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Understanding Crisis Information Needs in Context:

The Case of Intimate Partner Violence Survivors

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Abstract

The pervasive, personal crisis of intimate partner violence (IPV) demands community information resources in workforce, health care, mental health, public housing, criminal justice, and social service arenas. Although generally underutilized, public libraries have a pivotal role to play as the only public institution specifically structured to support community information access. In order to provide effective service, however, librarians must understand the information complexities of the IPV context. This study triangulates two populations and two data-gathering techniques in an effort to provide a deeper understanding of survivors’ information needs. The first segment analyzes the information issues of IPV survivors in an active bulletin board (BB) community; the second segment utilizes in-depth interviews with 57 individuals (safe-house staff, survivors, and police officers) in ten Texas cities. The information experiences were analyzed in the context of public library service and in light of Everyday Life Information Seeking theory.
Introduction

The context in which personal crises play out is kaleidoscopic in nature. Consider, for example, the personal crisis of being attacked repeatedly by an intimate partner -- a spouse or lover. View that crisis through the lens of law enforcement and issues of judgment, evidence, and legal boundaries predominate. View it through the lens of shelter staff and issues of safety, empowerment, and independence come to the fore. View it through the lens of Child Protective Services, public housing, or emergency room staff and different issues predominate. For the survivor, however, each click of the kaleidoscope produces a new, complex, and fragmented world. Tracking, integrating, and managing the information required to function effectively in all of those different worlds demands well-developed information skills. As if that were not enough to demand of an individual in crisis, intimate partner violence (IPV) survivors must also insure that their abusers can not use that information activity to track them.

This paper first examines the information-related experiences of IPV survivors, and then examines the potential of public library support for this vulnerable population. Based on triangulated data from one study of online exchanges and a second study of survivors, shelter staff, and police, this paper helps map the complex information arena of IPV survivors in light of public library support opportunities.

Context of Intimate Partner Violence

Demographics. Almost 5.3 million victimizations by intimate partners occur every year among U.S. women age 18 and older [1]. This violence crosses all social, economic, educational, racial, and cultural boundaries; however certain groups suffer most. Severe
IPV attacks are four to six times as common among Black and Hispanic couples as their White counterparts [2, p. 1039], and women who live below the poverty line and young women are more likely to be abused [3, 4]. IPV has a disproportionate impact on those lacking financial independence, the means to sustain themselves day-to-day. Nor do they have access to legal resources, which materially affects their ability to prevail in both civil and criminal courts [5]. Many lack financial self-sufficiency after years of being prevented from gaining an education and/or job; many also have primary financial and parenting responsibilities for young children [6].

Health. Women with a history of domestic violence victimization have significantly more physical and mental health problems than do other women [7]. Survivors frequently suffer the effects of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder [8] and they have 50% to 70% more problems with their physical health [7, p. 1157] than their counterparts.

Trying to leave. Simply reporting the abuse, much less leaving the abuser, can be extremely difficult for many survivors [9; 10, p. 1089; 11]. Judgmental responses from police and social service agencies to survivors’ help-seeking efforts can actually undermine healing [12] and leave survivors feeling “guilty, depressed, anxious, distrustful of others, and reluctant to seek further help” [13, p. 97]. Survivors develop a range of techniques for escaping abusers, protecting their children, contacting police, and trying to adjust or end their relationships safely [14, 15]. The financial, legal, deportation, custodial, emotional, and safety issues involved in trying to leave complicate the matter [16]. Many women move between an active fear of their partners and a desire to improve the relationship [9]. They also may hesitate to call the police out of shame,
guilt for having “provoked” the abuse, or sympathy for the abuser’s mental, career, or physical difficulties [11, 17].

Leaving. For those who do manage to leave, the point of separation is extremely dangerous. Estrangement is a primary risk factor in the murder of IPV victims [10, 17]. Those at the greatest risk of being murdered may well underestimate the degree of their vulnerability [18]. Survivors must be prepared both cognitively and affectively for any permanent, effective change to occur [9, 19, 20].

**IPV Survivor Information Behaviors**

Numerous studies confirm that survivors prefer using informal information and support networks [21, 22, 23, 24, 13]; nevertheless, they do make direct use of the formal information systems provided by police and other community agencies. Twenty-three different entities were expected to provide help (p. 80) on 18 different problems (p. 79) according to the germinal study *Barriers to Information: How Formal Help Systems Fail Battered Women* by Roma Harris and Patricia Dewdney [21].

Within the last decade, a few studies have focused on the contextual factors in IPV survivor information interactions. Three layers of service providers must be identified, navigated, and managed in order to obtain concrete aid. Survivors must move from emergency aid (e.g., police) to IPV-focused aid (e.g., shelters) and on to specialty social services for the general population, such as, mental health services [22]. IPV survivors using an electronic bulletin board requested and shared information on finances, children, law, mental health, domestic violence patterns, and escape logistics [25].
Community Response to IPV

Community response to IPV entails both governmental and private social services because this personal crisis devastates families to such an extent that the social and workplace consequences reach well beyond the home. Both government and private resources are often stretched past capacity by IPV’s impact on schools, mental health facilities, emergency rooms, and subsidized housing [1]. The annual medical and mental health costs of IPV survivors (over $4 billion) are dwarfed by the cost of their lost productivity in terms of both workdays and lifetime earnings (over $8 billion). Both legal and social service resources are required daily to inhibit the growth of the abuse cycle from one generation to the next [1; 26, p. 328].

