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Exploring the belief systems of domestic abuse victims: An exploratory study

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Abstract

**Purpose:** Support service provisions for domestic abuse victims has typically focused on the immediate risk and etiological factors associated with abuse. Consequently, there is limited research exploring more persistent and pervasive factors involved in this cycle of abuse, such as subjective experiences and beliefs held by victims of domestic abuse. The current study is a preliminary exploration of the individual experience of domestic abuse including the belief systems of participants. Increasing our understanding of key factors and beliefs in the experience of domestic abuse could enable support services to create more long-term sustainable support for victims.

**Methodology:** Twelve women with a history of domestic abuse participated in an exploratory interview about their general beliefs and thoughts surrounding their domestic abuse experience. Interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis.

**Findings:** The thematic analysis identified four belief themes: (1) personal responsibility, (2) antisocial attitudes, (3) environmental factors, and (4) negative attitudes toward police.

**Practical Implications:**
- Highlights the value of understanding subjective, personalized experiences and beliefs of domestic abuse victims.
- Identifies the importance of belief systems as potential treatment targets for domestic abuse victims.
- Acknowledges an avenue for more effective support provision for victims of domestic abuse.

**Originality:** This preliminary study offers new insights into the role of belief systems amongst a sample of domestically abused women. Understanding the significance of personalized, subjective experiences of domestic abuse victims is a step towards designing and implementing effective interventions. The findings further emphasize the need for more empirical research and theory development within the area of beliefs and domestic abuse victims.
Exploring the belief systems of domestic abuse victims: An exploratory study

Over two million women are victims of domestic abuse every year in the UK, with one in four experiencing some form of abuse in their lifetime (Office for National Statistics, 2013). Domestic abuse is defined by the Home Office (2013) as violence of any description that occurs between partners who are, or were, in an intimate relationship. The definition of abuse can include (but is not limited to) physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal abuse.

Domestic abuse also comes at a high financial price to the criminal justice system, health and community services. In particular, the UK spends an estimated £3.1 billion every year addressing domestic abuse, with a further loss of £2.7 billion to the economy due to women’s inability to work whilst recovering from injuries (Walby, 2004). In addition to the economic costs, the personal cost to victims can be extensive given the impact domestic abuse can have on victims’ psychological, emotional and interpersonal welfare (Cohen, Miller, & Rossman, 1994). Thus, it is clear that the overarching impact of domestic abuse has considerable implications for victims, the wider community, and the economy.

Currently, support service provisions for domestic abuse victims have focused on providing immediate emotional, practical and professional assistance (Spruin, Alleyne, & Papadaki, 2015). However, these services are often generalized and short term, lacking a more specialist tailored approach (Coy & Kelly, 2009) to provide victims with individualized help that responds to long-term outcomes. Therefore, there is a need for support services to offer greater longstanding, person-centred care (Hester & Westmorland, 2005).

One pathway for developing these effective long-term strategies is to identify key beliefs and elements implicated in the experience of domestic abuse victims as potential targets for interventions. Belief systems are important to address given they form the foundation for the way a person perceives and views the world (Schwitzgebel, 2001). For
example, negative beliefs play a fundamental role in the maintenance of longstanding problems, whilst other beliefs are thought to alleviate the sequelae of such, oftentimes, unavoidable problems (Beck et al., 1990). Research has further found that some of the most effective treatment outcomes are a result of changing maladaptive beliefs, and building more adaptive ones (Padesky, 1994). Accordingly, if the belief patterns common to domestic abuse victims could be identified, support services can then develop treatment strategies to address maladaptive beliefs, which have often been implicated in maintaining the cycle of abuse. So the aim of this exploratory study was to qualitatively evaluate these beliefs in a sample of women with prior experiences of domestic abuse.

