

# WORKING WITH AFFLUENT SURVIVORS



Andrea Silverstone,  
Executive Director  
[www.sagesse.org](http://www.sagesse.org)



# Sagesse

Sagesse empowers individuals, organizations and communities to break the cycle of violence by curating environments to heal and develop skills to lead safe, healthy lives



Our work:

- Direct Service
- Capacity Building
- Education and Advocacy

Located in Calgary, Alberta, Canada



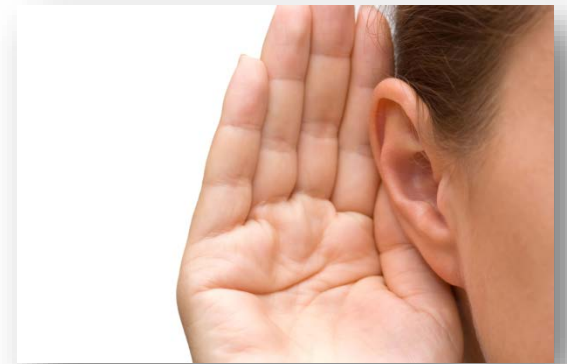
# Research Questions

- What do we know about the profile of affluent women who experience DV?
- What barriers does this population face in accessing services and supports?
- What types of services and supports have been effective, and why?



# Methods

- Literature Review
- Environmental Scan: Interviews with researchers and service providers specializing in this area (n=6)
- Qualitative research: Interviews with affluent survivors (n=4); interviews with family lawyers (n=2)



# Defining Upscale Violence

- [E]motional or physical abuse or violence, reported or non-reported, among families of upper educated and upper income status, or people of means. Basically, domestic abuse among people with higher education and/or from upper income families who live 'enviable lifestyles' where one would not characteristically expect to see abuse.

(Weitzman, 2013, p. 2)



# Defining Upscale Violence

- Domestic Violence among people of means
- Term “upscale” was never used; more commonly referred to as “affluent women” and “women of means”
- Income level less relevant than self-identifying as affluent, powerful, highly educated, upwardly mobile or successful in a white collar career
- Self Identified as:
  - Affluent
  - Powerful
  - Highly Educated
  - Upwardly Mobile
  - Successful in a white-collar career

# Barriers & Enablers



# Cultural Values & Norms

- Strong association with culture of affluence can impede disclosure and help seeking
- Beliefs/values that inhibit help-seeking include:
  - Emphasis on privacy, discretion, perfectionism and keeping up appearances
  - Assumption that DV doesn't happen to 'people like us'
  - Notion that affluence brings happiness and the rich have no right to complain feel depressed
- Decision to leave is fraught with issues related to identity, community, status and lifestyle



# Fear

- Fear of change in Socioeconomic Status (SES) (“further to fall”)
- Risk to professional status
- Fear of not being believed
- Fear of family/peer rejection



# Failure to Recognize Abuse

- Failure to recognize abuse may be more common among affluent women
  - Cognitive dissonance (successful/competent outside the home)
  - Pressure to conform to standards of the ideal family
  - Overriding sense that DV doesn't happen in affluent communities (limited representations of it in the media)



# Patterns

Pattern	Implications
Women of affluence often have little or no experience of violence prior to their marriage (i.e., they did not witness violence in their family of origin or in past relationships). This is quite different from the patterns we see in lower socioeconomic strata.	What are the implications of not having experienced violence prior to their marriage?
Affluent women are often highly educated, high achievers, and/or very competent professionally. This inflated sense of self-efficacy among some affluent women is a sharp contrast to the 'learned helplessness' that can characterize survivors within other socioeconomic strata.	How do you think that might impact disclosure or help-seeking?

# Patterns

Pattern	Implications
<p>Judgment and blame by members of an affluent community is often fierce. While DV can carry stigma at any social strata, members of affluent communities often assume that DV doesn't happen to 'people like us'.</p>	<p>What risks or vulnerabilities does this introduce?</p>
<p>Whereas lower income women sometimes experience traumatic bonding with their abusive partner, affluent women often report more attachment to their lifestyle. For affluent women, leaving an abusive marriage often entails having to choose a new lifestyle and social circle. Survivors may be giving up their wealth, and often lose their position in society.</p>	<p>What risks or vulnerabilities does this introduce?</p>

# Patterns

Pattern	Implications
Cultural norms around privacy, coupled with shame associated with the idea that violence doesn't happen in affluent communities, can inhibit disclosure and reporting to police.	How might this impact court proceedings? How might lower rates of police reporting impact women's access to services?
In many cases, the abuser has full control of the financial resources.	Why is this important for us to consider?
Abusers are often highly educated and/or have high social standing in the community. They are therefore viewed as highly credible, 'pillars of the community.'	What are the implications of this?

