

Abusive Men's Use of Children to Control Their Partners and Ex-Partners

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Abstract. While research has found that millions of children in the United States are exposed to their mothers being battered, and that many are themselves abused as well, little is known about the ways in which children are used by abusers to manipulate or harm their mothers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that perpetrators use children in a variety of ways to control and harm women; however, no studies to date have empirically examined the extent of this occurring. Therefore, the current study examined the extent to which survivors of abuse experienced this, as well as the conditions under which it occurred. Interviews were conducted with 156 women who had experienced recent intimate partner violence. Each of these women had at least one child between the ages of 5 and 12. Most women (88%) reported that their assailants had used their children against them in varying ways. Multiple variables were found to be related to this occurring, including the relationship between the assailant and the children, the extent of physical and emotional abuse used by the abuser against the woman, and the assailant's court-ordered visitation status. Findings point toward the complex situational conditions by which assailants use the children of their partners or ex-partners to continue the abuse, and the need for a great deal more research in this area.

Keywords: domestic violence, intimate partner violence, use of children, child witness

Conservative estimates suggest that at least 2 to 4 million women are assaulted by their male partners or ex-partners each year in the US alone (Browne & Williams, 1993; Edleson, 1999; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Tomkins et al., 1994). Depending on the methodology used, prior research has found that 21% to 34% of all women in the US will be victims of intimate male violence at some time in their lives (Browne & Williams, 1993; Koss, 1990; Stark & Flitcraft, 1988). While some couples participate in mutual conflict or minor violence that does not change their relationship's power dynamics, the larger social problem of "battering" includes a pattern of behavior, generally committed by men against women, through which perpetrators maintain power and control over their victims (Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992; Johnson, 1995). In addition to physical abuse, battering includes threats and psychological torment intended to instill fear and/or confusion in the victim. It also often includes sexual assault, economic abuse, social isolation, and threats against the victim's loved ones (Bancroft, 2002; Pence & Paymar, 1993).

To better understand this phenomenon, prior research has examined a number of the ways in which perpetrators abuse and control their victims. For example, studies have examined the ways in which perpetrators economically abuse their victims (Brush & Raphael, 2000; Lloyd & Taluc, 1999; Shepard & Pence, 1988), and the extent to which they psychologically terrorize them (Street & Arias, 2001; Tolman, 1992). Recently some attention has been paid to the ways in which abusers also harass or threaten women's

loved ones as a means of controlling their victims (Goodkind, Gillum, Bybee, & Sullivan, 2003; Riger, Racha, & Camacho, 2002). However, scant research to date has examined the ways in which perpetrators specifically use the women's children to control, harass, or threaten them.

While research has found that millions of children in the United States are exposed to their mothers being battered (Carlson, 1984; Straus, 1992), and that many are themselves abused as well (Edleson, 2001), little is known about the ways in which they are used by abusers to manipulate or harm their mothers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that perpetrators use children in a variety of ways. Biological fathers of the children may use prolonged custody battles to keep track of the mothers (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Saunders, 1994), or use visitation as an opportunity to continue their abuse against the child's mother (Saunders, 1994; Shepard, 1992). This has become such a widespread problem that supervised visitation centers have proliferated as one means to provide the abuser with access to the children but not to the woman (Oehme & Maxwell, 2004; Thoennes & Pearson, 1999).

An abuser may threaten to either harm or abduct the children if the woman does not do what he wants (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002). Children can also be used as sources of information about their mothers' whereabouts or activities. It is not uncommon for batterers to interrogate the children about their mothers' activities, as a way of monitoring all aspects of women's lives. This may be done in subtle ways so that the children do not even realize they

are being manipulated (McMahon & Pence, 1995; Shepard, 1992).

Using children to control their mothers' behavior may be an especially effective strategy, as mothers typically will put their children's needs and well-being above their own. It is, therefore, important to examine the extent to which abusers engage in these types of behaviors, as well as to understand the predictors of these strategies. For example, one might expect that men who are biological fathers of the children would be more likely to use the court system to control their partners than would men with no legal rights to the children. It would also be expected that abusers living with their victims might use the children to keep track of her activities and/or threaten to harm the children should she leave. After relationships end, on the other hand, abusers might either use the children to convince women to take them back or use the children to monitor their whereabouts.