Government first responders (police) and social service first responders (hospital and shelter staff) contribute to the information patchwork for survivors, as do clergy, social workers, educators, and physical and mental health providers. Police departments use their web sites to inform IPV survivors of their rights but that coverage is incomplete and rarely emphasizes essential points [27]. Various partnerships between public and private agencies [28, 29] mount web sites, offer email services, mail out reading matters, give talks, provide advocates, and staff hot-lines [30]. Social service agency efforts to make the most effective use of their scarce resources builds, in part, on developing a deeper understanding of survivor information needs.

Potential of Public Libraries

Public libraries, building on their well-established community information and referral function, have a pivotal role to play in the information world of IPV survivors.
They are the only public institution that is specifically structured, in terms of both resources and staff, to support the formal and informal information experiences of citizens [31, 32, 33, 34]. Libraries are particularly well placed to support the information needs of IPV survivors as they move from first-responder interactions through the process of developing safer, more independent lives. Unfortunately, email reference queries on basic contact information for IPV survivor shelters yielded uneven responses from public libraries with virtually no cyber-safety instruction and little affective support [35]. In order to be most effective in providing that support librarians must better understand the information complexities of the IPV experience.

**Theoretical Viewpoint**

The powerful influence of individual situation and context on IPV information interactions led to identification of the person-in-situation framework [36] of the “Everyday Life Information Seeking” (ELIS) model [37, 38, 39] as the most appropriate theoretical perspective for this study. From the ELIS perspective, the deliberate and active use of information-seeking is a life-mastery skill used by individuals in problem-solving. Four dimensions of those information-related behaviors are central to the quality of information experiences: information needs, affective states, cognitive mastery, and available resources [40, p. 431]. IPV survivors’ information needs may well be determined by external forces (e.g., an abuser’s tactics) and influenced by the priorities of support agencies (e.g., a police officer’s focus on pressing charges). Their affective states are deeply engaged in the abuser’s cycle of behavior as well as their own reactions to life changes. (The “abuse cycle” of tension to explosion to “honeymoon” is common
but not universal among abusers [41].) Cognitive mastery of several domains is often essential including material in criminal law, civil law, social services, health care, education, finances, and job skill development. Finally, the resources available to survivors vary widely since most community resources are almost entirely dependent on local funding levels and infrastructure, which, of course, vary from place to place and time to time. The ELIS perspective builds on the intersection of these key factors and therefore serves well as a theoretical foundation for this work.

An additional degree of focus is found in an extension of ELIS work, namely the person-in-situation model [36] which develops into the person-in-progressive-situation model [42]. The crisis aspect of IPV experiences requires a focus on the changes in personal context which take place over time. This model puts the analytic lens directly on the nexus of cognitive and affective situational elements which frame IPV survivors’ information seeking over time as their situations develop and change direction. Specifically proposed by Jennifer Dunne as a theoretical framework for learning more about the progressive and complex needs of IPV survivors as they move towards a safer life, this model recognizes that the “progression” involved may be less of a trajectory and more of a reiterative cycle for some survivors. A four-part model of such progressive situations among IPV survivors, complete with primary information need foci in each of the four parts, has been developed as an extension of this framework [27]. Applied in the context of police department web site information provision for IPV survivors, the model exemplifies this ELIS approach to more fully understand this population in crisis.

**Methodology**
This study triangulates two populations and two data-gathering techniques in an effort to provide a deeper understanding of survivors, both those using formal systems and those using informal systems. The first segment of the study details the information issues of IPV survivors in an active bulletin board (BB) community that had been functioning for 35 months at the time of this study. Established for the use of IPV survivors, the BB includes 1,326 threads and 7,566 responses to those threads. This anonymous BB community uses only screen names, strongly encourages rigorous cyber-safety precautions, and includes a large number of individuals who appear to feel safe in sharing their experiences and concerns.

The three-phase analysis used the constant comparison method of content analysis [43; 44; 45, pp. 339-344] with emergent coding developed, defined, and applied by one researcher. Individual statements were classed into emergent categories that arose from the data, rather than being structured in advance of analysis. These coding categories were constantly compared to each other, as were the statements classed within each, so that the codes were gradually refined, clarified, defined, and exemplified to create directional, mutually exclusive codes. When several phenomena were indicated in a single piece of text, multiple codes were applied to the same text. Within the codes developed for each type of phenomenon, however, all codes were mutually exclusive rather than overlapping. Where relevant, codes were also directional in nature to indicate, for example, affinity for or reluctance to use a particular information channel.

In the first phase, after obtaining the moderator’s permission to study the postings, a stratified, random sample of each month’s postings was used to gather 20% to 30% of posts from October 2005 to September 2006. The second phase strengthened anonymity
by removing potentially identifying information, such as the combination of an uncommon first name and a city name. The third phase used HyperResearch to record the 121 codes as applied to 341,382 words in 1,793 separate postings. The code-recode rate on the first 179 postings was 96%.

