now the under-appreciated norm in Canada – Implications for policy & practice*. [Conference Presentation]. National Family Law Program, Federation of Law Societies of Canada, Whistler, BC.
- Barnett, A. (2015). ‘Like gold dust these days’: Domestic violence fact-finding hearings in child contact cases. *Feminist Legal Studies, 23*(1), 47–78. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-015-9278-4>
- Bender, A. K. (2017). Ethics, methods and measures in intimate partner violence research: The current state of the field. *Violence against Mothers, 23*(11), 1382–1413. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801216658977>
- Boyd, S. (2017). Still gendered after all this time: Care and autonomy in child custody debates. In J. Gunning (Ed.), *Ethics, law and family* (Vol. 5, pp. 69–90). Taylor & Francis.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*, 77–101.
- Buchanan, F., Power, C., & Verity, F. (2014). The effects of domestic violence on the formation of relationships between women and their babies: “I was too busy protecting my baby to attach.” *Journal of Family Violence, 29*, 713–724. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10896-014-9630-5>
- Callaghan, J., Alexandra, J., Sixsmith, J., & Fellin, L. (2018). Beyond “witnessing”: Children’s experiences of coercive control in domestic violence and abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 33*(10), 1551–1581. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515618946>
- Canada Department of Justice. (2020). *The Divorce Act changes explained*. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/cf-md/f/dace-clde/dace.pdf>
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 12*(3), 297–298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613>
- DeVoe, E. R., & Smith, E. L. (2002). The impact of domestic violence on urban preschool children: Battered mothers’ perspectives. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 17*(10), 1075–1101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605-0201710-04>
- Dichter, M. E., Sorrentino, A. E., Haywood, T. N., Tuepker, A., Newell, S., Cusack, M., & True, G. (2019). Mothers’ participation in research on intimate partner violence: Findings on recruitment, retention, and participants’ experiences. *Mothers’ Health Issues, 29*(5), 440–446. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.whi.2019.03.007>
- Douglas, H. (2018). Legal systems abuse and coercive control. *Criminology & Criminal Justice, 18*(1), 84–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895817728380>
- Edhborg, M., Nasreen, H. E., & Kabir, Z. N. (2020). Impact of intimate partner violence on infant temperament. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 35*(21–22), 4779–4795. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517717489>
- Elizabeth, V. (2017). Custody stalking: A mechanism of coercively controlling mothers following separation. *Feminist Legal Studies, 25*(2), 185–201. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-017-9349-9>
- Ellis, D., Lewis, T., & Nepon, T. (2021). Effects of historical coercive control, historical violence, and lawyer representation on post-separation male partner violence against mother litigants who participated in adversarial family court proceedings. *Violence against Women, 27*(9), 1191–1210.
- Feresin, M., Folla, N., Lapierre, S., & Romito, P. (2018). Family mediation in child custody cases and the concealment of domestic violence. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work, 33*(4), 509–525. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109918766659>
- Fogarty, A., Woolhouse, H., Giallo, R., Wood, C., Kaufman, J., & Brown, S. (2019). Promoting resilience and wellbeing in children exposed to intimate partner violence: A qualitative study with mothers. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 95*, 104039. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104039>
- Galántai, J., Ligeti, A. S., & Wirth, J. (2019). Children exposed to violence: Child custody and its effects on children in intimate partner violence related cases in Hungary. *Journal of Family Violence, 34*, 399–409. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-019-00066-y>
- Government of Canada (2021). *About family violence*. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/DV-vf/about-apos.html>
- Gutowski, E., & Goodman, L. A. (2020). “Like I’m invisible”: IPV survivor-mothers’ perceptions of seeking child custody through the family court system. *Journal of Family Violence, 35*, 441–457. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-018-00063-1>
- Harper, B., Ogbonnaya, I. N., & McCullough, K. C. (2018). The effect of intimate partner violence on the psychosocial development of toddlers. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 33*(16), 2512–2536. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516628286>
- Haselschwerdt, M. L., & Hardesty, J. L. (2017). Managing secrecy and disclosure of domestic violence in affluent communities. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 79*, 556–570. <https://doi.org/10.1111/JOMF.12345>

- Holt, S. (2017). Domestic violence and the paradox of post-separation mothering. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(7), 2049–2067. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcw162>
- Hughes, J., Chau, S., & Vokri, L. (2015). Mothers' narratives of their involvement with child Welfare services. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, 3(3), 344–358. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109915574579>
- Jaffe, P. (2014). A presumption against shared parenting for family court litigants. *Family Court Review*, 52(2), 187–192.
- Jaffe, P., Johnston, J., Crooks, C., & Bala, N. (2008). Custody disputes involving allegations of domestic violence: Toward a differentiated approach to parenting plans. *Family Court Review*, 46(3), 500–522.
- Katz, E. (2016). Beyond the physical incident model: How children living with domestic violence are harmed by and resist regimes of coercive control. *Child Abuse Review*, 25(1), 46–59. <https://doi.org/10.1002/CAR.2422>
- Khaw, L., Bermea, A. M., Hardesty, J. L., Saunders, D., & Whitaker, A. M. (2021). “The system had choked me too”: Abused mothers' perceptions of the custody determination process that resulted in negative custody outcomes. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(9–10), 4310–4334. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518791226>
- Koshan, J., Mosher, J., & Wieggers, W. (2020). The costs of justice in domestic violence cases: Mapping Canadian law and policy. In T. Farrow & L. Jacobs (Eds.), *The justice crisis: The cost and value of accessing law* (pp. 1–30). UBC Press.
