# *Ay Amiga, ¿Qué Puedo Hacer?* Oh Friend, What Can I Do?: An Ethnographic Analysis of How Socio-Cultural and Structural Factors Shape Help-Seeking Relationships for Intimate Partner Violence in Lambayeque, Peru

by

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## Dedication

Para mis amigas lambayecanas. Las quiero un montonón. Merecen mucho mejor en esta vida.

For my *lambayecana* friends. I love you all so much. You all deserve so much better in this life.

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## Table of Contents

## List of Tables

## List of Figures

## Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV), though it exists as a global problem, is enacted and responded to in nuanced and locally specific ways, shaped by socio-cultural ideas and practices, material and structural conditions, and intersectional social identities in local, national, and global systems of power. Social work literature on help-seeking for IPV recognizes the importance of informal help-seeking in facilitating formal help-seeking, but also recognizes how informal helpers sometimes discourage help-seeking.

This three-paper dissertation draws on 24 months of ethnographic anthropological fieldwork, including participant observation, ethnographic interviewing, and life history calendars. Using grounded-theory analysis informed by anthropological theory, decolonial feminist theory, and social justice frameworks, this dissertation deeply examines how help-seeking relationships for IPV are constructed and shaped by these forces and explores implications for IPV prevention and intervention in Lambayeque, Peru.

Paper 1 examines how gossip and other social pressures shape and constrain help-seeking options for *mujeres abusadas* (abused women) and help-giving options for potential informal helpers. Hierarchical social networks reinforce themselves, creating webs of social and material constraints that are difficult to escape. Highlighting the power of everyday interactions (e.g., navigating family relationships and living situations), it demonstrates the critical importance of deeply understanding the socio-cultural context in which IPV and help-seeking/giving happen to adequately respond to and prevent IPV.

Paper 2 explores the many ways in which socio-cultural and structural factors impact help-giving relationships and highlights how it is misleading to assume that informal helpers can or will help. It examines how the intersectional positionalities of *mujeres abusadas*, *abusivos*, and potential help-givers interact and shape help-giving relationships, and explores how embeddedness in local power structures, including kinship and social networks that often control access to material resources, makes some helping relationships successful and others unsuccessful. It troubles the treatment of barriers and facilitators as discrete categories, identifying the contextual and interactional nature of informational, relational, material, and experiential barriers and facilitators, and highlights the complexity of social embeddedness and the need for intersectional analysis. This paper also describes what *mujeres abusadas* and potential help-givers wish were different (e.g., a desire for community-based violence education and prevention), a dimension that is absent from much help-seeking literature.

Paper 3 describes and analyzes the roles and activities of an activist group, *Ni Una Menos Lambayeque* (NUML), in the city of Chiclayo, Peru. This paper shows how NUML activists engage in community-based problem identification, strategy development, targeted actions, and process and outcomes evaluations. NUML's activism is raising consciousness among *mujeres abusadas* and the general population and is empowering potential help-givers to create new support systems. NUML's activism opens alternative routes for help-giving/seeking while challenging existing formal support services and systems of power. Drawing on decolonial feminist theory, this paper reconceptualizes activism as a third, "other" form of help-giving, challenging the commonly accepted binary of informal or formal help typical in the help-seeking literature. This paper argues that this "other" form of help-giving both challenges and augments these more commonly recognized forms of help.

Together, these papers emphasize the importance of recognizing IPV as social and systemic problems, rather than just as individualized, interpersonal violence. They highlight the importance of working across micro-, mezzo-, and macro-level factors and systems in a localized context, rather than relying on neat, predetermined categories that fail to capture the complexity of IPV and help-giving.

# Chapter 1 Introduction

This research is an ethnographic exploration of how women in abusive relationships in Lambayeque, Peru navigate complex decision making around formal and informal help-seeking, and what kinds of formal or informal help are available or denied to them and why. Over 69% of women in Lambayeque, Peru self-report having been controlled or abused by their partner (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática [INEI], 2013). My project asks how *mujeres abusadas*[1] and potential helpers navigate complex social, political, and economic lifeworlds, and how being located in those specific lifeworlds shapes the ways in which they navigate and live the experiences. My project explores if, when, and how *mujeres abusadas'* decision making is activated and the kinds of constrained choices they make around help-seeking. It also explores the complexities of help-giving from the perspectives of potential informal-help givers and activists.

## 1.1 Research Questions and Methods

This ethnographic research bridges Social Work, Anthropology, and Latin American Studies to analyze local understandings and navigations of help-seeking around intimate partner violence in Lambayeque, Peru. Building on Latin American feminist de/coloniality theories and anthropological methods that emphasize *otros saberes* (other ways of knowing), my research examines the everyday lived experiences of intimate partner violence and help-seeking

[1] Abused women: a local term that does not suggest an evaluation of individual agency, unlike "victim" and "survivor" in the US.

relationships from multiple perspectives to explore the implications for potential IPV interventions and policy. This research offers nuanced explorations of often misunderstood and highly stigmatized issues among multiply marginalized populations, offering analysis with practical implications that do not resort to over-simplification or victim-blaming, but instead focus on transformative moves towards social justice. In bridging these fields, and intentionally crossing many typical boundaries (e.g., micro- mezzo- and macro-foci; intersectional identities; multiple stigmatized issues), my research aims to be accessible and useful to researchers, service providers, and policy makers across fields and in and outside of academia.