**Current Support Service Provisions**

Research to date has identified specific risk factors that increase the likelihood of an individual experiencing an abusive relationship. These include: individual risk factors (e.g. low academic achievement, unemployment and economic stress; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015), and developmental risk factors (e.g. experiencing childhood abuse, growing up in a household where domestic violence occurred and previous experiences of other forms of violence; Garcia-Moreno et al, 2006). To explain the process of how such risk factors mediate the on-going cycle of domestic abuse, Walker (1979) developed a model containing three phases: (1) tension building, (2) acute battering, and (3) the honeymoon phase. The tension-building phase refers to the build of strain in the relationship over common domestic issues (e.g. money, children, employment). This build-up of strain then ‘boils over’, resulting in the acute battering phase. This is then followed by the honeymoon phase, whereby the abuser apologizes for their behavior and convinces their partner it will not happen again, strengthening the bond between them. This cycle continues over and over, each time reinforcing the victim’s false beliefs about the relationship (Engel, 2005).
The cycle of abuse and its associated risk factors are widely used as the basis for the current services offered by support agencies. This is exemplified by the immediacy and urgency in the timeline of support offered, for example, when exiting the relationship and breaking the cycle of abuse (Spruin et al., 2015). Currently in the UK, support services for victims of domestic abuse tend to focus on immediate and professional support (Spruin et al., 2015). Immediate support encompasses a number of instrumental services such as emergency helplines, refuges, temporary accommodation and support workers (Refuge, 2015), alongside professional and pastoral support, such as legal and counselling services (Henning & Klesges, 2002). Whilst these factors are important for victims, they might not be sufficient in breaking the cycle of abuse long-term. In particular, short term support might not effectively address long-standing factors known to play a key part in domestic violence and abuse (e.g., negative beliefs; Russell, Chapleau & Kraus, 2015; Martin et al., 2000), as it fails to address the belief systems and personal experiences of the victim that reinforce the domestic abuse relationship, and ultimately results in the victim staying with the perpetrator (Dutton & Golant, 1997).

**The Role of Beliefs in Perpetuating the Risk of Abuse**

Powell and Smith (2011) argue that understanding and addressing an individual’s experience of domestic abuse is vital due to the differences in victim experiences. In addition, research by Henning and Klesges (2002) found that out of a sample of 1,756 women who identified as being a victim of domestic abuse, only 14.9% of these women reported using available support services. A barrier to accessing such support services was described by these women, as the belief that services lacked the provision for personalized support, and instead provided a rather generic ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. This further illustrates the need for support services to understand the subjective experience of victims to address them through individually tailored help.
With maladaptive beliefs having been identified as some of the most pervasive risk factors, the most effective response to creating long-term change in domestic abuse victims may well be an ability to address these beliefs directly (Padesky, 1994). Stalans and Finn (2006) highlight that many domestic abuse victims express negative attitudes towards police officers, often viewing them as unsympathetic or lacking empathy (Stalans & Finn, 2006). Similarly, research has found that victims hold negative beliefs about themselves, believing that they are helpless (Tan, Basta, Sullivan, & Davidson, 1995) or to blame for their victimization (Street & Arias, 2001).

In line with the above, some studies have started to investigate the specific thoughts and beliefs that facilitate the traumatic cycle of domestic abuse. Hyde-Nolan and Juliao (2012) found a relationship between remaining in and/or returning to an abusive relationship, and the theory of learned helplessness (i.e., attempts to escape/avoid future instances of abuse are learned to be no longer effective after having past experiences of abuse). These findings may possibly be a consequence of the domestic abuse victim having experienced repeated acts of abuse, becoming passive and believing there is nothing they can do to avoid the abuse. With such beliefs argued to be entrenched in a victim’s schemas, they influence the victim to stay in (or return to) an abusive relationship (McPherson Halket, Gormley, Mello, Rosenthal & Mirkin, 2014).

In addition to beliefs about control in relationships, beliefs about opportunities can also impact a victim’s decision to stay in an abusive relationship. Spruin and colleagues (2015) identified three themes that were important in the sense-making process of their participants, all of whom were victims of domestic abuse: (1) the quality of their first intimate relationship (2) their perceptions of their quality of life prior to the domestic abuse, and (3) their perception of the support services available during and/or post-abusive experiences. One particular factor that emerged in this study was the need for more support that focused
on education and occupational issues. These findings suggest that the likelihood of leaving and/or returning to an abusive relationship is inter-twined with perceived opportunities. It could also be argued that the beliefs which abuse victims have about future opportunities, compounded by negative belief systems about themselves, may have a considerable impact on their willingness to leave a domestic abuse relationship.