The current study represents a first step in examining both the extent to which, and the various ways by which, abusive men use children to control or terrorize their partners. While this study was exploratory in nature, it was hypothesized that abusers' use of children would be related to a number of factors. First, we examined the assailant's relationship with the children as a predictor. We expected that biological fathers would be more likely to use the children to control their partners or ex-partners, because of both their legal right to have access to the children, as well as to their sense of entitlement over their offspring. Use of the children was also expected to positively correlate with both physical and emotional abuse experienced by mothers. Next, we examined whether use of the children varied by current status of the assailant's relationship with the woman (partner vs. ex-partner); no directional hypothesis was formulated regarding relationship status. Finally, it was hypothesized that assailants with court-ordered visitation would use children against their partners or ex-partners more often than those without, or those who currently live with their children.

Method

Participants

The sample was comprised of 156 battered women from a mid-sized Midwestern city who were participants in a larger research project examining the lives of battered women and their children over time. Four women were removed from the original sample of 160 participants after reporting that: (1) the assailant was not a biological father, step-father, or father figure to any of their children and (2) their children had not had any contact with the assailant in the prior 4 months.

The women were recruited from either a community-based agency providing short-term support to victims of domestic violence following police intervention ($n = 67$; 43%), a domestic violence shelter ($n = 48$; 31%), or the county prosecutor's personal protection order office ($n =$

41; 26%). Women were eligible to participate if they had experienced physical violence perpetrated against them by an intimate partner in the preceding 4-month period. A 4-month time frame was selected to assess recent episodes of violence. Women also had to have at least one child between the ages of 5 and 12 who was interested in participating in the larger research study.

Information in the current study came from initial interviews with the women, conducted within a few weeks after the women were recruited and gave written informed consent for participation. To avoid interviewing families while they were in crisis, women who were recruited from residential shelter programs were not interviewed until after they had exited the shelter. All 48 women recruited from a domestic violence shelter had exited the shelter within 1 week after being recruited, and were interviewed within the subsequent 2 to 3 weeks. Interviews were conducted in locations convenient and safe for participants (primarily in their homes), and women were paid \$20 for participating. Interviewers were all female and received extensive training on the interview protocol.

Demographics

The women ranged in age from 22 to 49 years ($M = 32.21$; $SD = 6.04$). Slightly less than half of the women were non-Hispanic White ($n = 71$; 46%), and over a third were African American ($n = 56$; 36%). The remaining women identified as multiracial ($n = 14$; 9%), Hispanic/Latina ($n = 11$; 7%), Native American ($n = 2$; 1%), or Sudanese ($n = 1$; < 1%). One woman's race/ethnicity was unknown.

When the interviews were conducted, 82% ($n = 128$) of the women were no longer involved in a relationship with their assailant. However, 17% ($n = 27$) of the women were still living with their assailant at the time of the interview. One woman was continuing her relationship with her assailant but was not living with him.

Most women reported having between one and three children ($n = 108$; 69%), while 28% ($n = 44$) had between four and six children, and the remaining 3% ($n = 4$) had either seven or eight children. The average number of children per family was 3.19 ($SD = 1.48$). A total of 275 children between the ages of 5 and 12 were represented by their mothers' reports in this study. Most of the children fell between the ages of 5 and 7 (44%), although 37% were between 8 and 10, and 19% were between 11 and 12 ($M = 8.16$; $SD = 2.27$). Slightly more than half of the children were male (54%). Approximately 41% were African American, 30% were non-Hispanic White, 25% identified as multiracial, and 4% were Hispanic/Latina.

Assailant-Child Relationship

Assailants were classified into one of four categories: Biological father, stepfather, father-figure, or non-father-fig-

ure. Assailants were categorized by information provided by mothers, and subsequently verified by the children. Stepfathers were identified by having been legally married to the mother of the child. Father-figures were defined as men who had played a significant role in parenting the child, and non-father-figures were identified as current or previous partners who did not play a significant parental role in the child's life. For 41% of the children, their mother's assailant was their biological father. For 22% the assailant was a stepfather, for 20% he was a father figure, and for 17% he was not a father-figure.