### *1.1.1 Methods*

In this research, I conducted a variety of anthropological and other ethnographic and qualitative methods to gather and analyze data. In addition to an extensive review of relevant literatures, I conducted a total of 24 months of intensive ethnographic participant observation over three time periods (4 months in 2010, 2 months in 2015, and 18 months in 2017-19). Some participant observation was general and focused on the activities of everyday life, while other participant observation was targeted at specific activities and populations, including *mujeres abusadas*, potential informal help-givers, activists, and formal service providers (Emerson et al., 1995; Pine, 2008; Alcalde, 2010; Bernard, 2011; Roberts, 2012; Parsons, 2013). Throughout my research periods, I collected and analyzed news articles to examine media narratives about gender violence and facilitate conversations with *lambayecanos* about these issues (Emerson et al., 1995; Alcalde, 2009; Bernard, 2011). Additionally, I conducted life history interviews and co-constructed life history calendars with *mujeres abusadas* (Freedman et al., 1988; Behar, 1994; Rubenstein, 2002; Yoshihama et al., 2005; Bernard, 2011; Yoshihama & Bybee, 2011; Hayes, 2018) and did qualitative interviews with potential informal helpers, activists, and formal service

providers. Data were analyzed using grounded theory methods, including constructing multi-level case studies (Yin, 2009), data triangulation (Denzen, 2011), and open and selective coding, accompanied by procedural and theoretical memoing to identify and investigate emerging themes and subject them to secondary and tertiary analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1999). While there is significant overlap in the methods and data collection between the three papers, chapter 2 draws most heavily on data collection with *mujeres abusadas* and potential informal help-givers; chapter 3 draws more heavily on data collection with informal help-givers, including *mujeres abusadas* who are also help-givers to others; and chapter 4 draws primarily on data collection with activists, but also includes data from *mujeres abusadas*. Each of the three papers that comprise this dissertation includes a detailed methods section that describes the specific research methods and data analysis particular to the data used in each paper.

### *1.1.2 Research Questions*

The three papers that follow explore different aspects of intimate partner violence and help-seeking/giving relationships in Lambayeque. They are deep-dives into particularities that are critical to understanding the larger whole of this set of social phenomena. They aim to open spaces of deeper understanding of how the local contexts and specificities of how IPV happens and is responded to matter when trying to prevent and respond to violence. These three papers certainly do not encompass the totality of IPV or responses to IPV in Lambayeque, both of which are highly complex and diverse.

When I began this dissertation research project, my research questions were:

1) How do women and men in Lambayeque explain the dynamics and causes of intimate partner violence? What behaviors are considered violent, and what violent behaviors are

considered un/acceptable in intimate partner relationships and why? What factors influence whether the violence is considered acceptable or not? What cultural, historical, and institutional conditions permit intimate partner violence to be so pervasive? How is intimate partner violence socio-culturally constructed, defined, and reproduced?

Are *mujeres abusadas* and *abusivos* more likely to have experienced or witnessed gender violence during childhood? Are *abusivos* more likely than other men to hold strong *machista* beliefs about normative gender roles for men and women? Do informal institutions (e.g., kinship relations) and formal institutions (e.g., social service providers, educational systems, etc.) contribute to the normalization of intimate partner violence against women, thus reinforcing the cultural reproduction of violence. What forms of violence are tacitly accepted, what forms are not, and what are the circumstances influencing this?

2) How and why do *mujeres abusadas* make decisions about when and where to seek help? Though the economic differences between the lower- and middle-classes in Lambayeque are relatively insignificant, the difference in social class (reputation, educational levels, the cultural capital each group holds) varies significantly and may influence what kinds of informal or formal help they are able and willing to solicit. Do lower- and middle-class *mujeres abusadas* have different priorities that determine how, when, and where they seek help? Do middle-class *mujeres abusadas* rely more on private services in Chiclayo or Lima to avoid the stigma of being seen accessing state-sponsored services in Lambayeque? Do lower-class *mujeres abusadas* rely more on social networks for support due to an increased sense of solidarity fostered through shantytown life, where social networks maintain deeper obligations? Does substance use (by the *mujer abusada* or her abuser) affect if women seek help and where they seek it? How does a fear of stigma affect the help-seeking choices of different women?

3) What supports are available or denied to *mujeres abusadas*, and how are they put into practice? Are lower-class *mujeres abusadas* denied access to state services due to classed and racialized discrimination? Are there generational differences around what kinds of support *mujeres abusadas* expect, seek, and accept? Are service providers, family, and friends less willing to offer help when there is a substance use problem?

4) When, why, and how does support for *mujeres abusadas* break down? What influences how formal and informal helpers decide which *mujeres abusadas* are "deserving" or "undeserving" of support? Does substance use (by *mujeres abusadas* or *abusivos*) affect what kinds of support are offered?

As I carried out my research and data analysis, I narrowed the focus of this dissertation to three papers, intended to stand alone, for a primarily social work audience. This research aims to challenge social workers to think beyond reified assumptions that oversimplify and mis-diagnose the social problems of intimate partner violence and then mis-inform intervention strategies, development, implementation, and policy-making. By examining intimate partner violence as a social phenomenon, social work researchers and practitioners can begin to identify the interworkings of the micro-, mezzo-, and macro-social processes and interactions that precipitate, enact, and respond to intimate partner violence. While I use some individual examples, I do so to illustrate pieces of systemic issues. Although my data is filled with what could be superficially misunderstood to be individual failings (e.g., a family member denying help to a *mujer abusada*), my hope is that these three papers demonstrate that these individuals are acting rationally within the socio-cultural structures in which they find themselves. This is not to say that there are no bad actors – there certainly are some people doing incredible harm to others, often intentionally. But there are many more people who are wanting to do good but are trapped in systems that

shape and constrain their behaviors in ways that complicate violence prevention and intervention.

The first paper, titled "*¿Qué dirá la gente?*: How the Fear of What People May Say Shapes Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence and Constrains Options for Help-Seeking in Lambayeque, Peru," examines how social pressures and gossip shape both intimate partner violence and help-giving. Through analysis of Lambayeque's kinship and social networks and the material conditions of most *lambayecanos*, I describe and analyze the social power of *el qué dirán* (the fear of what people may say).

