

## Box 8.2 Common Obstacles to Leaving an Abusive Partner

Sarah Buel, an attorney, law professor, and survivor of IPV, points out that the question, “Why doesn’t she just leave?” is indicative of the widespread belief that IPV victims who stay with, or return to, an abusive partner must be stupid, masochistic, or “codependent.” But, Buel (1999) argues, labeling victims culpable for the abuse because they remain in the relationship absolves batterers of responsibility for their crimes and ignores the many barriers victims face if they try to leave. Buel compiled a list of 50 obstacles to leaving an abusive relationship, although as she notes, the list is hardly exhaustive. Some of the reasons Buel enumerates include:

- The victim believes the *abuser’s threats to kill her and the children* if she leaves. Research shows that such beliefs are not unfounded, given that lethal risk increases when the victim leaves or tries to leave (Dobash & Dobash, 2015).
- The victim is *afraid of losing custody* of the children if she leaves. Abusive partners often threaten victims with custody litigation, and again, research indicates that these are not idle threats. Moreover, even in cases involving IPV, the majority of fathers who request some form of custody are granted it by the courts (Dragiewicz, 2011; Kernic, Monary-Einsdorff, Koepsell, & Holt, 2005; Morrill, Dai, Dunn, Sung, & Smith, 2005; D. Saunders, Faller, & Tolman, 2016).
- The victim realizes that she is *unable to provide for her children* without the abuser’s income. Buel (1999) cites a study from Texas that found that 85 percent of IPV victims who called crisis hotlines or went to emergency rooms or shelters had left their abusive partners multiple times but gave financial despair as the primary reason for having returned.

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