Measures

Assailant's Relationship to the Children

Information about the assailant's relationship to each child in the family was aggregated to the family level. Assailants were identified as biological fathers if they were the biological fathers of any of the children. If not biologically related, they were classified as stepfathers or father-figures (depending on whether the assailant had been married to the woman) if they served in that role for any of the children. Assailants not identified as serving a parenting role for any of the children were classified as non-father-figures.

Assailant's Physical Abuse of the Mother

A modified version of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999) was used to assess physical abuse that had been perpetrated against the mother by the assailant. This scale consisted of 24 items that asked about various types of physical abuse that had occurred in the prior 4 months (e.g., "Has he ever tied you up or physically restrained you?"). Participants reported the frequency of these acts on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never* to 7 = *more than 4 times a week*). Cronbach's α for this scale was .91 ($M = 1.75$; $SD = .63$).

Assailant's Emotional Abuse of the Mother

Emotional abuse of the mother was assessed using a shortened version of the Index of Psychological Abuse (IPA; Sullivan, Tan, Basta, Rumpitz, & Davidson, 1992). This 24-item index assessed the extent to which the assailant emotionally abused the mother in the prior 4 month period (e.g., "How often has he accused you of having or wanting other sexual relationships?"). Responses were based on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never* to 4 = *often*). Cronbach's α for this scale was .89 ($M = 2.47$; $SD = .59$). Items in this scale were examined for conceptual redundancy with the items related to the Assailant's Use of the Children; no items appeared to be redundant, so all were retained.

Status of the Woman's Relationship with the Assailant

Relationship status at the time of the interview was assessed using a single item. Women were asked "Are you continuing or ending your relationship with (*assailant's name*)?" The majority of the women (82%) were not continuing their relationship with their assailant.

Assailant's Court-Ordered Child-Visitation Status

Court-ordered visitation status was determined using a single item. Women were asked, "Does (*assailant's name*) have court-ordered visitation rights with any of your children?" Responses fell into one of three categories: (1) court-ordered visitation ($n = 26$; 17%), (2) no court-ordered visitation ($n = 104$; 66%), or (3) no visitation arrangements, because the assailant is living with the children ($n = 26$; 17%).

Assailant's Use of the Children to Control Women

A 7-item scale was created and used to assess the assailant's use of the children to control their partner or ex-partner. The scale was administered to mothers, and was comprised of items to assess the extent to which the assailant had ever used their children to harass, intimidate, or frighten them. Additional items pertained to the assailant's use of the children to stay involved in their mother's life, keep track of their mother, and try to convince the children that their mother should take him back. One additional item assessed the extent to which the assailant tried to turn the children against their mother as a mechanism of controlling her. Responses were based on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *none* to 4 = *very much*). Principle components analysis confirmed that the items comprised a single factor. Cronbach's α for this scale was .88 ($M = 2.26$; $SD = .94$).

Results

Extent of the Assailant's Use of the Children

A majority of women (88%) reported that their assailants had used their children to control them in various ways and to varying degrees. Most women reported that their assailants had used their children to stay in their lives (70%), keep track of them (69%), harass them (58%), or intimidate them (58%). Almost half (47%) of women reported that their assailants had tried to turn their children against them, while 45% reported that their assailants had tried to use the children to convince them that they should take him back. Forty-four percent stated that their assailants had tried to

Table 1. Items from the assailants' use of the children to control women scale: means and standard deviations

Assailant used children to . . .	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	% Endorsed
Stay in your life ^a	2.65	1.24	69.9
Harass you ^a	2.31	1.26	58.3
Intimidate you ^a	2.35	1.29	58.3
Keep track of you ^a	2.61	1.27	68.6
Frighten you ^a	2.00	1.26	43.6
Tried to turn the kids against you ^b	1.94	1.15	46.8
Tried to convince the kids you should take him back ^c	2.01	1.21	44.9

Note: Responses were based on a scale ranging from 1 = none to 4 = very much. ^a*n* = 156, ^b*n* = 155, ^c*n* = 149, because of varying amounts of missing data.

use their children to frighten them. Table 1 reflects the extent to which women reported the assailant's use of the children to control them.