The second paper, "*Los Terceros Salen Sobrando?* Are Third Parties Superfluous?: How the Sociocultural and the Structural Shape Help-Giving Relationships for Intimate Partner Violence in Lambayeque, Peru," looks at help-seeking relationships for intimate partner violence. It examines who potential informal help-givers are and what their relationships (and corresponding social expectations) are to *mujeres abusadas*, what kinds of help are asked for or expected, and how help is offered and/or denied. This paper uses a decolonial and intersectional feminist analysis to examine how local power structures shape help-giving relationships, making some successful and others unsuccessful. Importantly, this paper also explores what both *mujeres abusadas* and help-givers wish were different.

The third paper, ""An Other" Paradigm of Help: The Impact of *Ni Una Menos Lambayeque's* Activist Work on Help-Seeking and Help-Giving for Gender Based Violence in Lambayeque, Peru," examines the role of a group of local activists around gender-based violence in the city of Chiclayo. This paper describes the many ways in which these activists identify problems, develop strategies, take action, and evaluate processes and outcomes. Importantly, this paper builds on decolonial feminist theory and intervenes in the help-seeking literature to

reconceptualize activism as a third, "other," form of help-giving outside of the typical and oversimplified informal-formal binary and examines how this "other" form of help-giving both challenges and augments these.

### 1.2 Introducing Intimate Partner Violence and Gender Based Violence in Lambayeque

Intimate partner violence in Lambayeque (like everywhere) is a social phenomenon that involves many central and peripheral actors. When we limit our understanding of violence to just the actions between two intimate partners, we miss the group and broader social dynamics that facilitate, normalize, and sometimes encourage or challenge that violence. Peruvian law number 30364 recognizes four denounceable categories of Violence Against Women and Family Members: physical, psychological, sexual, and economic/patrimonial (El Peruano, 2015). These are often called "family violence and sexual violence" in legal arenas, while social service providers and practice and policy documents often refer to "domestic violence" or "intimate partner violence." During research, I tried to hold these terms at arm's length because although they approximate the social problem that this research explores, each of these terms have specific, culturally defined definitions and implications for both practice and policy that do not necessarily map on to women's experiences of violence in Lambayeque. In this dissertation, I use the term intimate partner violence to describe what *mujeres abusadas* generally defined to me as behaviors that cause harm and unhappiness in a relationship. They would then follow up with examples from their own or others' lives that included acts of physical and sexual violence, emotional abuse and manipulation, and economic control or neglect. Very often their stories would intertwine elements of several of these types of violence.

In this dissertation, I also use the term social violence – a term that emerged, in this case, from my data, and which I am defining as violence that happens both in and around the intimate

partner relationship. Social violence includes the weaponizing of social norms and expectations against individuals, often through gossip and other forms of public and private shaming and social pressures, and which is often strengthened by control over access to material resources. The *mujeres abusadas* with whom I worked, regularly included social violence in their description of intimate partner violence and flagged it as some of the most consequential violence in their lives. I also, at times, use the terms gendered violence against women or gender based violence, which, drawing from the descriptions offered by the *mujeres abusadas* and other *lambayecanos* (people from Lambayeque) with whom I worked, includes words, ideas, and actions that are employed at individual, group, and societal levels and which are harmful to women and make it difficult or impossible for women to live what they consider to be happy and fulfilling lives.

Intimate partner violence and gender-based violence against women occur across the lifespan and affect people of all genders – be it as victims, witnesses, perpetrators, or helpers. In Lambayeque, children grow up witnessing and experiencing gender violence in both private and public spaces. Witnessing and experiencing different forms of private and public violence throughout childhood contributes to the normalization of intimate partner violence and other forms of related violence in Lambayeque (Whitmer, 2010). Many women in Lambayeque describe feeling that violence surrounds them – sometimes overtly and sometimes more subtly – all the time and on all sides. Gender based violence in Lambayeque exists like a fog whose density ebbs and flows depending on the context. Sometimes it is barely perceivable and fades into the background, though it is ever-present. At other times it becomes so dense one feels like they are being swallowed up whole by it. It can creep subtly or viciously into unexpected spaces.

But even when expected, it can be hard to fully grasp, and its boundaries feel impossible to clearly define.

Gender violence happens in both private and public spaces, but public and private spaces are not discrete categories and in Lambayeque there exists a significant amount of blurring between the two. For the purposes of this dissertation, I am defining private gender violence as violence that happens in what are commonly thought of as private spaces, such as the home. Although the practical lines between public and private are more blurred in Lambayeque than in many places in the US, for example, violence that happens in private spaces is often intended to be hidden or unseen or – at the very least – expected to go unacknowledged by those outside of the private space. In these 'private' spaces there is an expectation of privacy from 'outsiders' that does not exist in public spaces.

Because of the social structures of multi-generational households and the physical structures of small, close-together housing in Lambayeque there is little ability to hide violence from family, including children. While some families own or rent houses or apartments, others live in *chozas* (shanties) or rented rooms that serve as one multi-use living space for the entire family. Because resources are tight, and inherited houses are shared by many heirs who often have their own partners, children, and sometimes grandchildren, it is common for multiple people to share small bedrooms and middle-/upper-class US notions of personal space and privacy are virtually non-existent. It is common for siblings to share beds, though parents make an effort to keep boys and girls in separate beds once they are school-aged. It is also common for children and their parents to share bedrooms. Even when there are separate bedrooms, houses tend to be small and crowded, and there is little individual privacy. The privacy afforded and

expected in these so-called private spaces is a collective, familial privacy and not an individual privacy.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I am defining public gender violence as violence that happens in what are commonly thought of as public spaces, such as in the street and parks, in spaces where anyone can gather – including schools, markets, restaurants, etc., and in the media/pop culture, which is consumed by the public. In these 'public' spaces, people have no expectation of privacy per se, but very often there is still the expectation that others do not get involved. There is a social expectation that witnesses mind their business and look away.

