

FIRST-YEAR COUNSELORS WHO WORK WITH  
MALE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENDERS

A DISSERTATION

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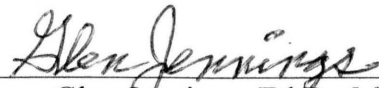
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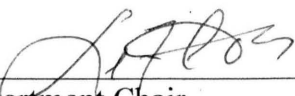
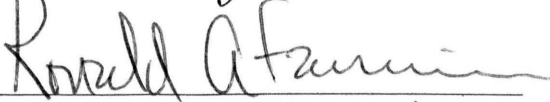
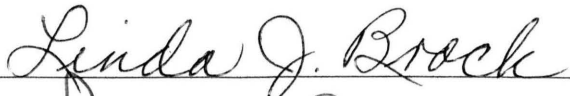
To the Dean of the Graduate School:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Yung-Chen M Chou entitled "First-Year Counselors Who Work with Male Domestic Violence Offenders." I have examined this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Family Therapy.



Glen Jennings, Ed.D., Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:



Department Chair

Accepted:



Dean of the Graduate School



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## DEDICATION

To my parents,  
thank you for your unconditional love and support.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the many individuals who have contributed to this dissertation through their guidance, support, and expertise. I would like to express special appreciation for Dr. Glen Jennings, my committee chair and mentor. His knowledge, encouragement, and support guided me to complete my doctoral program and dissertation. I deeply respect his scholarship and professionalism. I am truly indebted to Dr. Linda Brock and Dr. Ronald Fannin, who also served as members of my dissertation committee. Their kind words of encouragement, helpful comments, and thought-provoking suggestions added valuable perspectives to my work and writing.

I am also grateful to the participants in this study who took their own time to share their experiences with me. Their openness of sharing their feelings and thoughts toward their work with male domestic violence offenders has allowed others to gain a better understanding of their experience as a new counselor in this field. I thank them for their time and offer.

I also want to thank my dear friends, Bruce Nordstrom and Nanette Rousseau, who provided their own free time to review my writing. They have known me for years and understand the way I use English. Their great help has improved my dissertation work.

## ABSTRACT

YUNG-CHEN M CHOU

### FIRST-YEAR COUNSELORS WHO WORK WITH MALE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENDERS

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experience of first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders, including how they perceived their role in this process, how they perceived their clients, how they carried out their responsibilities, and how they viewed this work experience impacting their own lives. The goal of this phenomenological study was to understand the meaning of the first-year counselors' experiences through their language.

A total of nine participants were recruited in this study. All participants were under supervision for the master level internship or licensed internship. All participants had no more than one year of experience working with male domestic violence. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Five themes emerged from the interviews: (a) Working with male offenders was not the participants' original plan, (b) Limited academic preparation on domestic violence, (c) Professional development of working with male offenders, (d) Most male offenders are humans who made poor choices, and (e) Mutual influence between personal experience and professional practice. The results of this study were compared with a review of the literature in the discussion

of findings. Limitations of this study were addressed. Implications and suggestions for academic preparation and clinical supervision for new counselors were provided.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a disturbing and complex social problem that impacts not only the women, men, and children who are immediately involved in the incident but also all the members of society (Caprioli, 2003). Domestic violence is violence that occurs between family members and intimate partners. Family members are those whose relationship is established either biologically or legally through marriage or adoption. Intimate partners are cohabitants or unmarried dating couples that include both heterosexual couples and homosexual couples. Types of domestic violence include verbal, physical, emotional, financial, and sexual assaults which violate a person's physical body, sense of self, and sense of trust. Domestic violence offenders intend to demean their victims and their relationships through verbal, physical, emotional, financial, or/and sexual abuse (Caprioli).

Domestic violence has become a major social issue across the United States in the past few decades. According to a U.S. Department of Justice report (Durose et al., 2005), between 1998 and 2002, about 3.5 million violent crimes occurred within families, and about 2 million violent crimes occurred between unmarried intimate couples. The majority of domestic violence victims were women, and the majority of domestic violence offenders were men. One in every four women has been abused by their

intimate partner during their lifetime. Four out of five domestic violence offenders were men. The report by Durose et al. found that women were 84% of spousal abuse victims and 86% of dating partner abuse victims, and men committed 76% of spousal abuse and 86% of dating abuse.

It is difficult to measure the actual number of domestic violence crimes because not all incidents are reported and not all victims seek assistance or service. In the report by Durose et al. (2005), about 59% of violent crimes occurred within families and 55% of violent crimes occurred in unmarried intimate relationship were reported. The most common reason that domestic violence victims did not report the incident to police or other authorities was because they considered it to be a private and personal matter. Other common reasons for not reporting domestic violence by victims included fear of reprisal by the offender, protection of the offender, and their perception that the incident was not important to police.

Domestic violence is expensive, and its cost is shared by all the members of the society. Annually, violence between spouses and intimate partners costs the United States \$12.6 billion, or 0.1% of gross domestic product (Waters et al., 2004). Since the late 1980s, increasing studies have focused on estimating the overall economic cost of domestic violence through different methodologies in tracking costs (Chan & Cho, 2010). The overall cost of domestic violence can be divided into direct costs and indirect costs (Waters et al.). Direct costs include use of legal and social services, direct medical care, direct mental health care, and property damage and loss. Indirect costs include loss of

income, loss of consumption efficiency, loss of productivity, and long-term impacts to victims and offenders, such as psychological pain and loss of quality of life.

Domestic violence has been found as intergenerationally transmitted (Corvo, 2006). Men and women who experienced violence during childhood and adolescence are more likely to be involved in abusive relationships as adults. Men and women who observed the violence in their families of origin tended to adopt the behavior from the influential others, parents or primary care givers, to reach desirable outcomes in their own relationship (Goldner, Penn, Sheinberg, & Walker, 1990). Both victims and offenders include both men and women. While the majority of domestic violence victims were women, the majority of domestic violence offenders were men (Durose et al., 2005). A large amount of research on domestic violence was conducted within women's shelters, and these studies focused on the dynamic of domestic violence (Johnson & Farrorao, 2000), the treatment and needs of female victims (Caprioli, 2003) and their children (Corvo, 2006; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Hankla, & Stormberg, 2004). In order to break the cycle of domestic violence, researchers suggested that more investigation on domestic violence offenders is needed (Dutton, 1995; Guille, 2004).

Since the late 1980, laws have mandated the arrest of the domestic violence offenders when the police are called (Buttell & Carney, 2008). The purpose of the legislation is to protect the abused and to hold their violent partners to be accountable for their abusive behavior. If convicted, these violent offenders are required to attend community-based domestic violence offender treatment programs or to be sentenced to

jail. The Criminal Justice System prefers domestic violence offenders to attend a treatment program instead of further inundating the already-overflowing jails (Chalk & King, 1998). Many female victims also favor this approach as they hope there will be a change in their partners' abusive behaviors (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Young, Cook, Smith, Turteltaub, & Hazlewood, 2007). Group psychotherapy is the most utilized format of these treatment programs for domestic violence offenders (Gondolf & White, 2000). The common goal of most domestic violence offender programs is to hold the offenders responsible for their abusive behaviors as well as to get them to commit to changing their abusive behaviors.

Men accounted for 80% of domestic violence offenses (Durose et al., 2005). The most common treatment format for male domestic violence offenders is men-only specialized group therapy. Standards and regulations vary among the treatment programs conducted in the United States (Buttell & Carney, 2008). These treatment programs are provided by diverse social service organizations, including criminal justice agencies, mental health clinics, private practitioners, and women's shelters. These providers tend to adopt different philosophies toward domestic violence issues. There is also great variability among these treatment programs in terms of theoretical orientation, duration of program, length and structure of sessions, number of participants, and counselors' training.

Most men attending the treatment program are mandated by conditions of their parole, probation, or court order. The common attitudes and responses among these men

toward attending the treatment program appeared to be hostility, reluctance, frustration, humiliation, and poor motivation (Iliffe & Steed, 2000). Counselors of these treatment programs face a significant challenge in facilitating a group process whereby change may occur in these men when they are resentful and poorly motivated to make the commitment to change. Counselors who were able to create a positive relationship with male offenders were more likely to increase their willingness and ability to change (Brown, 1997). Many counselors, both males and females, may not be well prepared for treating male domestic violence offenders (Hansen, Harway, & Cervantes, 1991; Harway & Hansen, 1990). It is suggested that since counselors are the starting point for male domestic violence offenders to explore the group process and begin social change, it is important to further understand counselors' perspectives and experiences (Hart, 1993; Phyllis, 1994).

A small amount of literature directly discussed counselors' experience in working with male domestic violence offenders in the past few decades. Bricker (2000) explored counselors' therapy-related challenges and their preferred approaches to male domestic violence offender treatment. Agustinovich (2004) explored the vulnerabilities of both male and female counselors while they were conducting treatment in a mixed-gender co-leaders group. Two studies (Roman, 2000; Tyagi, 2006) investigated the unique experience of female counselors working with male offenders. One study (Livingston, 2002) addressed the researcher's personal experience as a male counselor working with male domestic violence offenders.

In order to improve and evaluate the treatment program, it is important to have a better understanding about the experiences, both positive and negative, of counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders. Most studies discussing counselors' experiences in working with male domestic violence offenders interviewed counselors who have worked with this population for a few years. There is less known about the experiences of counselors who just started to work with male domestic violence offenders. Understanding the experiences of counselors who have less than a year of experience working with domestic violence offenders would help both academic institutions and clinic supervisors develop and improve the leadership that is needed to prepare and train counselors for treating male domestic violence offenders.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The goal of domestic violence offender programs is to hold the offenders responsible for their abusive behaviors as well as to change these behaviors (Buttell & Carney, 2008). Although the treatment groups appear to be an effective intervention strategy for the male domestic violence offenders (Dutton, 1995; Gondolf & White, 2000), their value continues to be questioned, as true change in the behavior of the offenders is questionable and uncertain (Bogard, 1994; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). Since counselors are expected to bring out legitimate and lasting change in male offenders, counselors are most likely to have insights into the behavior and responsiveness of male offenders in the treatment programs.

The effectiveness of the treatment program was associated with counselors' perspectives toward domestic violence issues and counselors' personal training experience of treating male offenders (Phyllis, 1994). Offenders in the treatment group perceived the counselor as the teacher who helped them learn self-control and develop positive change (Shamai & Buchbindr, 2010). Counselors who were able to create a positive relationship with male offenders were more likely to increase their willingness and ability to change (Brown, 1997). Counselors appear to be the key to the effectiveness of male offender treatment in domestic violence.

To date, studies on counselors' experiences of working with male domestic violence have focused on interviewing counselors who have worked with male domestic violence offenders for a few years (Agustinovich, 2004; Brown, 1997; Livingston, 2002; Roman, 2000; Tyagi, 2006). There is little known from counselors who just started to work with male domestic violence offenders. More understanding of the experiences of counselors who have less than one year experience with male domestic violence offenders is needed.

### **Statement of the Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experience of first-year counselors who worked with male domestic violence offenders, including how they perceive their role in this process, how they perceive their clients, how they carry out their responsibilities, and how they see this work experience impacting their own lives. This qualitative study of first-year counselors' experience of working with offenders will



provide important information about counselors' thoughts and feelings during the very early stages involving treating male domestic violence offenders. Understanding the experience of counselors who have less than a year experience of working with domestic violence offenders would help both academic institutions and clinic supervisors improve the leadership that is needed to prepare and train counselors for treating male domestic violence offenders.

### **Research Questions**

Two research questions were used to guide this study:

Research question 1: What are the experiences of first-year counselors who have worked with male domestic violence offenders?

Research question 2: What academic preparation might have been helpful to first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders?

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of clarification, the following terms were used throughout the study:

Domestic violence: Violence that occurs between family members and intimate partners. Family members are those whose relationship is established either biologically or legally through marriage or adoption. Intimate partners are cohabitants or unmarried dating couples that include both heterosexual couples and homosexual couples (Durose et al., 2005).