Variables Related to the Assailant's Use of the Children

One-way analysis of variance was used to determine how assailants' use of the children against women differed by assailant-child relationship status. Significant differences were detected when considering the relationship between the assailants and the children used against their mothers, $F(3, 152) = 9.19$, $MSE = .76$, $p < .01$. Tukey *post hoc* paired comparisons indicated significant differences between biological fathers ($M = 2.67$; $SD = .91$), and each of the other groups: stepfathers ($M = 2.10$; $SD = .91$; $p < .05$), father-figures ($M = 1.93$; $SD = .85$; $p < .01$), and non-father-figures ($M = 1.80$; $SD = .74$; $p < .01$). Thus, biological fathers were significantly more likely to use children against their current or former partners when compared with stepfathers, father-figures, and non-father-figures.

Bivariate correlations were computed to examine the re-

lationships between the assailant's use of the children and the woman's experiences of physical and emotional abuse. As hypothesized, women who reported greater use of their children against them had experienced higher levels of physical ($r = .19$, $p < .05$) and emotional ($r = .61$, $p < .01$) abuse.

One-way analysis of variance was used to assess how assailants' use of children differed by their relationship status with the mother. Women who had ended or were ending their relationship with the assailant ($M = 2.39$; $SD = .93$) experienced their abusers' using the children significantly more than did women who were continuing their relationships ($M = 1.69$; $SD = .76$), with $F(1, 54) = 13.33$, $MSE = .82$, $p < .01$.

Analysis of variance was also used to determine if differences existed in the use of children by assailants with varying court-ordered child visitation statuses. Significant differences by court-ordered visitation status were detected, $F(2, 153) = 9.81$, $MSE = .79$, $p < .01$. Tukey *post hoc* paired comparisons indicated that assailants with court-ordered visitation were significantly more likely to engage in using the children against their partners or ex-partners ($M = 2.93$; $SD = .86$), than either assailants who did not have court-ordered visitation ($M = 2.19$; $SD = .90$; $p < .01$), or assailants who were currently living with the children ($M = 1.91$; $SD = .89$; $p < .01$).

Multiple Regression Accounting for Variability in Assailant's Use of the Children

Hierarchical regression was used to examine the collective contribution of variables related to assailants' use of children to control their partners or ex-partners. Independent variables were entered in a series of five blocks, ordered so that the effects of variables in later blocks could be assessed after controlling for variables in earlier blocks. The first block contained the relationship between the assailant and the children within the family, as this relationship is likely to influence the frequency and extent to which assailants have the ability to use the children against their partners or former partners. This variable was entered as a set of three

Table 2. Regression analysis predicting assailant's use of the children to control partners or ex-partners

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	<i>R</i> ²
	β	β	β	β	β	Change
<i>Block 1</i> – Stepfather vs. Biological father	-.23	-.25	-.24	-.22	-.21	.15
Father-figure vs. Biological father	-.35	-.40	-.29	-.29	-.25	–
Non-father-figure vs. Biological father	-.32	-.35	-.27	-.28	-.23	–
<i>Block 2</i> – Physical abuse in prior 4 months		.27	-.01	-.01	.01	.07
<i>Block 3</i> – Emotional abuse in prior 4 months			.59	.55	.55	.26
<i>Block 4</i> – Continuing vs. Ending the relationship				-.10	-.11	.01
<i>Block 5</i> – Court-ordered vs. No court-ordered visitation					.18	.03
Living with children vs. No court-ordered visitation					.08	–

Note: Total $R^2 = .53$; $F(8, 147) = 20.38$, $p < .001$. All coefficients are standardized; **bold** indicates that the effect is significant at $p < .05$

dummy coded variables: (1) stepfather, (2) father-figure, and (3) non-father-figure, with biological father as the omitted comparison category.

Physical abuse that had occurred in the previous 4 months was entered into the second block. Emotional abuse that had occurred in the prior 4 months was entered into the third block to determine its unique impact over and above physical abuse. The fourth block included whether the woman was continuing or ending the relationship with her assailant, to determine how this situational factor may be associated with the assailant's use of the children against her, after controlling for the assailant's role in the children's lives and the level of abuse against the woman. Finally, the last block was comprised of the assailant's current visitation status, entered as two dummy-coded variables: (1) court-ordered visitation and (2) living with the children, with no court-ordered visitation as the omitted comparison category. Results of the hierarchical regression models are presented in Table 2.