The second segment of the study utilizes in-depth interviews with 57 individuals in ten contrasting cities in three regions of Texas. Each community was purposefully selected to maximize demographic diversity in terms of population size (both total and immigrant as determined by federal census data), number of square miles, and geographic location. Urban, suburban, and rural communities were included. The only safe houses for two of the communities were actually regional facilities located in neighboring rural towns. A total of 24 shelter staff, 14 police officers, and 19 shelter clients chose to participate. The semi-structured interviews included five to seven open-ended questions designed to elicit primary information concerns and needs. In each shelter the administrator most directly in touch with shelter clients was interviewed; in several cases, additional staff volunteered to be interviewed as well. At most shelters, the director permitted shelter clients to be interviewed, either those who were simply available and willing at the time or volunteers who made special arrangements to be there during the site visit. At two sites, the shelter director specifically wanted the perspectives of shelter clients who spoke only Spanish to be included in the study; the necessary translations were handled by a bi-lingual shelter staffer. At all police departments the police chief chose for the interview the officer most closely charged with addressing IPV in the community. In four instances, additional police officers or civilian police employees in
Victim Services volunteered to participate by virtue of their teamwork with the primary interviewee or their position as someone who worked heavily on IPV cases.

A total of 63 hours of audio-taped interviews were transcribed resulting in a total of 106,530 words. Personal histories and detailed descriptions of abuse were not transcribed or analyzed as part of the overarching effort to insure that no quotation could inadvertently identify an individual. As with the BB data, the interview data were analyzed using the constant-comparison method of content analysis and HyperResearch. A reiterative process over three cycles of code development yielded a total of 467 unique codes which were applied a total of 3,259 times. The code-recode rate for two randomly chosen interviews was 93%, exceeding the standard for this trustworthiness indicator [46].

**Findings: overview**

Framing these analyses in terms of the ELIS person-in-progressive-situation context creates a matrix of situations with their attendant information needs, affective issues, cognitive domain demands, and resources. The situations, it must be remembered, are not purely progressive in that they do not always follow one upon the other in a linear fashion. They are, however, progressive in the critical sense in that as survivors move towards safer life situations the situations tend to build on each other. Put another way, survivors do not step neatly from one situation to the next; they may move between situations or never leave a situation. Those survivors who do progress towards safer living arrangements, however, learn from each progressive situation how to better
manage the challenges they face. An overview of the progressive situation/information need matrix is provided in Table 1, which is followed by more extended explanations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Information Need</th>
<th>Affective Issue</th>
<th>Domain Knowledge</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affirming abuse</td>
<td>Understand social &amp; legal norm of abuse</td>
<td>Shame, guilt, hope</td>
<td>Abuse cycle; criminal law</td>
<td>Web sites, books, other survivors, counselors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st police contact</td>
<td>How to use criminal justice system; how to navigate social service system</td>
<td>Fear of abuser; worry re food etc., self/kids; hope; guilt</td>
<td>Criminal law (e.g., filing charges); civil law (e.g., child custody); safety planning</td>
<td>Police, ER staff, shelter staff, other survivors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st shelter contact or stay</td>
<td>How to plan for the immediate future; considering change</td>
<td>Fear of shelter staff disrespect; hope; guilt</td>
<td>Social service system within and beyond shelter-generalized</td>
<td>Shelter staff, web sites, other survivors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing to separate on a long-term basis</td>
<td>How to make legal, employment, housing, and social changes; self-efficacy growth</td>
<td>Frustration with systems involved; info. overload; guilt; fear</td>
<td>Social and legal systems re specific issues; life mastery skills; safety/security skills</td>
<td>Shelter staff, web sites, police, other survivors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-shelter or post-move living</td>
<td>Avoiding abuser physically, emotionally, financially; self-reliant subsistence for self/kids</td>
<td>Loneliness, fear, guilt, anticipation</td>
<td>Safety/security skills; life mastery skills; self-analysis</td>
<td>Other survivors, counselors, books web sites, shelter staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Derived from triangulated populations and data gathering methods, these findings are useful for informing and deepening understanding of IPV survivors’ information experiences; they are not intended to be generalized.

**Findings: situations**

The five situations are, obviously, delineated only at the macro-level. Each could be further subdivided in terms of both phases and context. For example the first situation -- “affirming abuse” -- could be broken into phases, e.g., considering the idea, seeking or being receptive to outsiders’ commentary, accepting outsiders’ commentary, verbalizing nascent understanding of the idea, considering outsiders’ commentary on that verbalization, redefining “abuse” as a personally applied phenomenon, and recognizing...
the ability to affirm the abuse as such. Such phases would certainly vary somewhat among individuals. In addition, exemplars of that situation could be subdivided into various contexts, e.g., personally instigated via web exploration or externally instigated via involuntary contact with police.

Examination at this macro level is productive, however, in that it delineates meaningful and common situations which IPV survivors face in their movement towards safer living situations. The five situations are characterized as follows: affirming abuse, first police contact, first shelter contact/stay, preparing for long-term separation, and post-shelter/move living. The complicated nuances of information issues in each of the five stages can have substantial influences on affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of the ELIS experiences. Examination of the first stage, affirming the abuse as such, illustrates those influences.