Domestic violence victims: Those whose physical body, sense of self, and sense of trust were violated by their family members or intimate partners. Domestic violence victims can be any age, gender, race, ethnicity, or country of origin (Caprioli, 2003).

Male domestic violence offenders: Men who committed domestic violence offenses by demeaning their victims and their relationship through verbal, physical, emotional, financial, or/and sexual abuse (Caprioli, 2003). In this study, the term of male offenders means male domestic violence offenders.

First-year counselors: Counselors who have less than one year of experience working with male domestic violence offenders as of the date of the study, including those who already finished their work with male offenders and those who were still working with them. All the counselors in this study were under supervision as a master-level intern or a licensed intern.

### **Assumptions**

The assumptions of this study were:

1. That the participants were open, forthcoming, and truthful with the researcher.
2. That the participants were willing to share their insights.
3. That there is general societal disdain for domestic violence.
4. That there may be discrepancies among participants' experience.
5. That the researcher's experience with domestic violence may have an effect on the participants' responses.

### **Delimitations**

To support the credibility and the generalizability of this study's results, several factors delimit this study:

1. Participants included in this study were counselors who have less than one year of experience working with male domestic violence offenders.
2. Participants in this study have at least a bachelor's degree.
3. Participants were over 21 years of age.
4. Participants were located in the North Texas areas.

### **The Researcher as Person**

In qualitative studies, the researcher is a person that is a part of the research process (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher of this study is originally from Taiwan, and she is the youngest child and only girl in her family. The researcher first came to the United States in 2001, and she has received all her counseling training in the United States. The researcher is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) with six years of experience working with families with domestic violence issues, and she has worked with both victims and offenders, and with both children and adults. The researcher stopped working with offenders two years ago at the time of this study began, and she was working with children exposed to domestic violence when the interviews were conducted. The theoretical perspective of the researcher is the Client-Centered theory. The researcher believes that human beings strive for the best development in the environment in which they find themselves. When the environment provides more

positive influences than negative influences, more positive development in human beings is expected to be achievable.

### **Summary**

Domestic violence is a disturbing and complex social problem that impacts not only the women, men, and children who are immediately involved in the incident but also all members of the society. The treatment program for the male domestic violence offenders is an attempt to break the cycle of the domestic violence by holding these men accountable for their abusive behaviors and making positive change in their lives and their relationships with their partners. The counselors' ability to facilitate the offender group is positively associated with the effectiveness of the offender treatment program. Understanding counselors' experiences in working with male offenders would help evaluate realistic and lasting changes in male offenders. Current studies on counselors' experiences in working with male offenders were done with counselors who have a few years experience. This study explored the experiences of counselors who have less than a year of experience working with male domestic violence offenders.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence has become a major social issue across the United States over the past few decades. Domestic violence is violence that occurs between family members and intimate partners. Family members are those whose relationship is established either biologically or legally through marriage or adoption. Intimate partners are cohabitants or unmarried dating couples that include both heterosexual couples and homosexual couples. Types of domestic violence include verbal, physical, emotional, financial, and sexual assaults which violate a person's physical body, sense of self, and sense of trust. Domestic violence can happen to anyone regardless of the age, gender, race, ethnicity, or country of origin. Domestic violence offenders intend to demean their victims and their relationships through verbal, physical, emotional, financial, or/and sexual abuse (Caprioli, 2003).

#### **Domestic Violence as a Social Problem**

Domestic violence is a disturbing and complex social problem that impacts not only the women, men, and children who are immediately involved in the incident but also all the members of the society (Caprioli, 2003). Three out of four Americans personally know someone, including themselves, a family member, or a friend, who is or has been a

victim of domestic violence (Allstate Foundation, 2006). According to a U.S. Department of Justice report (Durose et al., 2005), between 1998 and 2002, about 3.5 million violent crimes occurred in families, and about 2 million violent crimes occurred between unmarried intimate couples. The majority of domestic violence victims were women, while the majority of domestic violence offenders were men. One in every four women has been abused by their intimate partner during their lifetime. Four out of five domestic violence offenders were men. The report by Durose et al. found that women made up 84% of spousal abuse victims and 86% of dating partner abuse victims, and men committed 76% of spousal abuse and 86% of dating abuse.

It is difficult to measure the actual number of domestic violence crimes because not all incidents are reported and not all victims seek assistance or service. In the report by Durose et al. (2005), about 59% of violent crimes occurred in families and 55% of violent crimes occurred in unmarried intimate relationships were reported. The most common reason that domestic violence victims did not report the incident to police or other authorities was because they considered it to be a private and personal matter. Other common reasons for not reporting domestic violence by victims included fear of reprisal by the offender, protection of the offender, and their perception that the incident was not important to police.

Domestic violence is expensive, and its cost is shared by all the members of society. Annually, violence between spouses and intimate partners costs the United States \$12.6 billion, or 0.1% of gross domestic product (Waters et al., 2004). Since the

late 1980s, increasing studies have focused on estimating the overall economic cost of domestic violence through different methodologies in tracking costs (Chan & Cho, 2010). The overall cost of domestic violence can be divided into direct costs and indirect costs (Waters et al.). Direct costs include use of legal and social services, direct medical care, direct mental health care, and property damage and loss. Indirect costs include loss of income, loss of consumption efficiency, loss of productivity, and long-term impacts to victims and offenders, such as psychological pain and loss of quality of life.

### **Social Learning Theory in Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is viewed as a learned behavior from role models (Mihalic & Elliott, 2005). According to social learning theory, human beings, as thinking organisms, reproduce the observed behaviors through vicarious and observational learning (Chibucos, Leite, & Weit, 2005). The family is the first social setting for children to learn about relationships with others. In the family, young children observe the behaviors of their parents, main care givers, or older siblings, and imitate those behaviors after observation. Men and women who observed the violence in their families of origin tended to adopt the behavior from the influential others, parents or older siblings, to reach desirable outcomes in their later relationships (Goldner, Penn, Sheinberg, & Walker, 1990).

Studies (Corvo, 2006; Foshee, Bauman, & Linder, 1999; Mihalic & Elliott, 2005) found domestic violence is intergenerationally transmitted. Men and women who experienced domestic violence during childhood and adolescence were more likely to get

involved in a violent relationship than those whose childhoods were free of domestic violence. The four intervening variables that successfully reproduce a given behavior in social learning theory that may be used to explain the intergenerational transmission of domestic violence are attentional processes, retention processes, physical or motor reproduction processes, and motivational processes (Chibucos, Leite, & Weit, 2005).

**Attentional processes.** In the family setting, parents or other significant adults are the primary role models for young children. Due to the physical and emotional needs, children pay a great deal of attention to the adults who are close to them (Corvo, 2006). Once children perceive violence as the appropriated or acceptable behavior and perceive that it results in no unfavorable consequences, they tend to adopt the behavior.

**Retention processes.** Violent behavior is viewed as the product of cognitive and self-reflective functions (Corvo, 2006). Being in a family where domestic violence occurs, children interpret the violent behavior as natural and acceptable. They internalize the violent behavior observed from their parents or primary care givers and incorporate it into their own coping skills, using it in reaction to or in response to the stress or conflict that occurs in their own relationships.

**Physical or motor reproduction processes.** Since children observe violence as a powerful tool used to resolve the conflict between their parents, they perceive that violence results in functionally positive consequences (Foshee, Bauman, & Linder, 1999). Once conflict occurs in their own relationships, their emotions are triggered by



the cognitive and behavioral patterns. Then they apply what they have learned from their parents, and expect the same outcome.

**Motivational processes.** Children's violent behaviors will be reinforced if there is no negative consequence resulting from it (Foshee, Bauman, & Linder, 1999).

Children who grew up in violent home rarely have the chance to resolve conflicts in constructive ways. When conflict occurs between them and their partners, it functions as the stimuli to motivate the same violent behavior to resolve the conflict.

### **Domestic Violence Offenders**

Either men or women can become victims or offenders of domestic violence, and in some cases, both. The majority of domestic violence victims were women, and the majority of domestic violence offenders were men (Durose et al., 2005). A large amount of research on domestic violence was done within women's shelters (Johnson & Farrorao, 2000). Many studies focused on the dynamics of domestic violence (John, 1995), the treatment and needs of female victims (Caprioli, 2003), and the impact to the children (Corvo, 2006; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Hankla, & Stormberg, 2004). Studies of domestic violence offenders focused on the characteristics of offenders (Murrell, Christoff, & Henning, 2007) and the effectiveness of offender treatment programs (Bowen & Gilchrist, 2004). In order to break the cycle of domestic violence, researchers suggested that more investigation on domestic violence offenders is needed (Dutton, 1995, Guille, 2004).

## **Characteristics of Male Domestic Violence Offenders**

Researchers investigated the characteristics of male offenders in order to target the high risk of attrition and develop appropriate treatments. McCloskey, Sitaker, Grigsby, and Malloy (2003) reviewed the literature to attempt to determine the typical offender profile, and they found it was difficult to clearly determine the characteristics for male offenders. Most male offenders appeared to be decent society members to those outside the family because they were only violent with their partners or family members (Peterman & Dixon, 2001). Male offenders were found in every social, economic, educational, ethnic, professional, and religious group. McCloskey et al. found the most common characteristics among male offenders were high rate of home-life instability, childhood abuse history, emotional problems, and substance use.

Studies by Corvo (2006), Dick (2005), and Murrell, Christoff, & Henning (2007) investigated the association between the characteristics of male domestic violence offenders and their exposure to domestic violence in childhood. The frequency and the severity of domestic violence offenses committed were found as positively associated with the frequency and the severity of exposure to domestic violence as a child (Murrell, Christoff, & Henning). Their exposure to domestic violence, either directly experiencing violence as a child or witnessing parental violence as child, had a long-term impact on their cognitive, social, emotional, or behavioral functioning (Laumakis, Margolin, & John, 1998; Rossman, 2001; Sternberg, Lamb, & Dawud-Noursi, 1998).

Mauricio and Lopez (2009) investigated 304 male offenders and divided them into three classes based on the frequency and severity of violent offenses they committed. Twenty-five percent of participants in this study were grouped into the low-level violence class in which minor psychological and physical violence were reported. The moderate-level violence class included 35% of participants who represented adult anxious attachment orientation. The rest of the sample, 40% of participants, was in the high-level violence class in which both adult anxious attachment orientation and personality disorder characteristics were found.

### **Treatment of Male Domestic Violence Offenders**

Since the late 1980, laws have mandated the arrest of the domestic violence offenders when the police are called (Buttell & Carney, 2008). The purpose of the legislation is to protect the abused ones and to hold their violent partners to be accountable for their abusive behavior. If convicted, these violent offenders are required to attend community-based domestic violence offender treatment programs or to be sentenced to jail. The Criminal Justice System preferred domestic violence offenders to attend a treatment program instead of further inundating the already overflowing jails (Chalk & King, 1998). Group psychotherapy is the most utilized format of these treatment programs for domestic violence offenders (Gondolf & White, 2000). The common goal of most domestic violence offender programs is to hold the offenders responsible for their abusive behaviors as well as to get them to commit to changing their abusive behaviors.

Men accounted for 80% of domestic violence offenses (Durose et al., 2005).

Many female victims favored the offender treatment program because they hope there will be a change in their partners' abusive behaviors (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Young, Cook, Smith, Turteltaub, & Hazlewood, 2007). The most common treatment format for male domestic violence offenders is men-only specialized group therapy. Standards and regulations vary among the treatment programs conducted in the United States (Buttelli & Carney, 2008). Generally, the offender program provides a framework to challenge offenders to be accountable for their violent behavior and the harm they have caused their spouses and families (Lee, Uken, & Sebold, 2004).