Overall, there is clear evidence showing the importance of increasing our understanding into the specific role that beliefs play in the cycle of domestic abuse as well as the individual experience of women who have experienced domestic abuse. Developing from this understanding could enable support services to create more long-term individualized support strategies for victims (Stith, Smith, Penn, Ward, & Tritt, 2004). This, in turn, could provide opportunities for the victim to develop from, and rebuild towards more positive and adaptive belief systems.

The Current Study

The current study aims to provide a preliminary investigation into the personal experiences, and key beliefs of domestic abuse victims (Oliveira, Viegas, Santos, Silveira, & Elias, 2015). The results will therefore complement existing research by providing a starting point into a greater understanding of the beliefs of these women. This insight could help support services to identify new provisions of support for domestically abused women and to allow them to recover and rebuild their lives in a more sustainable way (Murray et al., 2015).

Methods

Participants

Twelve women with a history of domestic abuse were recruited via a local abuse support centre (n = 12) in South East England. At the time of data collection, participants
were attending a support group for their past abuse. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 55 ($M = 28.95$, $SD = 10.67$), with ethnicities including: White British ($n = 9$) and Black British ($n = 3$). The majority of participants ($n = 8$) indicated they were unemployed, whilst the remaining participants stated they were currently in part-time ($n = 2$) or full-time ($n = 2$) employment. Half of the participants ($n = 6$) indicated completion of secondary school or equivalent, whilst half stated that they had obtained a university qualification ($n = 6$). The majority of participants reported being single ($n = 8$) with an equal number of participants stating they were in a relationship ($n = 2$) or married ($n = 2$).

**Data Collection**

As the study was exploratory, women were interviewed using a semi-structured design, whereby participants were asked about their general beliefs and thoughts surrounding their experiences of domestic abuse and follow up questions were asked for further elaboration/clarification. This enabled the collection of rich and detailed qualitative data for the analysis. This method of interview was utilized as it is particularly valuable during early stages of research to identify key themes within certain groups of people (Streatfield & Markless, 2012). Bryman (2012) argues that using approaches that focus on the perspective of the participants allows for more in depth data to emerge and for participants to be able to express their opinions more freely. Interviews varied in length from 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the amount of detail that each participant was comfortable to provide during the interview process.

**Procedure**

The University Research Ethics Committee approved the study, following which data were collected from a local domestic abuse support center. To be eligible to participate in the study, women had to be aged 18 years or older, emotionally stable, fluent in English and
willing to answer questions about an episode of domestic abuse (in the past or currently). Participants were advised that an ‘episode of domestic abuse’ was defined as any violence perpetrated by an intimate partner including, physical, verbal and sexual violence (Shrivastava & Shrivastava, 2013). Emotional stability of participants referred to their ability to remain calm and settled when discussing personal incidents of domestic abuse to ensure all participants felt able and comfortable to disclose details of their abusive experiences. If any participant felt that disclosing these details would cause them distress, they were thanked for meeting with the researchers and advised they would not be required to participate further in the study.

Participants who met the inclusion criteria were provided with a full verbal briefing regarding the purpose of the research and provided with an information sheet regarding the purpose of the study. If participants agreed to take part in the study, they were asked to read and sign a consent form, and were given a participant number to ensure confidentiality. In addition to the information sheet provided, the researcher also verbally explained to all participants that their responses were confidential and only the researchers involved with the study would be aware of their identities. The interview commenced once a participant signed the consent form. Upon completion of the interview, all participants were debriefed and thanked for their assistance with the research.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify themes within the interviews. This method of analysis was utilized as it goes beyond the basic premise of counting phrases or words within data, and instead identifies implicit and explicit themes, thereby capturing the intricacies of meaning within data (Guest, Macqueen, & Namey, 2012; Wilkinson, 2000). This particular
method has been shown to be useful during preliminary and exploratory research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Two researchers independently analyzed all 12 interviews using Luborsky's (1994) technique, which is suitable for analyzing qualitative data obtained from various interview methods. The analysis of the interview transcripts involved identifying comment themes expressed by the participants. If both researchers were in agreement about an identified theme, the theme was viewed as valid. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved, or accommodated through further refinement of the coding framework.

**Results**

Results from the thematic analysis indicated four belief system themes: (1) personal responsibility, (2) antisocial attitude, (3) environmental factors and (4) negative attitudes towards the police. Each of the four themes are presented in more detail below, supported by excerpts from the interviews.