Affirming the abuse as such in personal, social, and/or legal terms is essential for almost any movement towards a safer life. This single piece of information is the prerequisite for major change. Unfortunately, the information issues involved can be overwhelming and even dangerous as revealed by affective, cognitive, and behavioral analysis of these issues.

They can overwhelm affectively in that affirming abuse makes some survivors redefine themselves as abuse victims and redefine their intimate partnerships as seriously dysfunctional.

*In general, people don't like to be labeled as a victim, so we try not to refer to them as such. We try to use other terminology ... Once you use the word victim in there people feel like they've lost control and they no longer have power over the*
situation. If you keep that where they believe that they still have some power there, then they may be able to take more action, cooperate with you, and allow your investigation to go on without attaching a label to it (Police).

The sense of being affectively overwhelmed can even require survivors to re-examine their parents’ relationship. Based on social norms, both native citizens and immigrants may come from families in which some level of abuse is considered “acceptable” or is expected. A lot of them … come back. "My dad used to abuse my mom and my mom never did anything about it." So they were going with that mentality that it's all right. They were left in the dark, but now we have to enlighten them and tell them that it's wrong and they don't have to live like that (Police).

The information issues can overwhelm cognitively in that some survivors work to gain the domain knowledge of abuse cycles, causes, and legal definitions of abuse as part of this affirmation process. For example, actions that constitute abuse from a legal perspective may require documentation or even repeated documentation of physical abuse before the police, district attorney, and judge acknowledge it as such.

Well she got hit 10 times in the past, but she didn't call the police. And the lady is saying, “This is has been an ongoing problem, I finally have decided to call the police.” And there's no documentation, there's no police reports, no prior police reports, no prior arrest reports, no prior calls to 911. … Well the judge goes, “You don't have enough for a protective order.” And you and I both know that they do, but most judges start out as defense attorneys and they have a different mindset. (Police Officer)
Repeated death and/or torture threats that are unwitnessed and unrecorded may constitute abuse from the survivor’s perspective but not from all legal perspectives. *We tell the victims there’s nothing we can do. Thank God there’s no physical injuries; just a verbal deal right now. We can’t arrest him (Police Officer).* Others work to understand the implications of affirming abuse, recognizing its inherent difficulties. *The thing is i am in denial and i dont want to name it as domestic violence as i would then have to do something about it. Im just scared of the future of having no one and being a single mum. My family would say i told u so and my children would grow up hating me (Survivor, posting).*

The information issues can overwhelm behaviorally in that some survivors struggle with shifting the primary driving force of their daily behaviors from evading the worst abuser attacks to acting on this growing perception of the nature of their relationship. *Does anyone have any tips on keeping a log of incidents? What details should be recorded, how to remember the details etc? (Survivor, posting).*

The information issues of this first situation, or any other, can actually be dangerous. Any abuser-observed manifestations of these affective, cognitive, or behavioral aspects of affirming abusive behavior as such are likely to trigger episodes of particularly violent and even deadly abuse. The information complexities of this first of the five situations underscore the risks that survivors take in considering or acting on the ELIS components of moving towards safer living.

Analogous issues are involved in each of the other four situations. For example, the second situation --initial contact with government’s primary first responder, i.e., the
police-- can entail unrealistic expectations of the outcome. *There's a time when they're in crisis and they're in that crisis mode and they think that we're going to come in like knights on white horses and we're gonna save the day* (Police Officer). The third situation, initial contact with a shelter, can entail misconceptions about the nature of the physical space. *Women don't want to come in at times because they see it as maybe your skid row bum type of shelter that you might see on television for example. So they're envisioning cots lined up in this huge room, absolutely no privacy. Almost a non-safe environment for them, they see it as non-safe* (Shelter staff). The fourth situation -- preparing to separate -- involves a complex array of often overlapping information needs which, for some, must be met on a deadline. *I remember going so many places in the wheelchair, and when I got there they were like, oh you have to call and make an appointment before we can see you. And it's hard, just like for the women with 4 kids and the strollers. What do they need to bring -- ID, social security cards, stuff like that, so more information. They could put all that on a computer page, couldn't they* (Survivor, interview). Finally, managing a post-shelter or other independent living situation requires both emotional and applied support structures to work in concert. *I just wondered if maybe you spoke to the apartment complex manager and let them know that you are basically being stalked where you are, if they might not be willing to work with you on getting out of your lease. It might be worth a try* (Survivor, posting). In this situation, the affective willingness to try explaining abuse to one more person must combine with the practical concerns about leaving an apartment lease early in order to avoid an abuser. All five situations contain such inherent complexities.
Findings: information needs

The changing nature of information needs throughout the course of these five situations reflects the nature of survivor engagement with each situation. Initially, the information need is one of understanding – specifically, understanding the social and legal norms of abuse. When interacting with the police, the second situation, the information needs move to a more concrete level, from understanding to knowing “how to” navigate the criminal justice system as well as its attendant connections to a limited range of social services. The third situation, shelter contact, requires an analytic application of information as survivors are encouraged to begin making decisions regarding the immediate future for themselves and, if needed, their family.