My first encounter with overt IPV in a public space in Lambayeque was in February of 2006. I was living with my then partner and his family in Lambayeque. I had taken a few weeks off work and was standing in the doorway of the family's house one hot afternoon, trying to find a breeze. Across the street a young couple was walking down the sidewalk and having a loud argument. As I stood watching them, my father-in-law walked up our sidewalk to the house. We greeted each other and he stepped inside to set down his things. I continued watching the couple, as their argument escalated. The man suddenly pushed her, hard, up against the wall and was yelling at her. I gasped and my father-in-law asked, "*¿Qué pasa, Whitmer?*" (what's happening, Whitmer?). As he stepped next to me into the doorway, the man hit the woman across the face. My whole body tensed, and I quietly but urgently said, "*Tenemos que hacer algo*" (we have to do something). My father-in-law, who was always very kind to me, gently took me by the arm and pulled me backwards into the house and slowly closed the door, saying "*Pasa Whitmer, pasa*" (Come inside Whitmer, come inside). I, distraught as we could now hear the woman crying and the man continuing to yell, repeated that we needed to do something. He calmly told me, "*Gringa, no te metas, va a ser peor para todos*" (Gringa, don't get involved, it will be worse

for everyone). He explained that if I intervened, the man may try to hurt me. Or he may seek revenge on me some other day. Or he or his family could come to the house to *hacer problemas* (cause problems). He pointed through the small window in the door and told me to look at how many people were out in the street walking by, and to notice how no one else was getting involved. Not long after, the couple walked away, and my father-in-law told me, "*Sé que es difícil, pero es mejor así*" (I know it's hard, but it's better like this).

Common public expressions of gendered violence range from exploitative, denigrating, and discriminatory representations in popular media to acts of interpersonal violence between people in public spaces. My research participants described experiencing and/or witnessing gendered violence at school, in the workplace (Santi Huaranca, 2017), in popular culture, in everyday public life, and in their homes, pointing to the pervasiveness and inescapability of violence in *lambayecanas'* lives. Many *lambayecanas* feel that violence is coming at them from all directions, and that it is particularly damaging in private spaces where one is supposed to be safe, loved, and cared for.

In Lambayeque, IPV and GBV are frequently normalized. Normalization is an invizibilized social process by which things come to be understood as normal and socially expected. On its own, this is a value-neutral term and normalized behaviors can be understood, in local context, to be anywhere on the spectrum between 'good' (e.g., crossing oneself when passing a cemetery) and 'bad' (e.g., corruption in government offices among low-level workers).

People of all genders in Lambayeque regularly told me that intimate partner violence against women and some other forms of violence against women are common in Lambayeque and that they are often understood and treated as normal, while also being understood to be *algo malo* (something bad). The colloquial rhetoric around intimate partner violence against women is

commonly summed up by *lambayecanos* with the refrain: *así es el matrimonio* – that's how marriage is. A similar refrain describes men's violent and otherwise "bad" behavior: *así son los hombres* – that's how men are. These refrains are the result of normalized violence by men towards women, and their regular repetition also contributes to the normalization of violence in a co-constitutive process. They are further reinforced by by the Peruvian government's historic and ongoing failure to take IPV seriously. As Necochea López (2014, p. 74) explains, "The Peruvian judiciary's systemic failure to condemn violence against women contributed to the normalization of such violence within marriage, leading some men to consider their sexual jealousy and aggressive expectation of female obedience as perfectly legitimate." These normalizing agents contribute to a fatalistic resignation, held by many in Lambayeque, that accepts certain types of violence as normal and virtually inescapable. This tacit acceptance of certain forms of violence as normal often undermines attempts at a meaningful critique of these forms of violence in day-to-day life.

Women's experiences witnessing and experiencing multiple forms of violence in so-called 'private' spaces begin during childhood and adolescence. Many of my research participants told me about violence they witnessed firsthand (e.g., between family, friends, or neighbors) and violence that was used against them as children by adults. Drawing on their memories of violence, many *lambayecanos* – especially *mujeres abusadas* – understand themselves as having been conditioned to think of gender violence as normal, even when it is also thought of as "bad." In sharing their life histories, many of these women explicitly identified what they see as links between these childhood experiences and their adult experiences. Many *mujeres abusadas* told me that their childhood experiences of violence condemned them to lifetimes of violence. Witnessing and experiencing violence in childhood and observing how

adults responded (or not) to said violence served as a strong tool of socialization – teaching the girls the socially acceptable boundaries of resistance to violence, though in extreme cases of violence these boundaries are sometimes violated. This normalization of violence in childhood has two significant consequences for women across the lifespan. First, for some of my research participants, childhood and adolescent violence became a motivator to leave home and often compelled them to become involved in rushed intimate partner relationships that quickly also became violent. Second, for many of my research participants, experiences of violence in childhood strongly shaped the ways in which they relate to other people now, in adulthood – especially in help-seeking situations, whether with informal or formal help-givers or help-seekers.

My research found that *mujeres abusadas* in Lambayeque who have identified violence as a problem in their intimate relationship seek both informal and formal support (Sagot, 2005; Alcalde, 2010; Parson, 2010), often appealing first to family, friends, and neighbors to exert social pressure on *abusivos* (abusers) in order to stop abuse. *Mujeres abusadas* say that frequent denials of informal support by family and friends legitimize violence and discourage women from seeking help elsewhere. Among older generations in Lambayeque, violence against women by partners – and sometimes by in-laws and parents – is thought of as normal. Many husbands and partners, across socio-economic classes, use emotional, physical, sexual, and economic violence to control their wives' behavior (Fuller, 2001). The cultural valuing of certain *machista* (hyper-masculine) ideas and behaviors contributes to the creation and maintenance of strongly patriarchal gender structures. Because men are often expected to act violently, and women to tolerate abuse, men's violence toward their partners is not typically treated as extraordinary or critically addressed. Rather, it is understood and commonly talked about using normalizing

statements like, "*así es la cosa*" (that's how things are), or "*así es el matrimonio*" (that's how marriage is). The pervasive idea that "*así son los hombres*" (that's how men are) excuses and legitimizes men's violent behavior, which some women say undermines their ability to resist violence. My research suggests, however, that younger women – especially those who have been exposed to consciousness-raising activities or materials around violence – are less likely to tacitly accept violence as a normal part of relationships, as evidenced by how they talk about relationships and their increased participation in an anti-violence-against-women activism in the neighboring city of Chiclayo.