The offender treatment programs are provided by diverse social service organizations, including criminal justice agencies, mental health clinics, private practitioners, or women's shelters (Buttelli & Carney, 2008). These providers tend to adopt different philosophies toward the domestic violence issues. There is a great variability among these treatment programs in terms of theoretical orientation, duration of program, length and structure of sessions, number of participants, and counselors' training. The treatment programs extending over a longer period of time may be more effective than those with a shorter duration (Jones, Heckert, Gondolf, Zhang, & Ip, 2010). Offenders who were in a nine-month program tended to have more solid and positive changes than those who were in a three-month program.

The offender treatment programs provide an environment for male offenders to meet with other men with similar problems while they learn different coping methods for

controlling violence (Shamai & Buchbindr, 2010). Male offenders perceived the treatment program as a turning point where they learned self-control, and the counselors were viewed as the teacher in the group process. Male offenders perceived the counselors as being in a powerful position from which counselors would either create a caring and nurturing relationship with them or grow distant with conflict and criticism toward them. A warm, trusting, and accepting atmosphere was found to be most useful to assist male offenders in developing healthy coping skills and making positive changes. Male offenders mainly reported their experiences that the therapists were responsible for the success of the group treatment.

Most studies on offender treatment program evaluations focused on the rate of treatment completion and the rate of recidivism (Gondolf, 2004). Jones, Heckert, Gondolf, Zhang, and Ip (2010) pointed out that recidivism rate could be misleading because offenders' behavior may vary over time or differ in its visibility in order to maintain the control of their victims. The offender typology was suggested to be recognized by 'states' that can change over time instead of dispositional characteristics. The complex behavioral patterns in offenders increase the difficulty of defining positive outcomes of the offender treatment programs.

### **Counselors Who Work with Male Domestic Violence Offenders**

Literature on male domestic violence offenders mostly focuses on investigating the offenders' characters, the dynamic between offenders and victims, and the format and effectiveness of the treatment programs (Bowen & Gilchrist, 2004; Murrell, Christoff, &

Henning, 2007). Only a small amount of literature discusses the counselors' experience in working with male domestic violence offenders.

### **Studies on Counselors' Experience**

Hart (1993) and Phyllis (1994) pointed out that counselor perspectives on domestic violence issues and personal training experience of this population significantly affected the effectiveness of the treatment for male domestic violence offenders. Most of offenders are mandated to attend the treatment program. Counselors who work with these programs continuously face the pervasive issue of low motivation and commitment to change. Working with the offenders also brings out high stress and frustration in the process as well as a power struggle in the dynamic with the offenders. Phyllis suggested counselors would need to be aware of their own professional and personal biases and their own issues with control in order to be effective in the therapy process with offenders.

**Female counselors.** Two studies (Roman, 2000; Tyagi, 2006) investigated the unique experience of female counselors who work with male offenders. Roman interviewed seven intentionally selected female psychotherapists who all had at least one year of experience working with male offenders. All participants continued working with the offenders because of their commitment to the domestic violence issue and their personal growth through their work. The selected female psychotherapists also experienced being traumatized by the abusive stories and/or the intimidating behaviors of the male offenders. Participants reported having a professional support group that

provided an accepting atmosphere where they could explore their mixed feelings regarding working with the male offenders.

Tyagi (2006) pointed out that female counselors who worked with male domestic violence offenders face unique challenges. Many men are mandated to attend treatment groups, and they often are holding a resentful attitude toward attending a weekly counseling group. Counselors are in an unpleasant position because the male offenders would present their frustration with the justice system and low motivation to commit to change. Female counselors are in a more vulnerable position than male counselors as male offenders might allow their resentful feelings toward their spouses to spill over to female counselors.

**Male counselors.** Livingston (2002) discussed his own personal experience as a male counselor who works with male offenders. Livingston pointed out the overwhelming sense of responsibility those male counselors experience while working in the domestic violence field. Male counselors practice their work differently than female counselors because of male counselors' own complicity in the patriarchal system in which they were raised. While offenders are in the process of making change, they often depend on the guidance and support from their counselors. Offenders often see the counselors as teachers for learning new coping skills to reduce their abusive behaviors. Livingston suggested male counselors utilize infinite responsibility while working with male offenders. The parallels that exist between the offenders' experience of responsibility and the counselors' experience of responsibility can grow together.

**Male-female co-leaders.** Agustinovich (2004) explored the vulnerabilities in both male and female counselors while they were conducting the treatment in a male-female co-leaders group. Co-leadership is often employed in offender treatment groups because the intensity and potential volatility in this group situation as well as the need for modeling and role-playing. The use of male-female co-leaders can be beneficial in many offender treatment programs because each leader may bring in specific advantages to the process. For example, a female counselor might be more inclined to pick up on subtle gender-bias language and behaviors that a male counselor might overlook, and male offenders could learn from a male counselor who demonstrates the positive and healthy interactions with his female co-leader. However, the male-female co-leadership could be complex between the leaders as well as between the leaders and offenders. The difference in their special training in gender issues, their level of understanding of domestic violence, and their personal beliefs and values in intimate relationships would all impact the dynamic of the group process for both leaders and group members.

**Counselor's challenges.** Counselors appear to be the key to the effectiveness of male domestic violence offender treatment. Most men attending the treatment program are mandated by the conditions of their parole, probation, or court order. The common attitudes and responses among these men toward attending the treatment program appeared to be hostility, reluctance, frustration, humiliation, and poor motivation (Iliffe & Steed, 2000). The counselors of these treatment programs face a great deal of challenge of facilitating a group process whereby positive social change may occur in these men



when they are resentful and poorly motivated to make the commitment to change. Counselors who were able to create a positive relationship with male offenders were more likely to increase their willingness and ability to change (Brown, 1997). Many counselors, both males and females, may not be well prepared for treating male domestic violence offenders (Hansen, Harway, & Cervantes, 1991; Harway & Hansen, 1990). It is suggested that since counselors are the starting point for male domestic violence offenders to explore the group process and facilitate social change, it is important to further understand counselor's perspectives and experiences (Hart, 1993; Phyllis, 1994).

### **Academic Preparation**

There is little known in literature about academic preparation for future counselors to work with domestic violence offenders. Studies discussing academic preparation mostly focused on future mental health professionals' general perspectives toward domestic violence and their work with victims of domestic violence (Black, Weisz, & Bennett, 2010). Danis (2004) reported only about 55% of social workers had limited academic preparation for working domestic violence issues. Black, Weisz, and Bennet reported necessary knowledge and professional skills for addressing domestic violence issues were mostly taught as an integrated part of foundational courses throughout the academic program. It is less commonly found that domestic violence issues were addressed in a specifically designed course.

Black, Weisz, and Bennett (2010) investigated graduating social worker students' perspectives toward domestic violence. The result found that students with academic

preparation on domestic violence issues experienced less burnout while working with victims of domestic violence compared to those who had no academic preparation. The combination of academic preparation and professional experience was found as the strongest predictor of self-efficacious practice for social workers who just started working with victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence is a multifaceted social problem. Black et al. suggested that academic institutions were responsible for providing adequate training on domestic violence issues for future mental health professionals

### **Clinical Supervision**

Clinical supervision is essential not only to motivate new counselors to take an internship as a learning experience but also to enrich this learning experience by satisfying new counselors' curiosities about the meaning of their practices during their internship (Lizzo, Stokes, & Wilson, 2005). The primary task for new counselors during the first year of clinical contact is the development of confidence (Bischoff, Barton, Thober, & Hawley, 2002). Bischoff et al. investigated 39 recent graduates of marriage and family therapy master's degree program and found that clinical self-confidence was positively associated with the degree of internalization of clinical experience. Due to a lack of internalized experience, new counselors felt anxious and questioned their own competence. New counselors relied heavily on supervision to guide and develop their professional skills. Clinical supervisors who were able to monitor the details of new counselors' work with clients and emphasize the strengths of these new counselors would help grow the clinical self-confidence of these counselors.

A supervisory system is a training system that is similar to a family system, in that it includes at least three generations: the supervisor, the new counselor, and the client (Lee & Everett, 2004). The interactional patterns in the relationship between the supervisor and the new counselor will replicate themselves in the relationship between the new counselor and the client through a parallel process, which is called isomorphism. Clinical supervisors with isomorphism in mind are aware of the dynamic between themselves and new counselors, and between new counselors and clients. Isomorphism provides valuable insights for clinical supervisors to understand the parallel change between the subsystems in the training system and to improve the potential intervention. It is expected that a positive supervisor-supervisee relationship will result in a positive outcome of new counselors' clinical practice.

### **Summary**

Domestic violence is a disturbing and complex social problem that impacts all the members of society. Domestic violence is intergenerationally transmitted and children exposed to domestic violence were more likely to get involved in an abusive relationship when they grew up. Men accounted for 80% of domestic violence offenses. The treatment program for male domestic violence offenders is an attempt to break the cycle of domestic violence. The goal of the treatment program is to hold male offenders accountable for their abusive behaviors and responsible for making positive change in their lives. Studies found that counselors' ability to facilitate the offender groups was positively associated with the effectiveness and outcome of the offender treatment

program. Understanding counselors' experience in working with male offenders would improve the evaluation of the lasting change in male offenders. Current studies on counselors' experience were done with the counselors who have a few years experience of working with male offenders. To date, there is little known about the experience of counselors who have less than one year work with male offenders. It is important to have a study to investigate the experience of new counselors during the very early stages of their clinical contact with male offenders. A study on new counselors would provide a better understanding on their academic preparation and professional practice experience. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experience of first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders, including how they perceive their role in this process, how they perceive their clients, how they carry out their responsibilities, and how they see this work experience impacting their own lives.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experience of first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders, including how they perceive their role in this process, how they perceive their clients, how they carry out their responsibilities, and how they see this work experience impacting their own lives. To date, there is little known about the perceptions and experiences of counselors who recently began to work with male domestic violence offenders. Understanding the experiences of new counselors would help academic institutions and clinic supervisors improve the leadership that is needed to help new counselors develop the professional skills to become more effective as experienced counselors. The results from this study will aid the professionals who work in the domestic violence field. A qualitative approach was used. Data were collected through in-person interviews with counselors who have less than one year of experience in working with male domestic violence offenders. Audio from the interviews was recorded and transcribed. The phenomenological research method was used to explore the meanings that the first-year counselors gave to their experiences working with male domestic violence offenders.

## **Research Design**

Phenomenological research examines the actual experience of individuals and how they assign meaning to their experiences (Creswell, 2003; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The focus of a phenomenological study is to allow people to describe their experience in a way that makes sense for them. The goal of this phenomenological study was to understand the meaning of the first-year counselors' experiences through their language. The assumption for this study is that first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders have a shared experience and that they may generate meaning specific to them based on their experiences. Although the first-year counselors have limited experience in the field, the data may provide unique ideas for both the male domestic violence offender treatment and the clinical training of beginning counselors.

### **Data Collection**

The interview is the primary method of data collection in phenomenological research as the interview provides an opportunity for the participants to share their experience (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The interview is a collaborative process where the narratives would be developed beyond the initial questions. The researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol to interview the first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders. Audio from the interviews was recorded for accuracy and transcribed. The participants chose the locations for the interviews.

## **Instrumentation**

The researcher is part of the instrument in qualitative research, and the interview is the process to gather the data (Creswell, 2003). The researcher developed a qualitative interview protocol where central questions were addressed and subsequent questions were placed under the central question. The research questions that guided this study were:

Research question 1: What are the experiences of first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders?

Research question 2: What academic preparation might have been helpful to first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders?

This phenomenological study used four interview questions as the focus of the interview. The researcher used the interview protocol (Appendix D) to assist the interview. The interview questions were:

Interview question 1: How did you become involved in the work with male domestic violence offenders?

Interview question 2: What is your academic training related to domestic violence?

Interview question 3: What is your personal experience related to domestic violence?

Interview question 4: What changes have occurred in your beliefs and attitudes to domestic violence since you started to work with male domestic violence offenders?