The fourth situation, preparing for long-term separation, demands intense engagement in the almost cyclical movement from one information need to the next. For example, finding and successfully using employment information requires survivors to then take on the search for housing information. The final situation, independent living, requires that all of the previous situations’ information issues remain resolved; each information need could resurface if efforts are not made to reinforce the lessons learned earlier. For example, some survivors find that the fear of failure combined with the loneliness of independent living makes them particularly vulnerable to the “honeymoon” phase of the abuse cycle so that they must reinforce their understanding of abuse, gained in the first situation, in order to continue avoiding their abuser.

Findings: affective concerns
The vast majority of the affective concerns in all five stages are problematic and negative rather than empowering and positive. Given the relative fragility of a survivor’s sense of self-efficacy in most arenas of activity, from information-seeking to establishing financial independence, the affective pitfalls discussed herein have a substantial impact. Discouragement, confusion, frustration, shame, and anger can actually send someone back to an abusive situation in which the dangers are known and readily anticipated.

Affirming abuse, the first situation, may lead to the shame and guilt mentioned earlier; it may also lead to hope that the abuser will be able and willing to change the abusive behavior. *Is there hope for getting him to see himself if I remain calm in pointing out when he feels he's crossed a line* (Survivor, posting)? And, of course, actually affirming abuse may create a sense of helplessness because understanding the actions as abusive does not provide any clear means for stopping or escaping from them. *I am too scared to leave. I am afraid of what might happen if I do. I think I will just have to wait it out and see what happens from here* (Survivor, posting).

The activity of the second and third phases, interacting with police and shelters, often generates all the fears that abusers have been nurturing as control mechanisms over the course of the relationship, which in many cases is a period of years. Survivors may fear that they will be unable to feed and house themselves; those with children may fear that the children will blame them for breaking up the family. The complexities of both the civil and criminal justice legal systems could overwhelm anyone, much less a survivor who depends on an ever-changing stream of pro-bono legal aid workers, police, prosecutors, and judges. Even those who engage deeply with the full range of governmental and social service support systems in order to prepare for long-term
separation, the fourth situation, face the discouragement, frustration, and information overload generated by prolonged contact with bureaucracies and the increasingly common use of e-government’s online forms and web-based explanations of complex application procedures.

Affective issues in the final phase, independent living, can be positive as a genuinely safe life is anticipated and, gradually, relished. Years of abuse and the persistence of abusers who ignore protective orders and stalking laws, however, can generate great and often justified fear. When children, extended family, friends, and even pets are included in the abuser’s post-separation wrath, guilt may arise. Some abusers actually play on guilt by portraying themselves as suicidal, physically ill, or otherwise incapacitated by the survivor’s newly found independence.

_I was told by one of the counsellors at my Women's Group for DV, the other day, that if a man threatens suicide or in your case, has made out that his drugged state after the split-up, has already led to him nearly dying, then that in itself constitutes abuse!!! He is using mental abuse to make you want to take him back. He had made you feel fearful of rejecting him in case he loses it on the drugs and dies_ (Survivor, posting).

All of these affective issues require substantial emotional energy from survivors as they seek, evaluate, manage, and apply information within the context of these five situations.

**Findings: knowledge domains**
Knowledge domains are complicated by two factors: reiterative escape efforts and localized service variations. As survivors make repeated forays towards safer living, they may gradually master specific knowledge domains by virtue of repeated interactions. The legal stuff that goes on with CPS (Child Protective Services) -- that I do know for a fact ... ‘cause I've been through it. That's the only reason. There was a women that was scared and I told her about how CPS goes about their process (Survivor, interview).

Alternatively, they may become overloaded with information and respond by blunting its delivery or ignoring it altogether. Unfortunately, I've run into a lot of people that I've given [the required handout on how to get help] to and it's, “Oh I've got plenty of these. I've seen these before. I've read it.” I say, “Oh well, I'm gonna give it you again (Police Officer).” While police see people for a short time, shelters have a similar problem over the course of days or weeks. In most shelters you don't stay very long. You don't have a long time to process all this information. So just being a human being and not a computer, all that info going in and going in, some has got to just fly away. There's just way too much information to absorb in that short amount of time (Shelter staff).

Receiving, accepting, and comprehending information that has been delivered repeatedly and at different stages of an ongoing crisis requires a constellation of circumstances which no single agency can generate consistently. Both shelter staff and police recognize this and therefore repeat information in various formats.

The many variations in local service priorities, guidelines, and even interpretations of state laws create another critical issue in knowledge domains. For example, in Texas civil court order violations must be reported to a judge by the survivor rather than the police; the police can act only in cases of criminal protective order violations. However,
in some jurisdictions the local policy permits police officers to document civil court order violations and such documentation can be effective in persuading a judge to provide further protection for a survivor. *We don't have any problem doing that at all. A lot of times we don't but if they request it we will do it* *(Police Officer).* Mastering the intricacies of what is possible, required, effective, safe, and/or illegal can be crucial.

Survivors often listen closely to each other, trusting that both respect and insight come from their shared experiences.