Taken together, child-assailant relationship status, physical abuse, emotional abuse, survivor-assailant relationship status, and assailants' court-ordered visitation status accounted for 53% of the variance in assailants' use of the children to control their partners or ex-partners. In Model 1, assailants who were biological fathers to one or more of the children in the family engaged in more use of the children against mothers than did stepfathers ($\beta = -.23, p < .01$), father-figures ($\beta = -.35, p < .01$), or non-father-figures ($\beta = -.32, p < .01$); the assailant's relationship to the children accounted for 15% of the variance in assailant's use of the children. In Model 2, physical abuse accounted for an additional 7% of the variance; women who reported higher levels of physical abuse also reported greater use of their children by the assailant ($\beta = .27, p < .01$). In Model 3, after controlling for previously entered variables, including the level of physical abuse, emotional abuse accounted for an additional 26% of the variance; women who experienced more emotional abuse reported greater use of their children against them ($\beta = .59, p < .01$). In Model 4, relationship status, as defined by whether the woman was continuing or ending the relationship, was not found to be a significant predictor of the assailant's use of her children ($\beta = -.10, ns$). In Model 5, assailants with court-ordered visitation engaged in more use of the children against their partners or ex-partners compared with assailants without court-ordered visitation, after controlling for the other variables in the model ($\beta = .18, p < .01$); this variable accounted for an additional 3% of the variance.

In the final model one variable that made a significant contribution when entered into the hierarchical regression was no longer significant. The effect of physical abuse did not remain significant in the model after the addition of emotional abuse in Block 3, despite its significance in the previous block; this reflects the strong correlation between physical and emotional abuse ($r = .44, p < .01$).

Discussion

This study provides preliminary evidence that many abusers use children to continue to control and abuse their partners or ex-partners. The vast majority of the women in this study (88%) had experienced this phenomenon, and many reported that abusers had used the children for a variety of purposes. Seventy percent of abusers used the children to stay in women's lives, while over half also used the children to harass or intimate the woman. Slightly less than half of abusers tried to turn the children against their mothers, while others used the children to convince women to take them back. The least frequent manifestation of this phenomenon was the extent to which assailants used the children to frighten women. However, this was still mentioned by 44% of mothers.

The abuser's relationship to the children was found to be a distinguishing characteristic for understanding the conditions under which use of the children occurred. Biological fathers used the children against their mothers more than did stepfathers, father-figures, or non-father-figures. There are a number of possible explanations for this finding. First, biological fathers might have more access to their children than would stepfathers or non-father-figures, giving them more opportunity to use them against their mothers. Related to this, some biological fathers might feel a sense of ownership over their children (Bancroft, 2002; Bancroft & Silverman, 2002), which could result in their feeling entitled to use them against their mothers. Biological fathers might also have closer relationships with the children than would stepfathers, and some might exploit that closeness by asking the children to convince their mothers to take them back or by blaming their mothers for the breakup of the relationship. Others might use the threat of a custody battle to control their partners or ex-partners. It was beyond the scope of this exploratory study to examine such relationships in more detail, but future studies are warranted to better understand how relationship status to the child affects abusers' ability and willingness to use them to harm or control their mothers.

In examining the conditions under which assailants' use of children occurs, it is interesting, yet not necessarily surprising, that emotional abuse held the most explanatory power in predicting this phenomenon. Many tactics used by abusers to control their partners include indirect, non-physical strategies. Using the children is one additional strategy designed to cause victims emotional trauma. Therefore, it is to be expected that men who use more psychologically abusive tactics in their relationships would also be more likely to use the children as a weapon. It was also not surprising that the effect of physical abuse became nonsignificant after accounting for the impact of emotional abuse on assailants' use of the children. Similar to the relationship between emotional abuse and use of the children, it is expected that men who use physical means of abusing

women would also use other tactics to attempt to dominate and control them.