**Personal responsibility**

This theme seems rooted in the participants’ belief system that they were responsible for their abusive experience(s), resulting in the individual believing they had instigated, or somehow facilitated their abuse. Participants viewed themselves as not prepared in life or able to find adequate employment, due to believing they are not clever enough, or as knowledgeable as everyone else. For example, one participant stated: “I left school a month before my baby was born, I hated it! I couldn’t keep up and was always left behind, so I left” (P3). The participant went on to blame herself for leaving school and staying with her abuser because she “…couldn’t find a job after that, no one wants to hire a thick kid with a kid” (P3).
Maladaptive thoughts such as this one led to feelings of guilt, shame, and inadequacy. For example, one participant stated: “I used to blame myself because I used to be told it’s my fault... My dad would tell me I did something during the day or I bullied my sister so... that was my punishment...” (P1). Another participant explained how she began to blame herself for other events in her life. For example, when her child was born she was deeply concerned about her own ability to keep her baby well and happy, stating that “...if he comes out with something wrong with him, it’s my fault” (P10). She also discussed how these self-blaming thoughts led her to wonder “…is he ok, is he all right? Is he this? Is he that? And wasn’t like that I needed to hold him but that had to make sure that he’s ok” (P10).

This theme provides an example illustration of the importance of understanding the negative beliefs implicated in domestic abuse experiences, but also how these beliefs have developed.

**Antisocial attitudes**

This theme appears to be embedded within participants’ beliefs with regard to breaking the law and towards compliance with prevailing rules and moral standards, e.g. the belief that *stealing* or *breaking the law* is understandable within certain circumstances. In particular, women with these beliefs tended to feel let down by the institutional authority, and as a result, refused to follow conventional standards, replacing them with personal authority. These types of beliefs were highlighted when one participant was asked about life leading up to their domestic victimization. She recalled how tough it was at the time “having recently getting done for fraud” (P8), and went on to explain how the authorities made things difficult for her and her partner:

“I didn’t inform the council that my partner was doing agency work, so every time he only worked one or two days, if I had told the council they would have taken away my
benefits and it’s just a long process, they don’t think that he was only getting stupid
money. It’s wrong that I got done for a crime” (P8).

In the context of domestic abuse, participants felt that societal and conventional
norms had failed them, and forced circumstances upon them. As a result, they were more
likely to exhibit antisocial and illegitimate thoughts and behaviors. This becomes clear in the
following quote:

“I got expelled from school at the age of 12 and then I never went into education
afterwards. No school would let me in for what I was expelled for, and from then, I
started getting into trouble all the time... I got a prison sentence at 15 and then left
home at 16” (P12).

Similarly, when talking about the circumstances leading up to her abuse, another participant
explained:

“I got in with the wrong crowd and met these boys and I was seeing one of them and
there was another and they were into like...bad things really, like criminal activity,
 drugs and stuff like that and I got myself into that and that’s how I ended up in prison
and yeah...” (P5).

Environmental factors

Some women expressed feelings of powerlessness with regard to environmental
factors, which ultimately led to their experience of domestic abuse. An extension of this
perceived lack of power or external locus of control can be seen in women’s beliefs about the
lack of opportunities and support available to them. For example, one participant described a
lack of support she had received in caring for her mum who had chronic kidney disease, “I
had been looking after her until last year when she died, I had a lot stress worrying about my
mom, it was just me looking after her full-time” (P11). Whilst another participant commented
on the lack of educational opportunities growing up, “I got expelled from school at the age of 12 and then I never went back because no school would let me in after that” (P4).

The presence of such experiences resulted in an overall negative outlook on their environment, and contributed to a feeling of powerlessness when faced with escaping their abusive situation. In particular, one participant described her life around the time of her victimization:

“I was out of work, because a lot of places don’t want to take a single parent with school aged children. So because she is not in secondary school I am deemed not responsible enough…they are constantly sick according to most employers” (P4).

Similarly, another participant went on to discuss all the problems she was experiencing:

“Quite a lot was going on, like I said, my mom was ill and just really a lot of problems all around, my neighbor committed suicide. She jumped of the building where she lives, that was quite bad. Around the same time I had three close friends die as well. So it was all quite difficult” (P11).