*One of the ladies here who's new. She's never been on Medicare or any assistance, and the only thing that made it easier on her is that most of the women that are in here do have some kind of government assistance and we've basically already filled out most of the forms several times before. So being that we did that we're able to help her out and let her know the ropes on how to get certain things* *(Survivor, interview).*

The domain knowledge shared, sought, and needed in the first situation center on the abuse cycle’s components and relevant legalities. Interactions with criminal and civil law in the second situation combine to require domain knowledge in both of those complex areas as well as knowledge about safety planning, i.e., techniques for preparing to maximize physical safety particularly when efforts to escape are underway. The third situation requires survivors to learn how to function in and make use of a wide array of social services immediately beyond the shelter’s resources. The fourth situation often demands the greatest expansion of domain knowledge in that the material initially mastered in the second and third situations (i.e., law and social services) must be taken to
a deeper level and combined carefully with safety information. The fifth situation moves to a more internalized knowledge domain as survivors focus on life mastery (e.g., job skills, financial management, education) materials and the self-analysis required to avoid additional abusive relationships.

**Findings: information resources**

The information resources which survivors trust, seek, and employ are characterized by their social, physical, and cognitive accessibility. In each of the five situations, interpersonal contact provided all three advantages. Talking with a knowledgeable individual who understands and respects the complexities of each survivor’s unique situation leads survivors to seek information from those they know. *A lot of our clients say that they've heard about our hotline through friends or through family and also through other social service agencies, such as the United Way (Shelter staff).*

Once survivors enter that first situation and begin to consider the possibility of moving towards a safer life, information resources in general may become more noticeable to them. *Before I did not know that there was this kind of help, but now every time I look around, when you go to the hospital, when you go to Walmart in the bathrooms they have signs (Survivor, interview).* Seeing the information, however, may not immediately translate into actions or decisions. *She was very confused and at that moment she was having the crisis situation at home, so when she saw the billboard (about the shelter) she was confused. She wasn't sure to call at first, but then because of the situation and the information she got from the billboard she decided to call to see if she could get some help (Survivor, via a translator).* Throughout this and the other four
situations, those resources which are socially, physically, and cognitively accessible are more likely to be employed and trusted.

Social accessibility includes cultural and validation concerns. Cultural issues manifest in terms of language and locality in that survivors prefer information resources in their first language that is delivered by local agencies. Contacting a local shelter with a counselor who speaks Spanish provided a significant degree of affective comfort to Spanish speaking survivors interviewed. In addition, both police and shelter staff found that repeated affirmations of survivors’ rights to safety are essential. *There needs to be the validation because all of this (information) won't matter if I'm sitting here thinking it's all my fault (Shelter staff).* Survivors appreciate those individuals who combine moral support with concrete information. *She'll give you hope. Don't give up there, keep on going. We'll find a way (Survivor, interview).*

Physical accessibility can be particularly crucial when abusers literally isolate survivors, a common situation. Mandated information dissemination by police and emergency room staff can be somewhat effective in countering social isolation. Paradoxically, some isolated survivors are permitted access to the Internet and actually know how to use it to gather relevant information. *A lot of the women that come here have just been at home and been on the Internet, been on the computer all day, so they know about it (Shelter staff).* Some survivors are aware of numerous resources and provide access by sharing them readily with others. *There is awesome information out there on the web, in the bookstores, and here that will help you to find answers for you as well (Survivor, posting).* Billboards, notices in restrooms, and televised public service announcements reach many people, some of whom begin to actively seek material in
multiple formats. Now I look for books in the library and everything and it's there (Survivor, interview). I actually found it on the Internet. I found their web site and I called the number and that's how I left my husband (Survivor, interview). Finally, for the large numbers of survivors who have small children, physical accessibility includes childcare. The thing about [using computers to find information] is, is to have daycare available to them, too, so they would have time for themselves and have time to work on things that they need to work on for themselves (Shelter staff).

Cognitive accessibility may center on finding the information, applying the information, or both. Finding information may involve others. There is one lady here and she's lucky enough to have one of those 16 year old kids that can do everything and so they do go to the library quite often (Survivor, interview). However, several shelter staff members interviewed expressed strong reservations about the ability of survivors to locate information. Most of our clients aren't savvy enough to go and [find information in a library] (Shelter staff). Even carefully delivered information may not be applied effectively due to the crises faced by survivors. I'm not positive that they sit down and they read (the required information police give them at a domestic violence call). I'm not positive that it filters through … because there's so many thousands of things going through their mind (Police Officer).

Conclusions

Using the person-in-progressive-situation model from the ELIS theory, this study analyzed two triangulated data sets to further develop public librarians’ understanding of
the information issues faced by IPV survivors. The constant comparison method was employed to analyze hundreds of postings to a survivor bulletin board as well as over sixty hours of interviews with members of three groups (survivors, shelter staff, and police) in ten different locations throughout Texas. Using the key ELIS factors of information need, affective issues, cognitive domain knowledge, and information resources as the analytic basis for viewing each of five progressive situations, several information concerns, opportunities, and questions were identified.