# Patterns

Pattern	Implication
Violence among this population is often more subtle or sophisticated because affluent perpetrators have higher levels of power, resources and education on which to draw.	What are the implications of this for our work with affluent survivors? (Then: How might this impact safety planning?)
Financial, technological and legal abuse may be more common among this population	What are the implications of this for the kinds of services and supports that affluent women may need?



?

- Based on our definition of a Culture of Affluence, how do you see it manifest in your life? (and in the Jewish community?)
- How do you think it might manifest in the experiences of a victim of domestic violence?

# Access Barriers

- Eligibility criteria (Myth that all affluent women have access to resources)
- Discrimination, lack of empathy/understanding and lack of cultural competence on the part of service providers

*"People think 'What kinds of problems can she have?'  
The general thought is that if you have money, you  
don't have problems – you're just making stuff up."*



# Enabler: Children

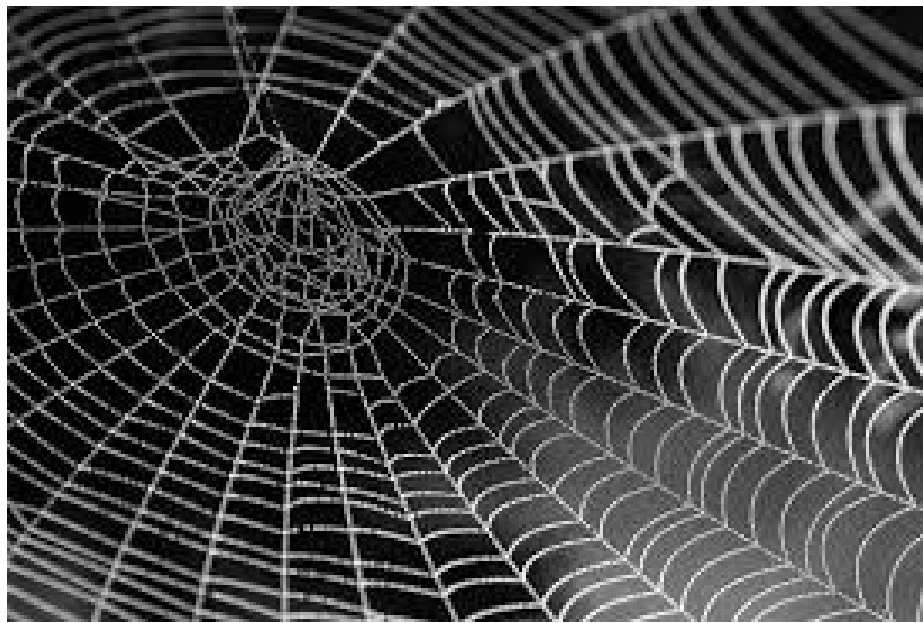




?

- Do you think there is a perception of 'worthy' (financially challenged, multi-barriered) and 'unworthy' (wealthy, mainstream) victims of domestic violence?
- How does this perception impact how individuals are supported in your agency?
- How do you think these values might impact program development and service delivery?

# Spider Web



# Services, Strategies & Supports



# Messaging & Outreach

- Messaging should specifically state that women of means can be victims of violence. Messaging about being believed might also be important with this demographic.
- Target venues where affluent women are most likely to congregate or services they are most likely to access (e.g., spas, salons, country clubs, upscale gyms, places of worship, Jewish community centres, cosmetic surgery facilities, executive coaching services, lawyers' offices, therapists' offices).



# Customizing Services & Supports

- Account for perpetrator's level of sophistication and resourcing
- Protect privacy
- Recognize Culture of Affluence as a distinct culture and provide cultural competency training
- Cultivate empathy for this population
- Consider the pros and cons of homogeneous groups

# Mixed vs. Homogenous Groups

## Mixed SES Groups

- + Diversity of experiences, opportunities for mutual learning
- + Less resource-intensive
- Increased discomfort, fear of being judged
- May inhibit the ability to share freely

## Homogenous Groups

- + Shared identity can enhance connection
- + May be able to address more challenging and intimate issues in a shorter period of time because foundational understanding exists
- No opportunity to learn from diverse experiences or develop solidarity with women from other SES
- Limited opportunity to develop critical consciousness

# Strategies for Working with Affluent Survivors

- Help women navigate their identification with the culture of affluence
- Help women work through issues associated with the potential drop in SES





# Capacity Building & Advocacy

- Public awareness
- Policy and advocacy work
- Research and evaluation
- Capacity building (DV sector, family lawyers, therapists, health professionals)



?

- The Rabbi's say in the Shulchan Aruch, that the community should supply a person asking for tzedakah what they are lacking with respect to their previous standard of living, how does this apply to our obligation to women of affluence who have experienced domestic violence?

[andrea@sagesse.org](mailto:andrea@sagesse.org)