Such accounts illustrate further how the subjective experience of participants can impact on the development of negative thoughts around societal support. They also illustrate the facilitative role feelings of powerlessness has in the maintenance of domestic abuse. Likewise, these negative thoughts could also heighten the negative reality of participants’ circumstances.

**Negative attitudes towards the police**

This theme illustrates participants’ negative attitudes towards the police and other agencies based on previous experiences of interactions with law enforcement agencies and/or authority figures resulting in negative outcomes for the individual. Subsequently, these
experiences led to negative beliefs about such agencies. For instance, one participant explained how she blamed the authorities for her hard childhood:

“Hmm... I had a good childhood, but then when I was around 8 the authorities took me out of my dad and my mum’s care, only to be passed around the family and to then be taken into foster care... It had a negative effect on the rest of my life really” (P2).

The participant further disclosed how her interactions with the police later on in life reinforced her negative perceptions of law enforcement. For example, she described having contacted the police a number of times about her abuser and already had “...a lot of things put in place, such as injunctions, and stuff like that” (P2), but it did not stop the abuse.

Similarly, another participant stated that as a child she tried to explain to teachers that she was being bullied, but the teachers seemed uninterested: “no one understood but I was trying to talk with them, I was just another colored book...All my life I’ve been picked on” (P1). Whilst another participant described how she was unfairly targeted by the police, leading to her arrest:

“Yeah and then there was one day where they just picked me up on the street and said they had me on surveillance and they had a lot of evidence against me and when I went to court and was found guilty, that was it, I got 5 and a half years” (P9).

Similarly, when one participant was asked about why she did not report her abuse to the police, she responded by saying “I was scared of social services and the police, making issues about my children and taking them off me” (P12).

This theme, in line with the previous ones, clearly illustrates the need to understand subjective experiences of victims of domestic abuse to be able to address the resulting negative thoughts on an individual basis and supporting long-term well-being of victims.

Discussion
The purpose of this study was to conduct an exploratory investigation into the experiences and belief systems of women who have experienced domestic abuse. It was proposed that this new insight could aid in the future development of personalized support for domestic abuse victims. The results from this study centred around four key belief themes: (1) personal responsibility, (2) antisocial attitude, (3) environmental factors and (4) negative attitudes towards police. These themes are in line with previous research, which has identified similar beliefs in domestic abuse victims, and highlights the interplay between such beliefs and participants’ individual experiences prior to and during the abuse.

In particular, previous research has indicated that many domestic abuse victims believe they are personally responsible for the abuse they endure (Gangoli, Razak, & McCarry, 2006), and this expression of self-blame was also highlighted in the current study. Whilst support services (e.g., Women’s Aid, 2015) continually remind victims they are never to blame for their abuse, this might not be sufficient to counter pervasive personal experiences, which support women’s subjective interpretations of their situations. Little emphasis is placed on supporting victims in developing the psychological tools to help them understand why they feel personally responsible, and more importantly, how they can change and reinterpret their personal experiences and feelings of self-blame (Gracia & Tomas, 2014). The current study suggests that victims of domestic abuse might benefit from more psychological assistance to help them counteract the misattribution of self-blame. A program facilitating such attitudinal change could ultimately contribute to abuse victims developing more long-lasting positive attitudes and self-appraisals.

The current study further highlights the potential link between long-standing antisocial attitudes related to experiences of domestic abuse. For example, the National Institute for Core and Excellence (NICE) review (2013) found evidence to suggest a higher than average prevalence of antisocial attitudes in domestic abuse victims. These attitudes are
often transmitted during childhood, when children are exposed to criminogenic attitudes, values and beliefs (Guy, Feinstein & Griffiths, 2014). Similarly, Geffner and colleagues (2003) found that children who witnessed domestic violence on a regular basis, developed greater antisocial attitudes and behaviours in adulthood, when compared to children from non-violent homes. The current study offers a starting point in unraveling what appears to be a complex mix of disillusionment, lost opportunities and alternative choices.