Many *mujeres abusadas* who seek informal or formal help describe potential helpers – including psychologists and social workers (e.g., at the state-run Women's Emergency Center and clinics) – who engage in victim-blaming and structural barriers that make true help ineffective or inaccessible. *Mujeres abusadas* say that these barriers, ironically, make some forms of 'help' more harmful than helpful. Echoing racist clichés like "a*mor serrano: más me pegas, más te quiero*" (Andean love: the more you hit me, the more I love you), "*chupa y se pone indio*" (he drinks and becomes an Indian – implying an inherent racialized savagery linked to drunkenness that leads to violence), and *"cuando se enoja se pone negro"* (when he gets mad he becomes like a Black man – implying an inherent correlation between Blackness and violence), both informal helpers and formal service providers sometimes repeat and reify classist and racist misunderstandings about partner violence (Sagot, 2005; Alcalde, 2007b; Parson, 2013). These judgments misconceive the relationships between age, gender, race, class, substance use, and violence, and wrongly assume a direct causal relationship between substance use and violence.

Importantly, my research found that *lambayecana* women who have bad experiences with formal service providers do not seek further formal help themselves and also discourage friends

and kin from seeking it. While it is true that service providers are under-resourced (Alcalde, 2010, 2011; Parson, 2013), merely expanding current services may not meet *mujeres abusadas'* wants and needs. There is more willingness among *mujeres abusadas lambayecanas* to solicit help from informal helpers – even after a prior rejection of help, likely because of the moral imperatives and social obligations that exist in kin and other social networks.

## Chapter 2 *¿Qué dirá la gente?*: How the Fear of What People May Say Shapes Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence and Constrains Options for Help-Seeking in Lambayeque, Peru

On a hot afternoon in Lambayeque, I sat with my friend Ximena in the cramped living room of her rented apartment – one of several rentals inside her landlord's house. Despite the summer heat, we spoke softly and kept the door and windows closed in a feeble attempt at some privacy. We both knew that it was easy to hear conversations from elsewhere in the house, and the landlords – a couple in their early 70s – are known for being nosey and meddling gossips. What started out as a conversation about some problems her sister was having quickly changed to Ximena's personal reflections on the challenges in her past relationship with the father of her son. Now in her late 30s, Ximena described how, in Lambayeque, conflict between partners often begins when women want to do things other than housework, childcare, and serving their husbands. She spoke rapid-fire, angrily describing her prior relationship as *esclavitud* (slavery) after her son was born. She told me how for two years she never left her husband's house, where they lived with his mother, other than to go to the market. She explained that no matter what women do – good or bad – others are closely observing and commenting on it:

> Relationships are supposed to be between two people, but so often I have seen here – in the majority of cases here – that the [extended] family is what drives relationships. They get involved in every way. I think that's the biggest thing. They put things in your head, *te meten cizaña* (they antagonize you to sow discord) that you are doing something wrong – and the husband almost always tends to believe and stick with his family. It's a rare case, here, that a family gets involved to do something positive. They fixate on everything – whether or not you've taken a shower, whether or not you've hung the clothes to dry. It's truly suffocating. You end up either fighting about it with your husband or ending the relationship and leaving the house. And even if you live in your

> own house, when they come to visit, they observe and critique everything: how you sit, how you dress, how you stand up, how you cook, everything! If they see you skinny – why are you skinny? If they see you fat – why are you fat? If you do your hair and makeup – why did you do your hair and makeup? If you didn't – why didn't you? It's an impossible situation! If you want to placate a person like that, it's not going to be possible because they always find some defect.

Ximena's experiences were not unique. Nearly every *lambayecana* woman (and many men) I spoke with shared similar stories and complaints about outsider interference in their relationships and the impacts of different forms of gossip on their day-to-day lives. This paper asks how social forces – especially the social fear of what others may say – shape the ways in which intimate partner violence occurs. It also asks how these social forces influence and often constrain help-seeking options for *mujeres abusadas* (abused women), as well as options for potential informal help-givers to offer help in Lambayeque, Peru.

In this research, I use the local term *mujeres abusadas*, as to not impose US-conceptualizations of culturally nuanced concepts. Unlike victim/survivor language in the USA, *mujeres abusadas* does not ascribe an evaluation of individual agency. Similarly, I use local understandings of what constitutes intimate partner violence. The Peruvian government legally recognizes four types of violence between partners: physical, sexual, psychological, economic. *Lambayecanos* (people from Lambayeque) have learned and sometimes use these descriptors and regularly identified examples of each when speaking with me. When asked to define for themselves what intimate partner violence is, *lambayecanos* talk more generally about behaviors that cause harm and unhappiness in a relationship, including many examples of what I call social violence.