### **Protection of Human Participants**

This study was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board of Texas Woman's University to protect the integrity of the study and its participants. The participants' identity and confidentiality were protected by using a coding system. Numerical and alphabetical codes were assigned to each participant. Only the researcher and her major advisor had access to identifying information. The participant's name only appeared on the consent form. No identifying information appeared on the demographic forms and transcripts. Transcripts, audio recordings, consent forms, and the list of participants who may request a summary of the research results were kept in a locked cabinet. All participant identifying data, audio recordings, and transcripts will be destroyed by the end of the year of this study.

The participants were given the opportunity to ask questions during the recruitment process as well as during the interview process. The researcher asked if the participants had any question before and after the interview. The participants were given a referral list of professional therapists (Appendix E) in their area after the interview. The participants were able to contact the researcher directly at any point of time during and after the research process via email or phone.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were the counselors who had less than one year of experience working with male domestic violence offenders. A total of nine participants were recruited from the community agencies where domestic violence offender



treatments are provided and the academic institutions where future mental health professionals were trained in the North Texas area. Participants were over 21 years of age, and included both males and females. The participants included those who were working on their master level internship and those who were working on their licensed internship. All participants in this study were volunteers.

### **Sampling Procedures**

The recruitment flyer (Appendix A) that introduced this study, including the purpose of the study and the researcher's contact information was sent out via email to the directors of offender treatment programs of community agencies in the North Texas area. The recruitment flyer was also sent out via email to academic institutions in the North Texas area where future mental health professionals were being trained. Additionally, the researcher used purposive and snowball sampling to increase the opportunity of reaching potential participants. During the contact process with potential participants, the researcher asked if they know other counselors who had less than one year of experience working with male offenders that might be interested in participating in the study. The directors of offender treatment programs and the professors of academic institutes whom the researcher directly contacted were invited to share this study in other settings where potential participants might be found. The participants were given a hard copy of the flyer at the end of the interview, so they might share this study with those who were potential participants.

## **Interview Procedures**

The interview process is central to this study. The researcher is to provide a neutral atmosphere where participant would feel free and comfortable talking about their experiences and sharing their feelings and thoughts (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The participants met with the researcher at the time and place of their choosing for the interview. After the greeting, the participants filled out the demographic information (Appendix C), and the researcher set up the equipment. The participants had the opportunity to ask questions before the interview started. The participants were made aware that they could take a break during the interview when they needed to or that they could withdraw from the study at any point. The location for the interview was either the participant's offices or a conference room in the library of Texas Woman's University.

The proposed time for the semi-structured interview was a maximum of an hour. The researcher followed the interview protocol (Appendix D) to conduct the semi-structured interview. The interview protocol assisted the researcher to prepare the participants for sharing their personal experience. The researcher went over the consent form (Appendix B) with the participants. The researcher answered questions if the participants had any, and the participants signed the consent form. The researcher kept the signed consent form, and the participants were given a blank copy of the consent form to keep as their record.

The interview consisted of four open-ended questions. The standardized open-ended questions provided the focus of the interview (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In the

semi-structured interview, the participants focused on the four standardized open-ended questions and responded to them by freely taking their time to share their own thoughts and feelings. In the first interview, one open-ended question was asked at a time for the participant's response. At the end of the first interview, the first participant suggested that the researcher provide all four open-ended questions to participants at the beginning of the interview, so participants could freely decide to answer the four open-ended questions in their preferred order. Thus, starting from the second interview and continuing through the last one, the researcher went through all the four open-ended questions with each participant before using the digital audio recorder to document each participant's responses.

All the interviews last between 30 minutes and one hour. After the interviews were complete, the researcher thanked the participants and answered questions if they had any. The referral list of professional therapists in the North Texas Area (Appendix E) was provided to the participants. The researcher went over the recruitment of snowball sampling (Appendix F) to invite the participants to share the recruitment flyer for this study (Appendix A) with others. Two participants orally requested to have a copy of the summary of this study once this study is completed and has been approved by the researcher's committees.

### **Treatment of Data**

After each interview, the researcher saved the audio recording under the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 8). The researcher listened to the

recording once and then transcribed it at the second time. Where appropriate, the researcher cited the notations into the transcript. The notations included any recollections of participants' emotional reactions, gestures, and body language. The researcher listened to the recording again to fill in any missing words on the transcript and reviewed the printed copy of the transcript for accuracy. Two hard copies were printed: one was used for sorting the themes, and the other one was for safekeeping. The consent form with participants' names on was locked away from the transcripts and demographic information.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

While a qualitative study allows the researcher to gather the data from the participant's life experience, the researcher may function as a filter to interpret the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). To reduce the degree of partiality to the data, the researcher sorted and organized the data based on the content in the participants' responses to the four standardized open-ended questions. After a list of meaning statements from each participant was developed, the researcher grouped all the meaning statement into meaning units. Individual meaningful sharing other than in response to the interview questions from participants was gathered to enrich the description of the experience.

To increase the credibility of this study, the researcher utilized triangulating analysts. The transcripts were analyzed by the researcher as well as two data analysts who have been trained in qualitative research methods. The data analysts were familiar with domestic violence issues but had not directly worked with male domestic violence

offenders. The researcher and the data analysts used the hard copies of transcripts to sort and group the themes. Each data analyst was given two transcripts to identify any themes. No identifying information was shown in the transcripts, and the data analysts did not see any demographic information. The researcher and the data analysts independently analyzed the data. Then researcher compared her data analysis with those of the data analysts. By the end of the study, only one of the data analysts was available to assist the data analysis. The other panel member did not complete the study due to personal reasons.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experience of first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders, including how they perceive their role in this process, how they perceive their clients, how they carry out their responsibilities, and how they see this work experience impacting their own lives. The participants for this study were recruited from the domestic violence offender program of community agencies and the academic institutions in the North Texas area. A total of nine counselors who had less than one year experience of working with male offenders were recruited in this study. Data were gathered in a semi-structured interview by using four open-ended questions. Audio from the interviews was digitally recorded and transcribed into printed copies. One data analyst assisted the data analysis to attempt to improve the creditability of this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This chapter presents the result of a qualitative study designed to explore the experience of first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders. The researcher interviewed nine participants who volunteered for the study. The first section presents a description of the sample of the counselors who had less than one year experience of working with male domestic violence offenders. The second section presents the five themes that emerged from the counselors' responses to the four interview questions.

#### **Sample Description**

The sample ( $n = 9$ ) consisted of 77.8% ( $n = 7$ ) female and 22.2% ( $n = 2$ ) male. The ages of the participants ranged from 23 to 57 with a mean of 31.9. Caucasians comprised 55.6% ( $n = 5$ ) of the sample, and the remaining 44.4% ( $n = 4$ ) sample included two Hispanic, one African American, and one other. The relationship statuses were single ( $n = 5$ ), married ( $n = 3$ ), and divorced ( $n = 1$ ).

Participants were from different master programs: marriage and family therapy ( $n = 2$ ), counseling ( $n = 5$ ), and psychology ( $n = 2$ ). Two participants had completed the master degree and were currently working on the licensed internship. Seven participants were working on the master program internship and expected to finish the master degree

in no longer than six months. All participants reported there was no course designed specifically for the issues of counseling domestic violence offenders offered in the master program. Five participants recalled that an introduction to and discussion on the issues of domestic violence were integrated in some of the classes they had taken.

The time that participants counseled male domestic violence offenders was: less than three months ( $n = 4$ ), between three and six months ( $n = 2$ ), between six and nine months ( $n = 1$ ), and between nine and 12 months ( $n = 2$ ). The time of their weekly work related to counseling with male domestic violence offenders was: under five hours ( $n = 4$ ), between 16 and 20 hours ( $n = 3$ ), and more than 20 hours ( $n = 2$ ). In terms of the supervision formats, four of the participants received both group supervision and individual supervision for their counseling with male domestic violence offenders. Of the remaining five participants, three received individual supervision only, and two received group supervision only. Group supervision was either in the group meeting provided by the director of the offender program or in the group meeting that included all of the counselors in the clinic. Individual supervision was provided by either the assigned clinic supervisor or the experienced counselor with whom they co-facilitated the offender group.

All participants had counseling experiences other than their work with male domestic violence offenders. The time of their other counseling experiences was: less than six months ( $n = 1$ ), between six and 12 months ( $n = 6$ ), between 19 and 24 months ( $n = 1$ ), and more than 24 months ( $n = 1$ ). The types of their other counseling experiences

varied among couple, family, play, individual, group, children, adolescent, and adult counseling. They all reported having counseling experience with the victims of domestic violence.

Regarding personal experience related to domestic violence, three participants reported that they had personal experience with domestic violence on their demographic information forms. Two of them personally experienced domestic violence as a victim, and one of them had a family member and a close friend who were in abusive relationships. Among the six participants who reported no personal experience with domestic violence on their demographic information forms, four of them shared in the interview that they did have this kind of experience that was either their own experience or the experience of someone they knew. All male participants ( $n = 2$ ) in this study reported no personal experience with domestic violence on both their demographic information forms and in the interview. The above and additional demographic information can be found in Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.



Table 1

*Age, Gender, Race, and Relationship Status of Participants in Domestic Violence Study*

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Relationship status
1	25	Female	Caucasian	Single
2	37	Female	Caucasian	Married
3	23	Male	Caucasian	Single
4	23	Female	Caucasian	Single
5	43	Male	Hispanic	Married
6	26	Female	African American	Single
7	57	Female	Hispanic	Divorced
8	27	Female	Other	Single
9	26	Female	Caucasian	Married

Table 2

*Type of Master Program, Time Since Degree Completion, Courses Related to Domestic Violence of Participants in Domestic Violence Study*

Participant	Master program	Time Since complete the master degree	Number of courses related to domestic violence*
1	Marriage/Family Therapy	3 months ago	None
2	Marriage/Family Therapy	22 months ago	2
3	Counseling	3 to 6 months	None
4	Counseling	< 3 months	None
5	Counseling	< 3 months	1
6	Counseling	3 to 6 months	1
7	Counseling	3 to 6 months	4
8	Psychology	3 to 6 months	None
9	Psychology	3 to 6 months	1

\*Participant recalled that issues of domestic violence were addressed in these courses.

Table 3

*Work Experience with Male Domestic Violence Offenders, Weekly Work Hours, and Supervision Format of Participants in Domestic Violence Study*

Participant	Time of working with male domestic violence offenders	hours of work per week	Supervision format
1	9 to 12 months	16 to 20	Group + Individual
2	< 3 months	>20	Group + Individual
3	< 3 months	<5	Group
4	< 3 months	16 to 20	Group + Individual
5	3 to 6 months	>20	Individual
6	< 3 months	<5	Individual
7	3 to 6 months	<5	Group
8	9 to 12 months	16 to 20	Group + Individual
9	6 to 9 months	<5	Individual

Table 4

*Other Counseling Experience and Counseling Types of Participants in Domestic Violence Study*

Participant	Time of other counseling experience	Types of counseling
1	< 6 months	Couple/Family/Individual
2	> 24 months	Family/Children/Group/Individual
3	6 to 12 months	Play
4	6 to 12 months	Adult/Adolescent
5	6 to 12 months	Group
6	6 to 12 months	Adult
7	6 to 12 months	Children/Adolescent
8	6 to 12 months	Adolescent
9	19 to 24 months	Individual/Group/Family/Couple

Table 5

*Personal Experience Related to Domestic Violence of Participants in Domestic Violence Study*

Participant	<u>Reported on demographic information</u>	<u>Shared in Interview</u>	
	Personal experience of domestic violence	Personally experienced	Family/Friends experienced
1	No	No	Yes
2	Yes	No	Yes
3	No	No	No
4	No	Yes	Yes
5	No	No	No
6	No	No	Yes
7	No	Yes	No
8	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Yes	Yes	Yes

### Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experience of first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders, including how they perceived their role in this process, how they perceived their clients, how they carried out their responsibilities, and how they viewed this work experience impacting their own lives. The goal of this phenomenological study was to understand the meaning of the first-year counselors' experiences through their self-report. To guide this study, the researcher focused on the following research questions:

Research question 1: What is the experience of first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders?