At its most fundamental, the study reiterates a common-sense finding that is easily overlooked, i.e., information needed to address a personal crisis must be presented in direct relationship to that crisis. *Her head is about to explode because she's been beat up and strangled. She's got two kids crying, it's 3 in the morning, and you hand her this packet with 24 pieces of information in it. It's gonna end up on the kitchen table (Police Officer).* Police, shelter staff, and survivors make effective use of various techniques for addressing this fundamental need by, for example, breaking information into smaller segments, putting it in multiple formats, repeating it regularly, and embedding it in affirming statements that create a more receptive frame of mind by addressing the affective issues faced by the survivor. In addition, resources can be used sequentially. *I am reading a book on how to identify and deal with "dangerous relationships" in the hope that this helps bring clarity to my mind until I can get to the counselor (Survivor, posting).* Keeping the crisis context at the fore of information provision criteria increases the efficacy of most efforts.

Successful navigation of government and other social service providers requires survivors to learn how to manage information.
When you want to apply for emergency assistance, it's best to have every information on hand that they're gonna basically ask for. Any interview you go to with any kind of government assistance. For instance proof of residency. They give you a letter of residency here [at the shelter]. Proof of any kind of income coming in, whether it's disability, child support, income from your job (Survivor, interview).

Learning to anticipate documentation requirements, balance personal safety with agency requests, keep track of logistical data, protect documents, and organize a functional system for following up on every contact demands a great deal of focus from anyone. Survivors who are using public transit, moving often, suddenly single parents, learning the intricacies of the criminal and civil justice systems, and trying to maintain a sense of physical safety require substantial support to develop sufficient information management skills. Certainly organizing it is the key to all of it. So we try to give them the information in an organized way to begin with, so that hopefully that helps them then maintain that pattern, because that's their only difficulty, to have papers from everywhere (Shelter staff).

While survivors and shelter staff increasingly recognize that cyber-safety issues are both essential and complicated, public librarians must address the affective components of Internet use. Cyber-safety requires such concrete actions as hiding a web-search trail, evaluating sites effectively, completing e-government forms safely, and using online support services anonymously. It also includes placing email and web use in the context of IPV, particularly in relationship to the cycle of abuse. We've just recently put a
computer with Internet connections at the shelter, but there's restrictions on that. They're not allowed to check their email. … It's the issue of keeping people from having contact with their abusers (Shelter staff). The affective aspects of Internet use are an inherent part of this danger. Abusers may use the Internet to stalk survivors through emotional manipulation in the “honeymoon” phase and through threats in the “escalating tension” phase of the abuse cycle. In addition, children are often used by abusers as a conduit for their aggression and/or a means of locating the survivor. Cyber-safety needs involve all family members in some situations.

Finally, there is some evidence that those who move through all five situations have developed certain meta-information system management skills. They can certainly meet the agency requirements, maintain cyber-safety, and manage their information, but they are also able to analyze systems in terms of information components. They learn when to provide additional information of what type in order to elicit more effective response from an individual or system. One survivor, for example, learned how to get seen more quickly at a busy social service agency. I noticed that a lot of women that did go in there, they would say they're in a shelter and they would actually get seen that day (Survivor, interview). Still others recognize information as a bulwark against the difficulties of these situations. If I gather information on what I'm doing now, I know it's gonna help me in the long run if I start falling back like that you know, I know what to look for, where to call (Survivor, interview).

Implications for public libraries
Well-run public libraries can function as a civic information hub, providing information and referral services for community members, agencies, and stakeholders. The ethics of private, professional service provision permeate librarianship, offering a secure, respectful, non-judgmental environment for information seeking. Where sufficiently funded, the multi-generational approach of modern public libraries makes the physical spaces conducive to the needs of the entire family with separate but readily accessible areas for children, teenagers, and adults. For many people who are living in a shelter that combination of sufficient space, inviting aesthetics, and physical security is greatly valued. Finally, public libraries are mandated to meet the needs of all survivors and their families with, where funding permits, a range of resources including, among other items, effectively chosen books, web sites, and games for children and teenagers, customized reference services, and classes for survivors. The natural link between public librarianship and the information needs of IPV survivors can be further enhanced by addressing the three implications of this study, i.e., the need for local service databases, policy and service development, and staff training.

Working with, where available, the local United Way’s 211 service, public libraries need to help shelters by structuring local service databases which can be remotely accessed and integrated into the shelter web site. Building on librarians’ thorough knowledge of community resources, such databases can be enhanced, embedded in an effective portfolio of services (e.g., ready reference, classes for shelter staff, classes for survivors), and marketed carefully. Where 211 services are unavailable or ineffective, libraries can build community contacts which both integrate the library into the community’s civic and social structure more fully and gather relevant information for a
local service database. Well-educated and technologically proficient librarians understand human information interactions as well as database structure sufficiently to develop or enhance database design and distribution in order to help shelters match social services to survivor needs. Several shelter staff expressed interest in developing a tool that would permit them to customize the information provided.

_Basically someone could enter [the survivor’s] demographic information and then the computer could give [the right information] back to them. You want information about housing. You need schools, or whatever. You need language friendly services. It could even help them choose. Start tailoring stuff. But the first piece -- to have pages you could pull down that would be again that kind of vending machine approach, that would be wonderful. Our web page is nothing more than, “hi we’re the crisis center.” And it hasn't been update since ’04._

_(Shelter staff)_

While the “vending machine” approach is beyond the resources of most libraries, they can partner with local civic organizations, 211-services, and local government by providing the information expertise needed to meet local needs.