Through ethnographic data, this paper presents the tremendous social force of *el qué dirán* (the what people may say), a phrase that functions linguistically as a noun, that includes all of the real and imagined possibilities of what others are or could say about someone or

something. Understanding *el qué dirán's* social power and the conditions that give it this power is key to understanding how violent relationships form and evolve and how and why *mujeres abusadas* strategically navigate different help-seeking strategies around intimate partner violence in Lambayeque. I argue that *el qué dirán* creates and exacerbates cycles of IPV, while also creating barriers to help-seeking and help-giving for IPV. *El qué dirán* precipitates violent relationships and exacerbates violence in relationships where it already exists, and IPV provokes more gossip and critical talk. *El qué dirán*, itself, is a form of social violence that encourages, exacerbates, legitimizes, and protects other forms of IPV. It is a mechanism that involves many people outside of an intimate partner relationship in the violence between partners. *El qué dirán* is a social force that both *mujeres abusadas* and potential informal help-givers weigh carefully when making decisions about help-seeking and help-giving.

To begin to comprehend the social power of *el qué dirán*, this paper carefully describes the cultural and material contexts and nuances that people in Lambayeque navigate as part of day-to-day life, including in-depth explorations of gender norms and gender relations and other social hierarchies. It also examines Lambayeque's heavily interdependent kinship and social networks, how these are tied to the material conditions in which *lambayecanos* live, including the many ways in which *lambayecana* society is generally violent (economically, structurally, physically, etc.).

## 2.1 Literature Review

### *2.1.1 IPV as a Social Problem*

This research builds on both social work and anthropological understandings and theories of IPV, and approaches IPV as a social problem that directly and indirectly involves many individuals and socio-cultural systems beyond just the intimate partners experiencing violence.

As Merry observed, an anthropological approach to gender violence, "shows clearly that efforts to change gender violence must understand the practice in terms of audiences that support it, the institutions that treat it lightly, and the structures of inequality that benefit from the kinds of control and power that it provides" (2009, p. 185). By analyzing if, when, how, and where victims of IPV seek-help – as well as whether support is adequately offered or denied – we can begin to understand and dismantle social and institutional structures that serve as barriers to victims getting the types of support that they need and want in order to live free from violence.

### *2.1.2 Informal and Formal Help-Seeking for IPV*

In their influential theoretical framework for understanding help-seeking processes among IPV survivors, Liang et. al. (2005) identify three iterative stages to help-seeking: recognizing and defining the problem, deciding to seek help, and selecting support. All of these are shaped, they explain, by individual, interpersonal, and sociocultural influences. The process of decision-making around help-seeking for IPV is not linear. Rather, victims continually evaluate and reevaluate their circumstances and their options – formal and informal. Formal help includes services from institutions like the police, the criminal justice system, social service agencies, medical services, crisis hotlines, mental health services, churches, IPV advocacy groups, and IPV shelters. Informal help includes support offered informally by family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and others, such as offering emotional support, advice, encouragement, affirmation, material assistance, financial support, childcare, and a place to stay (Liang et. al. 2005). Importantly, in addition to being iterative, this process is dialectical in that potential informal and formal helpers, institutions, and broader socio-cultural contexts also influence how a victim conceptualizes and evaluates these problems (Liang et. al. 2005).

Victims of violence must be able to recognize and to some extent define the problem before they can seek help for it. Liang et. al. (2005) remind us that as researchers and practitioners, we cannot rely on a priori "professional" definitions and assessments, but that we must rather investigate and understand local conceptualizations of how IPV is being defined and named (similarly or differently) by those involved – including victims, abusers, other involved parties, and potential informal and formal helpers. These understandings are not static and evolve depending on changing circumstances, knowledge, ideologies, socio-cultural norms, etc.

The decision to seek help requires a degree of understanding that there is a problem, and the person experiencing the problem needing or wanting help in resolving it. Like problem recognition and definition, deciding to seek help is a fluid state that responds to changing circumstances and influences. These circumstances and influences often include other people, socio-cultural norms and expectations, and informal and formal institutions. The decision to seek help requires an evaluation of the costs and benefits of seeking help, the in/accessibility of help, and the appropriateness and availability of different types of help (Liang et. al. 2005).

Selecting a source of support is intricately tied up with problem recognition/definition and deciding to seek help. How the victim understands and thinks about the problem influences what kinds of support they may seek, as does one's own relational style. Victims' knowledges of where and how to seek help can vary significantly and are shaped by socio-cultural class, educational levels, etc. Liang et. al. (2005) importantly observe that many victims carefully evaluate and try to predict the helpfulness of different possible sources of support, weighing the pros and cons of each. These evaluations are frequently shaped by practical and material constraints and demands (e.g., access to money, childcare, etc.), which also influences victims' decision-making around seeking formal versus informal help (Liang et. al. 2005).

### *2.1.3 Decision Making and Barriers to Help-Seeking for IPV Among Latin American Populations*

Qualitative studies of help-seeking for IPV provide meaningful descriptive and interpretive data that can begin to describe the complex and iterative nature of decision making around help-seeking (e.g., Sagot, 2005; Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006; Alcalde, 2010; Parson, 2010; Khoury & Wehbi, 2016; Voth Schrag et.al., 2021). Seeking informal help is a common first step for Latina survivors, as many survivors seek help from friends and family before going to state or nonprofit agencies or only seek help from informal sources (West et al., 1998; Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006; Brabeck & Guzmán, 2008, 2009; Alcalde, 2010; Perrin et al., 2011; Sabina et al., 2012; Salazar et al., 2012; Frías, 2013; Kyriakakis, 2014; Postmus, 2015). Formal help-seeking often occurs in parallel to informal help-seeking or after informal strategies have failed (Alcalde, 2010). Survivors often found formal help-services most useful when they linked them to and facilitated additional services (Brabeck & Guzmán, 2008). Sagot's impressive 10-country qualitative study found that victims were most empowered to seek help by, "support from close persons; favorable economic or material conditions; good information, sometimes obtained from public campaigns; and the existence of appropriate services that respond to women's needs and expectations" (2005, p. 1313). Other studies found that help-seeking was instigated by a cognitive shift to understanding the behavior happening inside of the relationship as violence (Salazar et al., 2012), by an increase in the severity of violence (Parson, 2010; Flicker et al., 2011; Sabina et al., 2012; Salazar et al., 2012; Frías, 2013), or by a desire to protect their children from violence (Alcalde, 2010; Parson, 2010; Salazar et al., 2012; Frías, 2013).

