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Recognizing exposure to IPV as child maltreatment presents many significant policy, practice, and legal implications. Because all U.S. states mandate reporting of suspected cases of child abuse, defining exposure to violence as child abuse makes IPV involving children grounds for mandatory reporting. This broadening definition of abuse has led to an increase in child protective services (CPS) referrals, which threatens to overwhelm already overburdened state child protection systems in this country (Kantor & Little, 2003). In Minnesota, for example, a law mandating reporting of all cases of IPV exposure overwhelmed CPS and had to be repealed. IPV exposure laws also put adult victims in a difficult position. Knowing that they may be seeking help from professionals mandated to report the IPV as child abuse, many victims may choose not to seek help (Jaffe, Crooks, & Wolfe, 2003).

Even more controversial is the question of who should be identified as the perpetrator in IPV exposure cases. Presumably, a physically abusive father or boyfriend would be culpable. But would the woman be culpable if, for example, she chose to reunite with her abuser, thus potentially exposing her child to further harm? These are difficult questions that sometimes pit family violence advocates against one another. Many child advocates maintain that a mother who remains with an abusive husband or boyfriend should be held accountable for her failure to protect. Women's advocates, on the other hand, argue that responsibility for the exposure should not fall on the woman, who is herself a victim. Any number of special circumstances might create obstacles to a woman leaving a violent relationship (LaViolette & Barnett, 2013). For example, women may lack the financial resources necessary to leave their homes or fear that leaving the relationship will incite more severe violence from the abuser. There is also the possibility that, because of the patriarchal assumption about the primacy of the mother's role, women who allow their children to witness IPV will be judged more harshly. Linda Mills, who has trained child welfare workers on methods of assessment and intervention, concludes that "in no uncertain terms, the mother is still viewed as the primary caretaker and is therefore judged more harshly by the child protection agency than her husband or partner" (Mills, 2000, p. 200).

In a widely publicized case on the subject, a New York district court ruled in *Nicholson v. Scoppetta* that child protection authorities acted in error when they removed children from the home of three battered women (Nowling, 2003). In each case, the primary grounds for removal was that the mother, who had been routinely assaulted, had failed to protect the child from exposure to the violence. The case hinged in large part on expert testimony from social scientists who offered differing opinions about what would likely cause the child more harm, separation from the mother or exposure to the violence. Experts called by the state testified to the various negative effects of exposure to violence, arguing in essence that removal was less traumatic and disruptive to the children than witnessing the violence. Experts called by the plaintiffs disagreed, arguing that "taking a child whose greatest fear is separation from his or her mother and in the name of "protecting" that child by forcing on them what is, in effect, their worst nightmare, is tantamount to pouring salt on an open wound" (psychologist David Pelcovitz, as quoted in Nowling, 2003, p. 518). In its decision, the court defended the mother-child relationship, ruling that child protection authorities "shall not remove a child from the mother's custody without a court order solely because the mother is the victim of domestic violence, except in cases where the child is in such imminent danger of life or health" (Nowling, 2003, p. 518).