Many victims of domestic abuse also struggle with feelings of helplessness within their environment. It has been proposed that such feelings are often learnt as a result of repeated incidents of abuse, and the level of control exerted by the abuser (Hyde-Nolan & Juliao, 2012). However, the current study suggests that this might well have been developed prior to the abuse starting. Many participants reported feelings of helplessness and loneliness from a young age onwards. This is a significant finding. If it is the case that helplessness is developed prior to experiencing domestic abuse, it is important that support services tackle the individual situations that have led participants to develop such feelings in addition to the characteristics of the abuse itself.

In addition, support services often emphasize the importance of social support networks, and how they are fundamental in a victim’s ability to recover from intimate partner abuse (Tan et al., 1995). Social support has been found to improve the mental health of domestically abused women (Kocot & Goodman, 2003) and increase an individual’s level of self-esteem as well as their ability to overcome feelings of helplessness (Mitchell & Hodson, 1983), whilst, without the presence of social support, the likelihood of a victim returning to their abusive relationship is high (Walby & Allen, 2004). Ultimately, negative experiences as a result of a lack of support could result in a victim further feeling helpless and lacking control (Spruin et al., 2015).
The last theme that emerged in the current study relates to the beliefs and attitudes abuse victims hold towards police officers’ involved in their domestic abuse case. In particular, this theme identified victims holding negative attitudes towards the police and other agencies due to disappointing, or frustrating experiences, resulting in some victims stating they are now less likely to seek help from the police or other authorities. This is in line with previous research which found that victims are often skeptical of police (Lonsway, Archambault, & Lisak, 2009) and fear that they will be shamed, disbelieved, coerced, retraumatized, or dismissed (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternice-Thames, Wasco, & Sefl, 2007; Patterson, Greeson, & Campbell, 2009). Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC, 2014) conducted a study of over 500 victims of domestic abuse. Whilst 79% of victims who had reported an incident to the police were satisfied with the initial police response, one third of victims stated that they did not feel safer, and in fact some felt less safe after the initial response. The majority of victims who felt less safe, attributed these feelings to poor police attitudes to victims, feeling judged and a lack of empathy and understanding.

Recently, the City of London’s Police (2014) report on domestic violence stated that the response to domestic abuse was not up to standard. The report stated that one of the key contributing factors in the poor response to domestic abuse, were police officers lack of skill and knowledge in engaging competently with victims of domestic abuse (HMIC, 2014). Subsequently, HMIC developed a set of recommendations for the Police Service to help in making long-term differences in the way the service prioritizes and responds to domestic abuse. One of these recommendations included police to work with partnering organizations to help support victims through the criminal justice process. If this were to occur, the negative attitudes police may have towards abuse victims could be transformed into more positive attitudes. However, this might not be sufficient as participants in the current study reported deep-rooted distrust of outside agencies often based on previous experiences that
occurred before the domestic abuse incidents. This may suggest that some women who experience domestic abuse might not seek help from such agencies. To break the cycle of abuse, participants might need individualized help to address and re-evaluate such beliefs to allow them to seek help in the future if needed.

Although this current research sets the groundwork to further understand the different beliefs domestically abused women may hold, there are still a number of considerations that need to be addressed. Firstly, this study is an exploratory, qualitative investigation. As such, it offers personal insights into the subjective experience of victims of domestic abuse. However, while the sample size is appropriate for the current methodology, future research should be carried out with larger and more diverse samples (e.g., including males, comparison groups, wider geographical area) to test for the applicability of the findings. With that, the length of the interviews within the study were brief (15 – 30 minutes) when compared to the average research interview, which takes between 30 minutes to several hours to complete (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Subsequent research therefore needs to be conducted using different interview approaches and methodologies (e.g., quantitative methods) before any generalizations can be determined. Secondly, the current study was an exploratory design with a view to identifying the gaps in the literature, and describing the need for further research. Accordingly, the current findings should be viewed as the first step towards understanding the beliefs held by abuse victims, and how these beliefs may impact on current and future abuse experiences. Furthermore, research in this area could also begin to develop an evidence-based model that domestic abuse services can draw upon, to help inform individualized and long-lasting psychological provisions.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, this study provides preliminary insights into the thinking styles of domestic abuse victims. The study highlights the importance of considering the long-standing and personalized beliefs and experiences of abuse victims.
However, the results of the study need to be viewed with caution, and further research is needed in the area before any definitive conclusions can be made.
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