For *mujeres abusadas*, navigating help-seeking is often fraught with complexity, undesirable choices, outside pressures, and contradictions. For example, the *mujeres abusadas*

that Alcalde (2010) interviewed throughout her ethnographic fieldwork in Lima, Peru, explained in great detail that seeking formal services – like going to the police – sometimes helps victims, but sometimes does more harm. In Peru, the police are generally known to be unhelpful and to treat women poorly, but they are a primary entry-point to support for victims of IPV. Peruvian *mujeres abusadas* weigh multiple factors when deciding whether to go to the police. Often, they have already had bad experiences, or have heard of others' bad experiences. They know that Peru has problematic laws and policies around IPV, and that police can hold the perpetrator for up to 24 hours after a complaint is made, but that getting a protection order takes much longer than 24 hours. They know that if they file a police report, the police are required to immediately notify the perpetrator, calling him in to make a statement, thereby alerting him to the fact that his victim has made a report which may escalate retaliatory violence. *Mujeres abusadas* also know that forensic exam appointments – required to get a protection order – often take days or even weeks to secure, and that injuries can heal before they are ever seen by a doctor. They know that the government usually recommends mediation[2] – rather than prosecution – and that the decision is not left up to the victim. Mediation stops prosecution from proceeding and tends to be quite biased against the victim (Alcalde, 2010).

The literature on formal help-seeking identifies fear and shame as principal barriers to seeking support. Survivors may be fearful of increased violence should the perpetrator find them out. They may also fear being discriminated against or treated poorly by institutions like the police, the criminal justice system, healthcare services, etc. (Sagot, 2005; Alcalde, 2010; Silva-Martinez, 2015; Voth Schrag et.al., 2021). Survivors may also lack basic resources like cash, transportation, and personal identification documents required to access formal services

[2] Peru's 2015 Law 30364 (El Peruano 2015) eliminated mediation as an option in cases of violence, but I was told that in practice it still happens.

(Brabeck & Guzmán, 2008; Alcalde, 2010; Mookerjee et al., 2015). Other survivors may be unable to take time off work to seek services (Parson, 2010; Perrin et al., 2011). A lack of services that met cultural expectations or services that were perceived to be ineffectual were also barriers to formal help-seeking (Sagot, 2005; Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006; Flicker et al., 2011; Salazar et al., 2012; Frías, 2013; Kyriakakis, 2014; Silva-Martínez, 2015; Voth Schrag et.al., 2021). In other cases, a lack of knowledge about available services and where to go for help limited victims' formal help-seeking (Moracco et al., 2005). Because of the myriad reasons that victims do not seek help, it is important to include victims who do not engage formal services in research, too (Voth Schrag et. al., 2021).

Seeking informal support can be equally complex and fraught. Potential informal help-givers sometimes discourage both informal and formal help-seeking based on conservative ideas about marriage and ideas about IPV being "normal" (Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006; Brabeck & Guzmán, 2008; Alcalde, 2010; Kyriakakis, 2014; Silva-Martinez, 2015). *Mujeres abusadas* who have poor relationships with their families but who live in socio-cultural contexts where norms discourage personal problems being shared outside of family networks often feel that they cannot seek informal support (Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006; Salazar et al., 2012; Kyriakakis, 2014). Both formal and informal helping-relationships can have positive and/or negative impacts on *mujeres abusadas*. Potential helpers can encourage and support *mujeres abusadas* in reducing or escaping violence, but they can also directly or indirectly discourage victims from seeking help and encourage them to continue enduring abuse (Liang et. al. 2005). In Lambayeque, *el qué dirán* (which includes gossip and other forms of social talk) is a major social force used by potential help-givers that discourages help-seeking, while also contributing to increased violence in intimate partner relationships.

### *2.1.4 The Social Practice of Gossip*

Linguistic Anthropologists have long been attentive to the social roles of gossip in their research. Ethnographic approaches to studying gossip analyze it within the broader socio-cultural context of everyday life, attempt to understand the local analysis and understandings of how and why gossip functions (including contradictions and inconsistencies), and examine how the micro (e.g., interpersonal instances of gossip) interact with the macro (other social practices and forms of communication) (Besnier, 2019). Van Vleet's (2003) work in the central Bolivian Andes highlights that "Linking micropolitics of situations with macroprocesses has implications for our understanding of particular cultural groups in contexts of social change […]" (p. 511).

Importantly, while gossip-like communication happens cross-culturally (Stewart & Strathern, 2020), there is not one universal definition of what gossip is. As Besnier explains in his review of anthropological theories of gossip,

> […] the distinction between what counts as morally problematic, reputation damaging, and privately bounded gossip and other forms of interaction lies in the eyes of the beholder. It is itself a politically, morally, and culturally laden judgment that is open to different interpretations, as well as contestation. What constitutes gossip in contrast to other forms of interaction is thus an ideological construct, whose dynamics are related to other aspects of social life and culture, such as morality, social inequality, and identity. (2019, p. 107)

Anthropologists who have been attentive to gossip in their research have not always agreed on its social role. Early ethnographers identified gossip as a way to identify and enforce boundaries between acceptable and deviant behaviors (Besnier, 2019). Max Gluckman (1963), for instance, argued that gossip is a social activity that is closely tied to delineating group belonging or exclusion by contributing to the cohesion of a social group and distinguishing that group from others by defining what is socially accepted versus deviant behavior. Others like Erving Goffman argued that rather than contributing to social cohesion, gossip is a social

commodity is exchanged in calculated ways to manipulate information in favor of personal and political interests and to undermine others' interests (Besnier, 2019). Similarly, Stewart and Strathern (2020) argue that within community contexts, "the intention [of gossip] is to influence situations in contexts of power but without explicit indications of this." In their research on gossip in an Indo-Fijian village, Brenneis and Duranti showed how in that specific context gossip was a group activity in which everyone participated as "coauthors" (rather than active speakers and passive listeners) of the gossip narrative and exchange, and thus shared in the moral responsibilities of participation (Besnier, 2019). Van Vleet (2003), a linguistic anthropologist working in the central Andes of Bolivia, argues that moral codes always constitute "partial theories," and gossip is one way for people to negotiate the tensions between coexisting partial theories.