Whether the woman was continuing or ending her relationship with her assailant was not a significant predictor of his use of the children, after controlling for assailant-child relationship, and physical and emotional abuse. This could be a result of how "use of the children" was measured in this study. Six of the seven items in the scale reflected strategies that could be used both during and after the relationship (e.g., "used the children to keep track of you," "used the children to frighten you"). Anecdotally, women have reported that abusers use the children to prevent them from ending the relationship as well as to convince them to reunite or to punish them postrelationship. The seven items used in this study to examine abusers' use of the children were exploratory and do not represent the full range of ways in which children could be used by assailants to harm, threaten, or control women. Clearly a great deal more research is needed in this area to examine the plethora of ways in which children are used against their mothers and the predictors of such behavior, as well as the consequences for both mothers and their children.

Assailants' access to the children through court-ordered visitation was also a distinguishing characteristic in helping to understand the conditions under which assailants use children against their partners or ex-partners. Assailants with court-ordered visitation status used the children more than those without. It is possible that assailants with court-ordered visitation have more access to the children, and, therefore, more opportunities to use the children against their partners or ex-partners, than those without visitation rights. Assailants with court-ordered visitation may also represent a population of assailants who are using visitation as a mechanism to regain access to their former partners.

In addition to the fact that only seven items were used to examine abusers' use of the children, the results presented must be considered with additional methodological limitations in mind. First, the sample included only self-identified battered women, so generalizability to all women with abusive partners is unknown. Also, women were asked to report the extent to which their abusers had *ever* used their children against them. This method of measuring assailants' use of the children has brought about two study limitations. First, the items which comprised the use of the children scale were not time-bound, as were other variables with which the scale was associated. For example, physical and emotional abuse were reported over the prior 4 months. In order to understand causal or predictive relationships, future studies need to more carefully examine temporal ordering. Secondly, women were asked to report on the extent to which their assailant had used their children against them. Because children were not asked directly about their encounters with the assailant, women may have under- or over-estimated the extent to which the assailant had attempted to negatively influence their children.

Another limitation of this study pertains to unit of analysis. Mothers reported about their assailant's use of any of their children, so it was not possible to examine individual child characteristics (e.g., age, gender) that might be associated with elevated risk for this type of manipulation. Because there were multiple children in most families, some of whom had different fathers, the assailant's relationship to the children was defined at the level of the family rather than the individual child. Thus, although use of the children was greater among assailants who were biological fathers of at least one child in the family, it is possible that, in some cases, the assailant's biological child may not be the one being used. However, this was an issue in only 15 families (10% of the sample) that had children with differing relationships to the assailant, so it is not likely to have driven the results. Similarly, court-ordered visitation was reported by mothers in regard to any of their children, so it is not possible to link visitation arrangements for a specific child to the assailant's use of that child. More precise analysis of these issues will require careful collection of information about individual children's relationships and contact with their mother's assailant as well as the specific ways in which they may be used and manipulated by him.

Finally, the current study did not ask about race or ethnicity of the batterers so was unable to examine racial differences in the extent to which or manner in which use of the children occurs. Additional research is needed to examine if there are racial differences associated with the way in which children are used against survivors of domestic violence.

In spite of these limitations, this exploratory study provides preliminary evidence that many abusers use children to further abuse or control the women they are or have been involved with. It is important to understand this phenomenon more fully for a variety of reasons. Clinically, it is important to understand how such tactics would likely traumatize women and contribute to their behaving in ways that professionals might not immediately understand (such as suddenly returning to the relationship, or refusing to leave it). Clinicians working with children would also benefit from understanding how common these tactics are so that they can include them in their assessments of children's experiences and help children develop effective coping strategies. At the policy level, understanding how children are used as weapons by many abusers is critical when creating policies related to visitation and custody. For instance, many communities still do not have supervised visitation centers that women can use when the abuser has a legal right to see the child but when such access endangers the mother. If the prevalence of this phenomenon were better understood, as well as its consequences both for mothers and for the children, such centers might become a higher priority in communities.

Using children to harm and control their mothers is a strategy that can have serious, negative consequences for both women and their children. At this point in time, vir-

tually nothing is known about how children cope with being used in this manner over time. We also know little about how various tactics affect women's behaviors as well as their psychological well-being. Further research is also needed to examine additional situational characteristics that relate to the occurrence of this phenomenon. Shedding light on this complex phenomenon can result in an improved community response to survivors and their children, making it more difficult for abusers to successfully engage in such tactics in the future.

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