Research question 2: What academic preparation might have been helpful to first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders?

This phenomenological study used four interview questions as the focus of the interview. The interview questions were:

1. How did you become involved in the work with male domestic violence offenders?
2. What is your academic training related to domestic violence?
3. What is your personal experience related to domestic violence?
4. What changes have occurred in your beliefs and attitudes to domestic violence since you started to work with male domestic violence offenders?

### **Theme One: Working with Male Offenders was not the Participants' Original Plan**

Most participants decided to work on their internships in these community agencies because of their interests in working with the victims of domestic violence. They were encouraged to work with male domestic violence offenders after they were accepted by the internship settings.

One participant in this study was asked by the supervisor of the internship setting to choose to work with the offenders over the victims.

I picked domestic violence shelter because I intended to work with domestic violence victims.... So she [supervisor] asked me since they are just having their intern leave, if I would be interested in not counseling victims but male offenders, or offenders general, male or female. I was kind of hesitant because it was not

what I intended to go into. And I did have some big sort of blocks when it comes to think about male offenders.... So I went through their orientation. And she [supervisor] taught part of the orientation before I made the decision. (Participant #8)

Five of the participants in this study became involved in working with male offenders because the internship settings required them to choose at least one group to work with for their internship training. The male offender group was introduced to some of the participants for the very first time. Since the internship began, these participants started working with both the victims and the offenders at the same time.

I have signed up for a class, a group, and I wanna a morning group, so I signed up my name to a morning group. But I didn't realize what I have signed up for....I didn't know, but I signed up anyway. (#2)

We were expected to pick a group to work with and there were a few groups that work for my schedule. Many of them work with my schedule were the offender groups.... So I signed up to be in the group without really having any knowledge of what this group is. (#3)

When did I become involved? Hmm...it was about two months ago when I first started my internship and found out the group. I heard about the [offender] group and stared with that group. (#6)

How did I become involved? I was by the agency, my supervisor, and by the director of victim outreach to co-facilitate a group of offenders. (#7)

Only one participant in this study initially chose to start her internship work with both victims and offenders at the same time.

Well my first practicum was at [agency name], so I got to choose what we want to work with, the victims or the offenders. I was interested in both, so I started co-leading group. (#9)

Two participants in this study began their work with male offenders after they had been in the same internship setting for a while. They worked with the victims of domestic violence when they first started the internship in the setting. They intended to explore further understanding of male offenders and the dynamic of domestic violence.

Then I went to another [offenders] orientation.... So I started to see them not necessary in a victim and abuser, two separate catalogues, but as more just kind of connected, more as the societal issue, and how can we stop that. So I became very interested in working with the abusers at that point. (#4)

I decided to do my internship here again. And the way I get involved actually the [offender] program here was when we were doing the initial orientation, the director of the [offender] program introduced all these. I was intrigued by the perspectives they were working.... After the orientation I went to explore the direction that I was interested in and possibly working with them in some way I could. (#5)

All participants in this study perceived working with male offenders during their internship as a positive learning experience. Working with both victims and offenders

has extended their understanding to the whole picture of domestic violence. Some of them were interested in continuing to work with male offenders in the future. Some of them would only work with male offenders for this internship.

### **Theme Two: Limited Academic Preparation on Domestic Violence**

All participants in this study reported there was no course designed specifically for the issues of domestic violence offered in their master programs. Five participants in this study reported they received limited academic preparation for working with the issues of domestic violence. No participant reported there was any academic preparation for working with male domestic violence offenders.

Five participants reported that the issues of domestic violence were integrated into some of the courses they took. They recalled that the issues of domestic violence were presented in discussion formats with limited time. The discussions basically addressed the general statistical data of domestic violence, the dynamic of domestic violence, the types of abuse, and the treatments for the women victims and their children.

We discussed it in our family therapy classes. Our theory classes we discussed about it. And diagnosis classes we discussed about it....I don't think the school covers it enough at all. (#2)

The only class I felt like even touched on this was women emotional health. And we didn't talk about that [offenders] much. But we more talked about domestic violence that affects on women. (#6)

Most classes address trauma which includes obviously domestic violence.... It is like different classes seemed to have, you know, kind of part of the package. (#7)

Four participants reported that they did not receive any academic preparation on the issues of domestic violence from their master programs. One participant reported that she did not take a class that might have included the information of domestic violence.

As far as the classes I have taken, I haven't had any class that deals with domestic violence as main focus in the class. We did have crisis class, but I've never taken that class. (#4)

Some participants reported that they were not aware if the information of domestic violence was included in any of the courses offered by their master programs.

I actually don't have any. That is a hardest part in doing this. I don't recall seeing any class gear toward that in a master level in my program. (#1)

I can't think of any class has with instruction about domestic violence.... I don't get any education about the domestic violence population... I am the only in my class that is in this kind of setting.... I don't remember of engaging any discussion or any professor initiating readings that talked about domestic violence. (#3)

Most participants reported that since academic preparation on domestic violence from the master programs was limited, their knowledge of the issues of domestic violence was mainly from their own efforts in searching out the information related to domestic violence and from their direct work with the victims of domestic violence.



I was putting a lot of my time and resource to my individual clients because I never worked with sexual assault clients or domestic violence clients before. Either never had any experience with that kind of stuff. Obviously my school doesn't do anything about relationship violence. They are not on that side either. So I was putting a lot of my effort in research to them. (#1)

I got started with this population because of other clients I was working with. I started to notice that a lot of my clients have domestic violence and sexual assault in their background.... And I got involved because I need to have more experience working in this area. (#2)

I think working both with victims and with offenders have really given me such rich understanding of this population. (#3)

Every time when we had presentation or paper, I did it over domestic violence: the affect on the children, what happened in the courtroom and stuff like that.... No, no training. I mean I remember the only reason that I kind of knew a little about male offender side was just my own personal reading on the side. (#8)

Regarding how an educational institute may improve the academic preparation on domestic violence for training the future counselors, two participants who were in a marriage and family master program addressed the importance of having a course designed for the issues of domestic violence to be included in their programs.

I mean I originally came to school looking to do marriage counseling, couple counseling....I like to be prepared. I thought that my program had better prepared

me to be around all the counselors. Coming here and having no knowledge, any kind of domestic violence or anything. It was just hard.... That would be nice they [school] offer a class or even a section in a class.... Because some of our volunteer clients are coming here and being referred from their marriage counselors and individual counselors. This is gonna show up in my private practice if I would ever have one. (#1)

Like marriage counseling, I think [training on domestic violence] should be mandatory. I mean now with my experience, I really do. Has to be one of the classes you have to take.... I think you should really have that training in every marriage and family therapy, course requirement. Because it is more common than we think, especially in the verbal and emotional abuse. (#2)

Some participants in this study suggested that the issues of domestic violence could be designed into an optional course provided to those who plan to be specialized in domestic violence. They mentioned that attending workshop could be an option to improve professional training in domestic violence.

I wouldn't see a whole lot of advocacy for school to teach a class on domestic violence unless that was something somebody wants to specialize in. On one hand, sure I would like to know more about this population, but I am learning a lot right now. And it is a given choice.... I am certain there are people out there who want to specialize in domestic violence and sexual assault. I think the class

would be perfect for them but not for me at least. I think workshop would be better, like a daylong workshop. (#3)

They [master program] do offer classes in community, community crisis. I know that. So I think that is a good thing if you wanna follow. Unless they [master program] wanna offer some specialty, you know, classes that are elected part of your area concentration, they can have one in domestic violence issues. (#7)

About half of the participants in this study had received no academic preparation on domestic violence. They were to learn about the issues of domestic violence from the internship settings they were in. Most participants would like to see the issues of domestic violence included in the courses offered by their master programs.

### **Theme Three: Professional Development of Working with Male Offenders**

All participants reported that they had received no academic preparation to help counsel male domestic violence offenders. Most participants were literally learning about male domestic violence offenders after they started co-leading the male offender group. They perceived their internship settings and their clinic supervisors were the main resources providing the necessary knowledge about domestic violence as well as guidelines for working with the male offenders.

When you have a program that is so structured with, you know, set topics and set activities and things, that I think it becomes agency's responsibility to them to provide us, the people are presenting the information in a psychoeducational group. (#1)

When I took the three days training here, more than two and an half days training here, I learned a lot more about domestic violence than I even did in graduate school. (#2)

My support comes from the agency. And I am in an internship class where we meet once every two weeks. There is no feedback I get about domestic violence or about offenders.... I think I have voice to my opinion to my supervisor here because my supervisor here is wonderful. I just wish that my school supervisors were as good as she was. Maybe I would feel more satisfied. (#3)

All the skills that I have, as far as specialized, I learned pretty much on the job.... I have a supervisor now that it is just being really awesome about kind of allowing me to have those weaknesses and being ok with that. Like not making me feel like I need to be perfect to everything. (#4)

I feel like I have enough supervision at my internship, so I don't feel like I need to ask them [school].... I just think the supervision part is very important. To be able to have that kind of environment to ask those questions if they are not sure what they are doing. (#6)

It was just an orientation before I started my practicum. So it was five weeks, or five classes, one class a week for about two hours or so once I said yes that I would do my practicum with male offenders.... And before I got into individual counseling with them [male offenders], speak to my supervisor about her training of me. (#9)

All participants in this study were under supervision for either their master level internships or licensed internships while working with male domestic violence offenders. Four participants reported they received both group supervision and individual supervision for their work with male domestic violence offenders. Of the remaining five participants, three received individual supervision only, and two received group supervision only. Group supervision was either in the group meeting provided by the director of the offender program or in the group meeting that included all of the counselors in the clinic. Individual supervision was provided by either the assigned clinic supervisor or the experienced counselor with whom they co-facilitated the offender group.

The co-facilitators appeared to have a greater influence on the participants' work with male domestic violence offenders than other types of supervisors. Some participants in this study perceived their experienced co-facilitators as immediate resources for consulting with for their work with the male offenders. They discussed their group work before and after the group session. Some participants even depended solely on their experienced co-facilitators for their work with the male offenders when their assigned clinic supervisors were focusing on their work with the victims only.

I actually don't receive a lot of supervision about the offenders. I received supervision about the victims. And it's only because the schedule conflict that I can't make the supervision time [group supervision]. I do consult with my group leader [co-facilitator] a lot who has been with this [offender] program for many

years. And she [co-facilitator] and I talk. And she [co-facilitator] provides some education to me in the limited amount of time we have. (#3)

I am able to have my supervision with mine, the person I co-facilitate the group with and with my supervisor here in the agency. And they provide group supervision for one hour each week. So I feel like I am very much covered in the supervision.... We can get advice or guidance from people who have been doing longer in the group supervision. (#6)

Some participants reported that when they first started to work with male offenders, their experienced co-facilitators were not providing enough guidelines or consults for their needs to work with the offender group. They perceived this situation had prolonged the time needed to get familiar with the group materials and the time to be accepted by the group members.

When you first started doing it, there is no guideline. There is no introduction menu. There is no nothing. You are literally as the group was learning at the first time. I was learning at the first time... I remember saying several times "I never see this materials before. This is all brand new to me." So it is hard to come up with processing questions when you are already in a new situation... I remember I talk him [co-facilitator] about that. He [co-facilitator] was just like "You are doing fine." (#1)

Not at that time. I didn't have any. No. If I do...this is kind of disappointing. To be honest with you, I did not get any, not even. I got the book because I have

brought it. I've asked for like the group rules. I've mentioned about several times. It was never given to me. So I ended up saying, you know, when it was time to say rules, the group rules, I said "I don't have the rules. You guys have to help me because I don't know the rules." So that really kind of, I asked that, this gentleman [co-facilitator] who was leading the group several times "Can you email that? Can you give it to me? Can you put it into my box?" "Never happened. So that was a little bit disappointing. I felt no support. (#7)

All the participants in this study appeared to greatly depend on their clinic supervisors to develop their professional work with male offenders. The supervisors or co-facilitators who provided immediate responses to the participants' needs for starting their counseling with male offenders were reported as providing the greatest help in the participants' professional growth.