Part of the egalitarian ethos of public libraries demands that all people have equal access to all services and resources. Survivors’ needs for computer access are seen as no more critical than those of a chronically homeless citizen or those of a latch-key child. Both services and policies, however, need to be examined in light of crisis needs. Public libraries have long used staff and fiscal resources to meet compelling information needs on a community basis. As populations grow more linguistically diverse, for example,
community libraries set aside funds to buy books in various languages, set aside space to be used for ESL classes, and to hire staff who can answer reference questions with due deference to both culture and language. At times of public crisis, such as Hurricane Katrina, the people most affected might be given priority on Internet access. Book delivery to nursing homes and the homebound also address the needs of individuals as librarians seek to provide equitable information access rather than equal access.

This study implies that IPV survivors’ situations merit similar consideration. People who risk physical harm in order to simply get to the library, people who need information in order to escape from criminal attacks, and people whose medical conditions (both Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and physical problems) limit their ability to stay in public places merit a review of policy and service initiatives. Public libraries need to develop policies which support access to resources for IPV survivors. Consider the following survivor perspective: she speaks of walking to the public library where she routinely waits in line for her one-hour of computer access during which time she tries to file e-government forms, find a job, and find housing. The things we need to use [library computers] for it would be different than somebody coming in and giving you an hour limit, then you have to wait in line. But I don't ask them, because there are other people who have problems too, so I just go for an hour. I just physically and emotionally I can't sit there an hour and wait. And walking back and forth is hard on me too (Survivor, interview). Solutions will be, of course, locally influenced by resources and cultural attitudes towards IPV survivors. The potential, however, exists and should be vigorously pursued. Policies, for example, could be developed which permit shelter inhabitants to reserve computers after they have completed a course in cyber-safety and information
management – a course that might be delivered by a librarian at the shelter to small groups of survivors who are facing similar situations. The combination of policy revision and service initiatives could make a substantial difference for IPV survivors.

Finally, public library staff need additional training to help them understand the information needs of IPV survivors in various common situations. Simply inviting local shelter staff into the library to address a staff meeting can be an effective first step in even the smallest public library. Integrating library initiatives with shelter and police services can also help staff develop both an understanding of IPV survivor needs and an appreciation of their complexity. Collections can be more effectively developed when these needs are more fully understood. *I have been trying to read some books about helping kids to cope, but I think I don't have alot of coping skills myself* (Survivor, posting).

Instructional services can be focused and enhanced to help survivors learn to better evaluate information, as well as manage it safely. *I found this information. I got it by Googling, so I'm not sure of its authenticity* (Survivor, posting). Fully developed, contextually relevant, and carefully focused information literacy programs can be established to help those users who are not savvy enough to [go and find information in a library] (Shelter staff). Librarians can help survivors learn to navigate e-government sites, gather useful information, manage multiple information threads, and maintain their cyber-safety boundaries throughout those efforts. Various mechanisms are worth considering in light of local opportunities for contact including small-group clinics on specific information literacy topics held at shelters as well as one-on-one appointments for extended coaching available in the library and at various locations which might be
comfortable or safe such as churches. And, of course, reference services which are deployed in tandem with instructional services can be more effective when librarians can readily place the information needs of survivors in the context of their situations with the attendant demands of affective concerns, domain knowledge, and resources.

**Future research**

These two studies suggest more research questions than they answer. What is the most effective role for public libraries? Should librarians work within the shelters as an outreach effort by holding classes, providing on-site reference service, offering story hours in combination with on-site reference services, and helping staff develop the local resource databases they need? Or should they develop ways to help survivors to get into and make fuller use of libraries? *We need more computer access here [in the shelter] -- use it for jobs, housing. Resources [shelter staff] are not telling us, or they don't know (Survivor, interview).*

How can librarians effectively support survivors’ efforts to help each other find effective, accurate information? Their preference for informal information provision and their trust of other survivors are well established. How do librarians make use of those patterns? Consider the following postings made by one survivor to another in light of the information provided and the information still needed.

*The comments you've made about fearing being alone and wondering if you're better off in your relationship because you're scared of the alternative? That's a feeling that develops in most DV relationships, it's directly caused by many factors that have happened, relating to the abuse. The term that best describes*
this feeling is what they term "Traumatic Bonding" - do some searches for it on the net and read up about it (Survivor, posting).

I don't know if this helps, but there is a book written for women who are involved or getting out of relationships with police officers. I will try to google it for you (Survivor, posting).

Finally, how can public librarians best help survivors find those delicate pieces of information that library policies generally set aside as unanswerable, i.e., questions of medicine and law? After being punched in the head a few weeks ago, I decided to search the web on brain injury in abused women. Amazing results (Survivor, posting). The effort of vetting, recommending, using, and even creating resources which provide medical and legal judgment carries a risk of error but that risk is the Rubicon of professional judgment. Librarians have long recognized their obligation to make the crossing. Indeed, the call for “risking relevant reference” from the user’s perspective is well established [48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55]. Nevertheless, the risk here could literally lead to direct physical consequences. So, too, could inaction. IPV survivors need the best that public librarians have to offer, including their deepest self-reflection.
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\[\text{Footnote: For more on the ways in which women develop their own internalized understanding of such life-altering concepts, see [47].}\]