- Laing, L. (2017). Secondary victimization: Domestic violence survivors navigating the family law system. *Violence against Women*, 23(11), 1314–1335. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801216659942>
- Letourneau, N., Duffy, L., & Duffett-Leger, L. (2012). Mothers affected by domestic violence: Intersections and opportunities with the justice system. *Journal of Family Violence*, 27, 585–596. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10896-012-9451-3>
- Lux, G., & Gill, S. (2021). Identifying coercive control in Canadian family law: A required analysis in determining the best interests of the child. *Family Court Review*, 59(4), 810–827. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12540>
- McIntosh, J., & Chisholm, R. (2008). Cautionary notes on the shared care of children in conflicted parental separation. *Journal of Family Studies*, 14(1), 37–52. <https://doi.org/10.5172/jfs.327.14.1.37>
- McIntosh, J., Smyth, L., Kelaher, M., Wells, Y., & Long, C. (2010). Parenting arrangements post-separation: Patterns and outcomes. A longitudinal study of school-aged children in high conflict divorce. In K. Kuehnle & L. Drozd (Eds.), *Parenting plan evaluations: Applied research for the family court* (pp. 155–187). Oxford University Press.
- Meier, J. S., & Sankaran, V. (2021). Breaking down the silos that harm children: A call to child welfare, domestic violence and family court professionals. *GW Law Faculty Publications & Other Works*. 1553. https://scholarship.lawgwu.edu/faculty_publications/1553
- Miller, S. L., & Manzer, J. L. (2021). Safeguarding children's well-being: Voices from abused mothers navigating their relationships and the civil courts. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(9–10), 4545–4569. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518791599>
- Morton, M., Samardzic, T., Cross, P., Johnstone, S., Vesely, L., & Choubak, M. (2021). The degendering of male perpetrated intimate partner violence against female partners in Ontario family law courts. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 43(2), 104–118.
- Moulding, N. T., Buchanan, F., & Wendt, S. (2015). Untangling self-blame and mother-blame in women's and children's perspectives on maternal protectiveness in domestic violence: Implications for practice. *Child Abuse Review*, 24(4), 249–260. <https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2389>
- Natalier, K. (2018). State facilitated economic abuse: A structural analysis of men deliberately withholding child support. *Feminist Legal Studies*, 26, 121–140. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-018-9376-1>
- Nicklas, E., & Mackenzie, M. J. (2013). Intimate partner violence and risk for child neglect during early childhood in a community sample of fragile families. *Journal of Family Violence*, 28, 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S10896-012-9491-8>
- Nielsen, L. (2011). Shared parenting after divorce: A review of shared residential parenting research. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 52, 586–609. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2011.619913>
- Nielsen, L. (2018). Joint versus sole physical custody: Children's outcomes independent of parent-child relationships, income, and conflict in 60 studies. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 59(4), 247–281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2018.1454204>
- Nikupeteri, A., & Laitinen, M. (2015). Children's everyday lives shadowed by stalking: Postseparation stalking narratives of Finnish children and women. *Violence and Victims*, 30(5), 830–845. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.VV-D-14-00048>
- Pinto, R. J., Correia-Santos, P., Levendosky, A., & Jongenelen, I. (2019). The role of maternal satisfaction, parenting stress, and social support among mothers and children exposed to intimate partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 34(19), 4114–4136. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516674199>
- Public Health of Canada. (2019). *Provincial and territorial child protection legislation and policy 2018*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/health-risks-safety/provincial-territorial-child-protection-legislation-policy-2018.html>
- Qu, L. (2004). Children's living arrangements after parental separation. *Family Matters*, 67, 4–7.
- Sheehy, E., & Boyd, S. B. (2020). Penalizing women's fear: Intimate partner violence and parental alienation in Canadian child custody cases. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 42(1), 80–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09649069.2020.1701940>
- Shepard, M. F., & Hagemester, A. K. (2013). Perspectives of rural women: Custody and visitation with abusive ex-partners. *Affilia: Journal of Woman and Social Work*, 28(2), 165–176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109913490469>
- Statistics Canada. (2012). Table 1: Divorce cases in civil court, 2010/2011. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2012001/article/11634/tbl/tbl01-eng.htm>
- Sweet, L., & Power, C. (2009). Family Law as a determinant of child health and welfare: Shared parenting, breastfeeding and the best interests of the child. *Health Sociology Review*, 18(1), 108–118. <https://doi.org/10.5172/hesr.18.1.108>
- VerSteegh, N., & Dalton, C. (2008). Report from the Wingspread Conference on domestic violence and family courts. *Family Court Review*, 46(3), 4540475. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-1617.2008.00214.x>
- Walker, L. E. A. (2020). Nonjudicial influence on family violence court cases. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 64(12), 1749–1767. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764220956688>
- Wolfe, D. A., Crooks, C. V., Lee, V., McIntyre-Smith, A., & Jaffe, P. G. (2003). The effects of children's exposure to domestic violence: A meta-analysis and critique. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 6(3), 171–187. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024910416164>