#### **Theme Four: Most Male Offenders are Humans who Made Poor Choices**

All participants in this study reported they experienced anxiety before they started to work with the male domestic violence offenders. Some participants had fear toward male offenders because they had heard the horror stories from their victim clients or other counselors. They were worried that male offenders may get angry in the group and hurt them.

To be honest, I really thought that they were more dangerous. I guess I would have, I asked my supervisor before I started the group. I had asked her if

someone can walk me to the parking lot to my car after the group, stuff like that.

(#1)

The first time I did the group. It was...I was a little nervous. And that was a main facilitator. And she [co-facilitator] sat down in her chair. I sat down right next to her [co-facilitator]. You know because I wanted to sit next to her [co-facilitator] to feel safer, like she [co-facilitator] could, you know, defend me or anything. But I sat next to her [co-facilitator] on purpose. (#2)

When I first started my group, I was petrified because I thought these guys were all coming from jails, and that they were all hard criminals, and they were gonna beat me up and kill me. That was my first impression of going into the group.

(#3)

The first time I went I was really nervous, and I didn't really know what to expect. (#4)

I was nervous. I wasn't scared. I wasn't scared of the guys because I kind heard that with the guys who participate in domestic violence they are usually nice with everyone else and the behavior usually comes out to the victims. (#6)

The first group session appeared to be the starting point for most participants to change their perception toward the male domestic violence offenders. They appeared to be closely observing their own emotional reactions as well as cautiously evaluating changes in their thought processes throughout their first group session with male domestic violence offenders.



I think until you go through it, I don't think anything...hmm...can [silence]. Just because you had that perception of fear, like "I should be afraid of you so" [participant was tearing up]. It is just funny [laughing with tears]. It is funny to think about that. That was... I think is I never experienced something like that. And so to put yourself in a room with people you know who have done that is like crazy? [tearing] Why would put yourself in that position? (#1)

During the group once the guys introduced themselves, and they commented how they were accountable, and they were not yelling or screaming, they were just talking about the subject that we were talking about during the ... you know, I kind of forgot that they... I got more comfortable as two hours went on. I may never feel relaxed but as two hours went on I felt like progressively more comfortable. (#2)

The first session was really strange because the first hour was very strong and very good for my comfort because I got to observe the group dynamic. And everything was really calm and really productive. But second half...a lot of fighting and a lot of commiseration going on against my co-leader who has been with this group for long time. That was really scary for me because the guy was angry. (#3)

The first group was kind of overwhelming because there were about eight guys there. They were comfortable with the other group leader. And I just kind of felt like a grouper coming in and just "Hey, what's up?" But since then I feel much

more comfortable in the group and feel like I could start confronting them and started kind of interacting with them without feeling like I am gonna be shut down or not listened to or that what I have to say is meaningful instead of just someone who doesn't know anything. (#4)

You always think of these people were being monsters and a lot of like they portray on the TV or the movies. And once I got in there with them and started to work with the guys, I mean they are just regular Joes... It was an eye-opening experience. It's not what I expected at all, not at all. It was totally surprised. Consider they were just regular guys, they made some really stupid choices for a reason. (#5)

The first one, it was very shocking to hear some of the stories particular by one of the men who described how he hurt his wife... Listening to them. Some of them seemed to be truly wanting to change. I think the majority of them.... Once in a while, I would like to intervene to ask an open question. They seemed that...because I am older they seemed to respect me. So I tried to be...I was not very respectful because I know most of them come from situations, not all of them, but latest situation there were in childhood that was obvious why they became such angry people. But they still made the choice to beat somebody else. So it's, it's very...I went through a lot of emotions while dealing with this group of people, lots of emotions. (#7)

So introduced me as an intern, and a lot of clients had questions for me, “So what do you think of that?” Some of them asked me these questions: “What interests you to this kind of stuff?” and “What is your role gonna to be here?” ... Because they have been in the group now for three, four, five months vary, so try to come in and be more casual and be more relaxed, and the confidence was nerve-racking I guess. So I was surprised they were polite. Then my other surprise....that everybody is talking about violence so freely which, you know, it quickly follows by “No, that’s good. No, that’s good. They are talking about it.” (#8)

I was a little nervous because I didn’t know what that would be like to have to that role for offenders. Because of my own personal experience with it, with domestic violence, so I didn’t know how I would react. I didn’t know what to expect that were things. But I thought it’d been a challenge and as a growing experience. So when I got in the group started hearing the men talking about the different things they would go through each day, it helped me. It is kind of like an aha! moment I guess. It helped me, I guess, empathize a little bit more with thing that might be going through. Help us normalizing them I guess. They seem more like people. (#9)

Most participants started to change their perceptions toward male domestic violence offenders after they started to work with them. Their work with the male domestic violence offenders helped most participants in this study understand that domestic violence was more complicated that they thought it was. They started to view

the male domestic violence offenders as humans who made poor choices in hurting their partners. The participants' empathy toward the male domestic violence offenders grew as they saw the daily stresses these men have been through and their lack of ability to deal with conflicts occurring in the relationship. The participants believed the reason that these men were in the group was to learn more coping skills, so they could do better for their families. The participants addressed the importance that the male offenders should always be accountable for their abusive behavior and be responsible for positive change.

Now it's very much changed since being with this group. I think I've been able to really start to view their human side of their perspectives.... They made poor choices, but they still have stress in their lives. They still suffer. They may be experiencing abuse from their partner too, you know. I understand a batterer's situation is a lot more complex than what I initially thought it was, which is very black and white. A better understanding of the fact, you know, batterers are not monsters, they are people who made up poor choices.... I really value having my perspective changed on that because I don't feel judgmental anymore. (#3)

The male offenders are really, like I said it's real big eye-opening experience for me. Because once again everything I read in many class, even any study I read, it's always about victims. You never really heard the other side of story, never. Not justify with that. We never hear them [offenders]. We never met them [offenders]. We never had interacting experience with them [offenders]. So, no, I mean it was real eye-opening experience working with perpetrators because it has

really, brings to life. These are real people. These are just regular Joes other than made some real mistakes, some real stupid choices frankly. That is best what I can think of is really stupid choice, and not validating with they did or justify or by any mean minimizing what they did. But it's lack of, I still say, it's lack of training, lack of understanding of what is appropriate, what is not appropriate, how to deal with certain situations. (#5)

I think that I believe now they [offenders] are able to complete to change. And even though with the group members that I have already finished the program, even though I don't know if they can just complete never do it again, I feel like they really do change. And they [offenders] do the work in group and do at home and outside the group. (#6)

In some complicity they [offenders] were victims. And they [offenders] just need to change their choices, the way they made choices. (#7)

So my perspectives just raised the awareness. I guess it is the change: more aware of there is more complicated than poor victims. You know there is all other cultural, family, environmental stuff going on and personal stuff going on with offenders whether they are male or female. So I guess it just make more complicated the whole treatment. Everything has its story. Everybody has background. Everybody has things push their bottom or things motivate them. So I guess that was kind of human. (#8)

Most participants reported that before they started to work with the male offenders, their preconceived notions toward the male offenders were that these men were like monsters, that they were bad people, that they got angry easily, and that they were dangerous to approach. They experienced that not knowing any male offenders had increased their fear of them. After starting to work with the male offenders, the participants started to see these men were also humans. Although the participants became empathetic toward the male offenders, they continued to emphasize that the male offenders should always be accountable for their abusive behaviors and be responsible for making changes in their behavior.

#### **Theme Five: Mutual Influence between Personal Experience and Professional Practice**

Three female participants reported they were the victims of domestic violence in the past. Their personal experiences of domestic violence: one involved the husband, one involved the father, and one involved both the father and the boyfriend. They appeared to be open to sharing their personal experiences with domestic violence. They reported that their personal experience with domestic violence might have been an influence in the first place on their choices of working with people who were involved with domestic violence.

Not physical violence, but emotional, yes. My husband was very emotionally and verbally abusive. Maybe that is why I went that route. I don't know.... Maybe

because I know how it feels as a victim. Maybe it is not physical violence, but I do see how they would feel. So that is why my heart is where it is. (#7)

My father was physically, verbally, emotionally abusive to my mother and all of my brothers and sisters and myself. Growing up as the oldest of the daughters, that was hard to see my mother, my role model as a woman for so long basically cower down and living in the fear of this man.... When I read about psychology, I read something with violence to helping people. So I was like “Yes! I wanna go there!” I wanna figure out what is going on in my family because what is going on in my family. (#8)

My parents are still married, so I grew up with both of them. And my dad, he has been always violent since I could remember. I don’t have memory when I was a young child they’re not arguing. So I remember my dad being violent just my whole life.... When I started dating, not surprisingly I would pick people who are a lot like my dad. And I got into a relationship with a man who is very violent. I was with him for four years. So I could, I think, what drove me to work with domestic violence in general was that experience. (#9)

The remaining four female participants all had someone in their families or among their friends who were involved with domestic violence. Although they did not witness the incidents when they occurred, they recalled that they did sense there was something going on with the person at the time. Their professional training on domestic violence now has helped them come to realize that at that time they were at some level

indirectly influenced by domestic violence. One of these participants mentioned that this indirect personal experience with domestic violence might help explain how she chose to work in this field.

I think a couple of friends in college that weren't going through the relationship anymore have been physically violent in relationship. I don't know because it wasn't a scary population. It wasn't a scary incident that I definitely know it is out there. (#1)

I have one of my best friends and my sister in abusive relationship. I could see it a lot more clearly than I could before, before I took the orientation class. I could hold their [offenders'] behaviors more accountable like I can see. Maybe a lot to do with them [offenders] more than to do so with the spouse. (#2)

Looking back how my childhood that I have a brother. We were emotionally and physically abused to each other growing up. And it was never something that was spoken about or dealt with.... She [mother] didn't even understand what was really going on... And that like since growing up like my father was never in the picture. But my mom has told us that he would emotionally and physically abuse to her during they were married. And so in that way I have some experience with domestic violence. (#4)

After I started internship, I was talking to my mom about it, and it turns out she has. But I never knew that. So she [mother] did when I was younger. But I was not there when it happened.... I was really shocked. And I was really sad for her



[mother]. But I also told her [mother] it kind of made sense why I wanted to work with this population.... I felt like I knew something was going on because I was always there really protective of her [mother]. (#6)

Most participants shared their work experience with male domestic violence offenders with their friends and families. They reported their work experience with male domestic violence offenders has brought positive changes to their personal relationships. Some participants reported that this work experience has improved their intimate relationships.

I would go to the [offender] group and come home and tell my husband how much I love him, how thankful I am for the things he does. Because things my husband does I haven't thought about was so difficult for men that my husband does naturally, like reflecting feelings, listening, being accountable for his own behaviors. I mean this little stuff normal men do. I am so thankful for my husband now. (#2)

She [wife] is under a lot of stresses. She [wife] tends to get a little more frustrated easily. She [wife] is...before I would've escalated a little as well because she would say something cocky... now it is just "Whatever, ok, I am sorry you feel that way. That is why it is ok." And instead of going all these defenses, she [wife] will realize that she is losing it. And she [wife] will come back and (say) "ok I am sorry." So it doesn't blow up to a big fight, a really yell voice to each other. (#5)

I think that's been really neat because I found that every time I go to group I learn something that I can apply to my relationship.... I just found out new things about myself, like about how I may or may not communicate with my boyfriend.

(#6)

Some participants reported that once people knew about their professional experience, people came to them to share their stories or ask for help.

I talk a lot with family with friends about different patterns of abuses. What I am seeing is a lot, it is people are starting to come to me to say that "I know this person. Their partners are treating them like crap." I think they [family/friends] are coming to me as a source of information because I do have that experience now. (#3)

I feel very responsible to share with my family.... I feel like they [family] do think that I have that knowledge. They [family] do come to me for help. But then when I try to help, they [family] don't really listen [laughing] what I had to say. So it can be really frustrating. (#4)

All the participants in this study reported that ever since they started to work in the field of domestic violence, they became more aware of the abusive behaviors in the people around them. They believed the society needs more education on domestic violence. Most participants started to view themselves as responsible for sharing the information about domestic violence with others since they have obtained the knowledge of domestic violence through their professional work.

Nobody talks about this stuff, and this stuff didn't get found out unless people talk about it...so I think if anything it is made the importance of advocacy part really important. Just think of how many clients we are having here. (#1)

I think I am very high in my awareness what it is abusive behavior. And I think I am very sensitive to it now...I am more ready to take an active approach at stopping situations of abuse that I may see upon the public...kind of duty of mine and ethical obligation to the population I work with to put into it, to really advocate for people even when I am not just in the setting [clinic]. (#3)

Every teenager's parent like me, I am telling them "Yeah, there are many ways you can get those some kind of heads down for time to do it." Because they need to know what really is appropriate.... So when he gets that situation, he knows how to act, not react... If you have a plan of action, you don't have to react. You are not reaction or you know how to proper action. You know how to do. You have the tools needed to react, to take care of it. That is why I think it's lacking in our education system. (#5)

It appears that there is a connection between the participants' personal experience on domestic violence and their professional practice. The participants who have been the victims of domestic violence in the past reported that their own personal experience has contributed to their choice to work in the domestic violence field. The participants who had family members who were victims of domestic violence reported their indirect experience with domestic violence might have been the reason why they wanted to work

with people who were involved with domestic violence. All the participants in this study, with or without personal experience related to domestic violence, reported that because of their professional practice, they started to perceive themselves as responsible to advocate for the knowledge about domestic violence. Some participants reportedly became the source for the information of domestic violence for their families and friends.

### **Summary**

The results of this qualitative study exploring the experience of first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders were presented in this chapter. A total of nine participants were interviewed for this study. The participants for this study were either master level interns or licensed interns that were recruited in the North Texas area. The demographics of the sample and a narrative of the emerging themes were presented in this chapter. Five themes emerged from the interviews: (a) Working with male offenders was not the participants' original plan, (b) Limited academic preparation on domestic violence, (c) Professional development of working with male offenders, (d) Most male offenders are humans who made poor choices, and (e) Mutual Influence between personal experience and professional practice. Participants in this study shared their experience of working with male domestic violence offenders, including how they perceived their role in this process, how they perceived their clients, how they carried out their responsibilities, and how they viewed this work experience impacting their own lives.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experience of first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders, including how they perceive their role in this process, how they perceive their clients, how they carry out their responsibilities, and how they see this work experience impacting their own lives. This chapter presents a discussion of findings, limitations, implications, suggestions and conclusions.

#### **Discussion of Findings**

Two research questions guided this study. The first question focused on the experiences of first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders. The second question focused on what academic preparation might have been helpful to first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders. Four interview questions were used as the focus of the interview. Nine counselors who had less than one year experience with male domestic violence offenders completed the interviews. Five themes emerged from the participants' responses to the research questions.

Overall, the participants in this study chose to work on their internships in these community agencies because they were initially interested in working with the victims of domestic violence. Working with male offenders was not included in their original plan.

It was made as a suggestion or requirement by the internship settings or their clinic supervisors. Some participants were not aware of the offender group until they attended the orientation before their internship began. This finding echoed a previous study on experiences of female counselors working with male offenders. In the study of Roman (2000), among the total seven participants, two of them stated they did not choose to work with male offenders, and they were assigned to work with male offenders when they were new interns.

It appears to be common that participants in this study were questioned by their classmates or friends about their choice of working with male offenders. Some participants reported that they were the only person who worked with male offenders in their master internship classes. In some cases, they were the only person who worked on their internships in the community agency specialized for domestic violence. These participants reportedly experienced being less understood and less supported by their internship classes. The support for their work with male offenders was mainly from their families and their internship settings. The counselors who worked with male offenders depended on the professional support group where they could explore their mixed feelings while working with these men (Roman, 2000; Tyagi, 2006). In this study, the professional support group means the internship setting.

No participant in this study received any specific academic preparation for their work with male domestic violence offenders. Fifty-five percent of participants ( $n = 5$ ) in this study reported they had received limited academic preparation on domestic violence

from their master programs. This finding is the same as the report by Danis (2004) that about 55% of social workers students had received limited academic preparation for working with the issues of domestic violence. Black, Weisz, and Bennett (2010) reported the information of domestic violence was presented in discussion format integrated in some foundational courses offered by the academic program. In this study, participants who had received limited academic preparation on domestic violence reported the discussions basically addressed the general statistical data of domestic violence, the dynamics of domestic violence, the types of abuses, and the treatment for the women victims and their children. The participants who did not receive any academic preparation on domestic violence from their master programs reported that they obtained the information of domestic violence mainly from their internship setting. Some participants who were master level interns reported that they preferred to consult about their clinical work with their internship settings only because their internship classes did not cover domestic violence and their instructor did not have training on domestic violence. This situation might explain the participants' experience that they felt less heard and less supported by their internship classes.

Participants had different attitudes toward how the education institutions might improve the academic preparation on domestic violence for training the future counselors. Their chosen attitude appeared to be associated with their academic training background. Two participants who were from the marriage and family therapy program suggested that domestic violence issues should be included in a specifically designed

course provided by their programs. These participants have learned that domestic violence occurred more than it seemed and was more complex than it looked like. These participants questioned their own competency of being specialized in marriage and family therapy because they became aware that they were not well prepared to help their clients who came in with domestic violence issues involved. However, two participants who were in counseling program suggested education institutions might design the issues of domestic violence into a specialized course only if the master programs intended to train the future counselors to specialize in domestic violence issues.

Since there was no academic preparation on working with male offenders, the participants depended solely on the internship settings to establish their professional development of working with male offenders. All the participants in this study appeared to depend on their clinical supervisions to develop their professional work with male offenders. Their co-facilitators happened to have a greater influence on the participants' work with male domestic violence offenders than other types of supervisors. The participants viewed that their experienced co-facilitators were the immediate resources to consult their work with the male offenders before and after the group session. The primary task for new counselors during the first year of clinical contact is the development of confidence (Bischoff, Barton, Thober, & Hawley, 2002). In this study, the supervisors or co-facilitators who provided immediate responses to the participants' needs for starting their work with male offenders were reported as the greatest help to the participants' professional growth and confidence development.



Black et al. (2010) addressed that the combination of academic preparation and professional experience was found as the strongest predictor of self-efficacious practice for social workers who just started working with victims of domestic violence. Due to the lack of academic preparation on working with male offenders, this statement may not apply in this study to predict the self-efficacious practice of first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders. However, the self-efficacious practice of the participants in this study might be predicted by their supervisory experience. The interactional patterns in the relationship between supervisor and new counselor will replicate themselves in the relationship between new counselor and client through a parallel process, which is called isomorphism (Lee & Everett, 2004). In this study, it was found that the participants who reported having a positive relationship with their supervisors or experienced co-facilitators tended to be satisfied with their professional development of working with male offenders. The participants with supervisors or experienced co-facilitators provided inadequate guidelines or consults reported their dissatisfaction to their professional development in the work with male offenders.

All participants in this study talked about their experience of being nervous and anxious before and during the group sessions they worked with male offenders. This finding is supported by several studies (Agustinovich, 2004; Livingston, 2002; Roman, 2000; Tyagi, 2006) on the vulnerabilities in counselors while they were working with male offenders. Most participants reported that before they started to work with the male offenders, their preconceived notions toward the male offenders were that these men

were like monsters, that they were bad people, that they got angry easily, and that they were dangerous to approach. They experienced that not knowing any male offenders had increased their fear of them. Most participants started to change their perceptions toward male domestic violence offenders after they started to work with them. They started to view the male domestic violence offenders as humans who made poor choice by hurting their partners. Although the participants became empathetic toward the male offenders, they continued to emphasize that the male offenders should always be accountable for their abusive behaviors and be responsible for making positive changes in their lives.

There appears to be a connection between the participants' personal experience on domestic violence and their professional practice. In this study, personal experience might have contributed to the choice of professional practice, and professional practice might have carried out further personal experience. The participants who had personal experience with domestic violence reported that their own personal experience has contributed to their choice to work in the domestic violence field. The participants whose family members were victims of domestic violence reported their indirect personal experience with domestic violence might have been the reason that they wanted to work with people who were involved with domestic violence. The participants reported that their professional practice has extended their personal experience. Some participants shared their learning from the professional practice has benefited their own intimate relationships. All the participants in this study, with or without personal experience with domestic violence, reported that because of their professional practice, they started to

perceive themselves as responsible to advocate the knowledge about domestic violence. Some participants reportedly became the source for the information of domestic violence for their families and friends.

All the participants in this study took this experience of working with male offenders as a positive learning experience. Before this experience, most participants in this study only knew about domestic violence from the perspectives of the victims. Through this experience, they reportedly learned that domestic violence is a complex societal issue and it is more complicated than they thought it was. Some participants mentioned that they would be interested in continuing to work with male offenders because they wanted to continue their personal growth through this work. Some participants decided they would only work with male offenders during their internships. After they complete the internship, they would focus on the population that they were originally interested in.

### **Limitations**

The generalizability of this study is limited by several factors. This was a selected sample. The results from this research cannot be generalized to all new counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders. Because the sample was self-selecting, the researcher interviewed the participants who were available to her. The research could only hear the stories from the participants in this study. It is difficult to know about the stories from those who chose not to participate.

The researcher used gatekeepers and snowball sampling to recruit the sample. The gatekeepers were chosen because they were in the same area where the researcher was located. This limited this study to particular geographical regions. Some gatekeepers from community agencies responded to the researcher's request to recruit the sample that they did not have master interns in their setting who would fit the criteria of this study. Some gatekeepers from education institutions noted to the researcher that they were not aware if any of their students chose to work with male domestic violence offenders. These facts have already predicted the difficulty of obtaining participants. By the end of the recruitment, the researcher had a total of nine participants. The sample size was acceptable for a qualitative research of this type. However, a larger sample would add to the credibility of this study.

The researcher used the interview protocol to control the quality of the interview. However, English is the researcher's second language. This might have affected the participants' responses during the interview. Some participants might have chosen to make their responses short and concise for the researcher to understand, and some might have chosen to include abundant information in their responses to insure that the researcher understood them. Besides, the participants were aware that the researcher had also worked with male offenders in the past. Some participants might have adjusted their responses to the interview questions due to this fact. The researcher's language also limited the quality of the transcripts. All the audio recorded interviews were transcribed

by the researcher. It is possible that the researcher might have missed or mistaken the participants' responses.

### **Implications**

The results of this study reveal several implications for academic institutions and clinic supervisors to develop and improve the leadership that is needed to prepare and train new counselors for treating male domestic violence offenders.

1. Domestic violence is a common social problem that has an impact on all the members of society. Having knowledge about domestic violence can add new counselors' understanding of the systemic effects domestic violence has on the family.
2. Academic preparation on domestic violence helps new counselors feel less overwhelmed when they first start to work with clients who are involved with domestic violence.
3. Orientation training before internship starts helps new counselors to obtain knowledge about male offenders as well as become emotionally prepared.
4. New counselors experience a great deal of mixed feelings while working with male offenders, especially during the first group session.
5. Experienced co-facilitators have a great influence on new counselors' work in the male offender group.

6. Social learning experience occurs in both male offenders and new counselors.

The materials that were used in the offender group appear to benefit new counselors' personal relationships.

### **Suggestions**

Adequate academic preparation on the issue of domestic violence helps increase the confidence of new counselors when they first start to work with people who are involved with domestic violence. It is understandable that academic institutions may not address domestic violence in a specialized course. However, the necessary knowledge of domestic violence needs to be made known to the future counselors. Domestic violence is one of most common social problem that affects all the members of society. The counselors, with any kind of academic training background, would always have the chance to encounter clients who are involved with domestic violence. It is suggested that the knowledge of domestic violence covers both victims and offenders.

It appears that the internship settings are the primary resource where new counselors learned about counseling with male offenders. New counselors seem to experience mixed feelings while working with male offenders more than while working with victims. That not knowing a thing about male offenders may increase their fear of these men and inhibit their professional development. It is suggested that internship setting provides a comprehensive orientation to prepare new counselors intelligently and emotionally. Besides, new counselors depend on their experienced co-facilitators to start and improve their counseling with male offenders in the group process. It is suggested

that experienced co-facilitators need to be aware of their influence on new counselors and obtain some basic supervision skills.

### **Conclusions**

A limited number of qualitative studies explored the experiences of counselor who work with male domestic violence offenders. There is little known about the experience of new counselors who just start to work with male domestic violence offenders. This study sought to fill some of the unknown by focusing on the experiences of first-year counselors who work with male offenders. A total of nine participants shared their experience of being a new counselor to work with male offenders. The results found that the participants did not initially choose to work with male offenders. Yet most participants perceived working with male offenders was a positive learning experience. It was found that the participants in this study received none to limited academic preparation on domestic violence. All the participants depended on their internship setting for their work with male domestic violence offenders. Another finding is that most participants started to see the human side of male offenders after they started to work with them. However, their empathy toward the male offenders did not take away their belief that the male offenders should always be accountable for their abusive behaviors and responsible for making changes. The participants in this study stated they have learned domestic violence is a complex social problem. It appears to have a connection between personal experience and professional practice. The participants' personal experiences with domestic violence have brought them to work with people who

were involved with domestic violence, while the participants' professional practices in the domestic violence field have extended their current and future personal experience.

The treatment program for male domestic violence offenders is perceived as an act to break the cycle of domestic violence. The counselors are perceived as in a powerful position to create and improve the realistic and lasting changes in the male offenders. The foundation for new counselor to become experienced counselors needs to be done by both academic institutions and internship setting. New counselors need the academic preparation to provide the necessary knowledge of domestic violence. Internship settings need to provide a concrete and structured training and supervision to assist new counselors' professional development.



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## APPENDIX A

### Recruitment Flyer

# **Participants Needed**

## **For A Texas Woman's University**

### **Dissertation Research Project**

My name is Megan (Yung-Chen) Chou. I am a doctoral candidate conducting a research study for my dissertation. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of counselors who have worked with male domestic violence offenders for less than one year. It is my hope that the results from this research will obtain specific understanding of the experiences and needs of the first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders.

You are invited to participate in this study if you are a master intern counselor who has less than one year experience of working with male domestic violence offenders in a clinic setting. You must be over 21 to participate in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at anytime. I will conduct each interview myself. All interviews will be completely confidential. The interview time for participants is approximately 60 minutes. All personal information will be dealt with in a confidential manner. Your name will be known to me alone and will not be given to anyone.

If you are interested in participating in this study or have questions regarding this study, please contact me at [YChou@mail.twu.edu](mailto:YChou@mail.twu.edu) or via 214-531-3354. You may also contact my advisor Glen Jennings, EdD at 940-898-2695 or email him at [GJennings@mail.twu.edu](mailto:GJennings@mail.twu.edu)

There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and internet transactions.

## APPENDIX B

### Consent Form

## TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: First-year Counselors Who Work with Male Domestic Violence Offenders

Investigator: Megan (Yung-Chen) Chou, [MEYChou@mail.twu.edu](mailto:MEYChou@mail.twu.edu) 214-531-3354

Advisor: Glen Jennings, EdD [GJennings@mail.twu.edu](mailto:GJennings@mail.twu.edu) 940-898-2695

#### Purpose of the Research

You are being asked to participate in the dissertation research for Megan Chou at Texas Woman's University. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of counselors who have worked with male domestic violence offenders for less than one year. It is my hope that the results from this research will obtain specific understanding of the experiences and needs of first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders.

#### Research Procedures

For the purpose of this qualitative study, the investigator will conduct face-to-face individual semi-structured interviews with each participant. The interview will be scheduled at a time and place that is mutually agreed upon by you and the researcher. Before the interview starts, you will fill in the demographic information. Your interview will be audio recorded for later transcription and data analysis. The maximum time commitment for the interview is approximately 60 minutes.

#### Potential Risks

A possible risk of your participation in this study is the loss of confidentiality or release of personal information. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and internet transactions. Any identifying information will be known only to the researcher. Your

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Participant's initials

Page 1 of 3

name will remain anonymous. A numerical and alphabetical code will be assigned to you. All information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. A master list with participant's names will be stored separately from other data. Only the researcher and her advisor will have access to the audio recordings. All disks will be erased and typed transcripts will be shredded once the dissertation is completed and approved approximately one year from the end of data collection. Any names you might mention during the interview will not be transcribed. It is anticipated that the results of this study will be published in the researcher's dissertation as well as in other research publications. No names or other identifying information will be included in any publication. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law.

Another potential risks related to your participation in this study may occur during or after your interview is emotional discomfort. The researcher will attempt to prevent any problem that might occur in the research process. You will be given a list of phone numbers of professionals in your area that you may contact if you feel the need to speak with someone professionally. You will also have the researcher's contact information if you desire to contact me. You may take breaks at any time during the interview. You may withdraw from the study at anytime.

The researcher and her advisor will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researcher and her advisor know at once if there is a problem and they will help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because you are taking part in this research.

### Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at anytime. You may request a summary of the research results to be mailed to you at the completion of the study.

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Participant's initials

Page 2 of 3

### Questions Regarding the Study

Should you have any questions related to this study, you may contact the researcher at [Ychou@mail.twu.edu](mailto:Ychou@mail.twu.edu). Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study or the manner in which this research is conducted may be addressed by contacting the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via email at [IRB@mail.twu.edu](mailto:IRB@mail.twu.edu). You will sign two copies of this dated consent form, one for your own personal records, and one for the researcher to keep.

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Signature of Participant

---

Date

Page 3 of 3

## APPENDIX C

### Demographic Information

## Demographic Information

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Participant's Code: \_\_\_\_\_

### **A. Basic Information**

- 1) Gender:    ☐ Female    ☐ Male
- 2) Race/Ethnicity: ☐ Asian    ☐ African American    ☐ Caucasian    ☐ Hispanic  
                                 ☐ Native American    ☐ Other
- 3) Relationship Status: ☐ Single    ☐ Married    ☐ Divorced    ☐ Widowed    ☐ Other
- 4) Age: \_\_\_\_\_

### **B. Academic Information**

- 1) When will you complete your master degree?  
     ☐ Less than 3 months    ☐ 3 to 6 months    ☐ 6 to 9 months    ☐ 9 to 12 months  
     ☐ Other (please indicate the time: \_\_\_\_\_)
- 2) How many courses have you had so far related to domestic violence?  
     ☐ None    ☐ 1    ☐ 2    ☐ 3    ☐ 4    ☐ More than 4

### **C. Work Experience with Male Domestic Violence Offenders**

- 1) How long since you started working with male domestic violence offenders?  
     ☐ Less than 3 months    ☐ 3 to 6 months    ☐ 6 to 9 months    ☐ 9 to 12 months
- 2) How many hours of work per week?  
     ☐ Less than 5 hours    ☐ 6 to 10 hours    ☐ 11 to 15 hours    ☐ 16 to 20 hours  
     ☐ More than 20 hours
- 3) Supervision format?  
     ☐ Individual    ☐ Group    ☐ Both

### **D. Other practice of counseling experience**

- 1) How long is your other counseling experience?  
     ☐ Less than 6 months    ☐ 6 to 12 months    ☐ 13 to 18 months    ☐ 19 to 24 months  
     ☐ More than 2 years
- 2) What kind?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **D. Personal experience related to domestic violence**

Have you personally experienced domestic violence?    ☐ No    ☐ Yes



## APPENDIX D

### Interview Protocol

## Interview Protocol

Participant's Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of first-year counselors who work with male offenders of domestic violence. This study is to understand specific experiences and needs of beginning counselors during the time when they first started to work with male offenders of domestic violence. In order to conduct this research, it is necessary to hear stories from the counselors who have less than one year experience of working with male offenders of domestic violence. Your willingness to participate in this study will help identify specific understanding of the experiences and needs of beginning counselors, and it will aid clinic supervisors in their work with beginning counselors of male domestic violence offenders.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As we discussed, the purpose of this research is to explore the experience of first-year counselors who have less than one year experience of working with male offenders of domestic violence. Do you have any question?

Before we start the interview, let's go over the consent form.

Do you have any questions about the consent form? After you sign the form, I will give you a copy for your files.

The questions I ask will focus on your experience of working with male offenders of domestic violence as a beginning counselor. During the interview, I will make notes. There is no need for you to use your name during the interview. Your name and any names you may mention will not be transferred to the transcript or any other record.

Do you have any questions before we start?

I am going to turn on the recorder now.

How did you become involved in the work with male domestic violence offenders?

(Pause to hear story)

What is your academic training related to domestic violence?

(Pause to hear story)

What is your personal experience related to domestic violence?

(Pause to hear story)

What changes have occurred in your beliefs and attitudes to work domestic violence since you started to work with male domestic violence offenders?

(Pause to hear story)

Prompts:

Nodding

How come?

I see

Silence

How did you handle it?

What happened after it?

Tell me more

Smiling

Hmmm...

What was that like?

Anything else?

## APPENDIX E

### Referral List of Professional Therapists in North Texas Area

## Referral List of Professional Therapists in North Texas Area

### General

1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

### Denton, Texas

Crisis Hotline (Denton County Mental Health Center)	1-800-762-0157
Counseling and Family Therapy Clinic (Texas Woman's University)	940-898-2600
Counseling and Testing (University of North Texas)	940-565-2741
Counseling Center of Denton	940-382-5328

### Dallas, Texas

Crisis Hotline (Dallas MetroCare Service)	214-330-7722
Crisis Line (Suicide & Crisis Center)	214-828-1000
Crisis Help Line (Contact Counseling and Crisis Line)	972-233-2233
Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas	214-820-0606

### Plano, Texas

The Center for Family Counseling (Southern Methodist University)	972-473-3456
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### Richardson, Texas

Student Counseling Center (University of Texas at Dallas)	972-883-2575
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### Garland, Texas

Galaxy Counseling	972-272-4429
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## APPENDIX F

### Recruitment of Snowball Sample

## Recruitment of Snowball Sample

(At completion of interview)

Our interview is now finished. Thank you for your participation in this study. Do you have any questions?

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of counselors who have less than one year experience working with male domestic violence offenders. Your participation helps the researchers of this study to obtain better and more specific understanding of the experience and identify the needs of the first-year counselors who work with male domestic violence offenders.

I'd also like to invite you to help the researchers of this study to find additional potential participants. You are welcome to take these flyers with you to your school and practicum site. We appreciate your help in sharing this study with your classmates and co-workers. Please encourage anyone you know who is first-year counselor that works with male domestic violence offenders to contact us. Please do know that your participation and help with this study will be kept in the strictest confidence. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your time!

## APPENDIX G

### Institutional Review Board Approved Letter





**Institutional Review Board**

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619  
940-898-3378 FAX 940-898-4416  
e-mail: IRB@twu.edu

February 21, 2011

Ms. Yung-Chen Chou  
926 Cleveland St., Apt. 28  
Denton, TX 76201

Dear Ms. Chou:

*Re: First-Year Counselors Who Work With Male Domestic Violence Offenders (Protocol #: 16358)*

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and appears to meet our requirements for the protection of individuals' rights.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp and a copy of the annual/final report are enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. The signed consent forms and final report must be filed with the Institutional Review Board at the completion of the study.

This approval is valid one year from February 21, 2011. Any modifications to this study must be submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any unanticipated incidents. If you have any questions, please contact the TWU IRB.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kathy DeOrnellas, Chair  
Institutional Review Board - Denton

enc.

cc. Dr. Larry LeFlore, Department of Family Sciences  
Dr. Glen Jennings, Department of Family Sciences  
Graduate School