Anthropologists like Abu-Lughod (1991) have complicated notions of both culture and morality, examining how they are sites of "contestation and disagreement" rather than "subjects of consensus" (Besnier, 2019). As Besnier explains:

> Local morality may be superposed with other forms of morality associated with such entities as the state, development, modernity, or transnational mobility. For example, agents of development (e.g., state agents, NGO workers, religious figures) may urge people to save their resources, and thus demonstrate their moral worth as modern strategic thinkers, while local moral codes may insist that people meet traditional expectations of reciprocity and resource redistribution, and thus demonstrate their moral worth as generous and tradition-abiding people. Those who opt for the first of these contradicting moral injunctions may become prime targets of gossip (Besnier, 2009, pp. 120–142; Van Vleet, 2003). Alternatively, people may gossip about each other and about themselves to find comfort in retreating in a well-defined local morality that excludes their participation in a wider world where they feel lost and no longer have a well-defined moral compass to live by (Besnier, 2016). Here we see the methodological importance of contextualizing what people say about others during gossip in a broader context in which moral precepts may be heterogeneous and contested. (2019, p. 109)

Van Vleet's (2003) work deeply explores these conflicts and negotiations within and between local and other moralities.

The social practice of gossip that Van Vleet (2003) describes is the Bolivian Andes is very reminiscent of the social practice of gossip in Lambayeque. Van Vleet argues, gossip is a social practice that intertwines social bonds of intimacy with discourses around envy and progress. Gossip (and gossipers) blur the lines between local ideologies and national ideologies "as they 'theorize' about (and dialogically produce) relationships and events." (2003, p. 491). Van Vleet conceptualizes gossip as,

> […] a social activity and as a type of 'personal' or 'living' narrative through which people make sense of relationships and events, creating order and coherence from the complicated and contingent occurrences of everyday experience (Ochs and Capps, 2001:2). From this perspective, what is spoken about in gossip is an indicator of the issues and questions and theories that circulate about humanness and reality (White, 2000). Even as people try to impose a certain coherence on the details of events and interactions, individuals may accept different interpretations, become caught up in maintaining or contesting particular orders, or recognize that not all the contingencies of the events as they happened can be accounted for or explained. (2003, p. 492).

Van Vleet tells the story of a woman, Ilena, whose husband hits her. Ilena understood the violence to have been "the direct result of gossip and envy" by others in their community (p. 493). Ilena defends herself against the gossip, and "positions herself as worthy of envious attention" (p. 506) by drawing attention to her hardworking nature and her children's accomplishments. By being worthy of envious attention, "Ilena positions herself as someone who has been or will be harmed by the envy of others" (p. 506). Drawing parallels with the work of Taussig, Van Vleet explains,

> As Michael Taussig (1987: 394) points out in his discussion of envy in shamanic discourse and practices in Putumayo, Peru, envy indexes disruption in 'the social bond' arising in a context of inequality, or perceived inequality. Envy arises from a sense that someone is gaining or advancing without proper attention to the moral obligations of sociality and reciprocity. Moreover, the envy of others may cause material and metaphysical harm to the envied person and to those people and animals close to him or her. (2003, p. 506)

Besnier (2019) highlights the many ways that gossip – while often stigmatized and dismissed as trivial – can have important social consequences. Sociocultural anthropologists examine:

> […] how gossip articulates with a larger context of hierarchy, inequality, power, belonging, and the state. In particular, they have recognized that, despite its appearance of inconsequentiality, gossip can have seriously damaging effects on the reputation, social standing, and even life of the person being gossiped about. In other words, gossip can be a powerful tool for enacting political action, and this recognition argues for an understanding of politics as not confinement to the juridical-political spheres of social life. […] [gossip] can potentially supplement dynamics of power and coercion and thus exacerbate structures of inequality and oppression, weaken the weak, strengthen the powerful, and marginalize the marginalized, as those in power can deploy it to control others or to control material and symbolic resources (Besnier, 2019, p. 109-10)

Similarly, in the Andean Bolivian context described by Van Vleet, the details that gossip contains are negotiated in ways that are not neutral. She explains,

> In gossip the details of local relationships are discussed and negotiated, and not only particular commodities but particular configurations of relationships may be desired. But commodities are not neutral or exchanged in a whimsical way. Likewise relationships are not neutral. Particular configurations of relationships between individuals embody local conceptions of proper behavior and local renderings of national and even transnational ideas articulated unevenly in discourses of reciprocity and modernity. (2003, p. 510)

Attention to gossip, Van Vleet argues, pushes us to understand power as not only existing in institutions, and allows us to examine "the ways in which resistance and collusion emerge at the level of daily interaction" (2003, p. 499).

Besnier (2019, p. 111) reminds us that, "the sociopolitical makeup of the group determines who benefits and who suffers from gossip, but the reverse is also true: gossip creates particular sociopolitical configurations." The people involved and their relative social positionalities and locations (Bograd, 2005; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Boesten, 2010; Grzanka, 2014; Muñoz et al., 2020) within power structures all matter when considering the effects and impacts of gossip. In certain contexts, gossip loses its power when the subjects are significantly

socially marginalized or have already tarnished reputations. It is often the elite and the very poor who are least impacted by gossip. However, when gossip is between and about people of similar socioeconomic statuses, gossip can act as a sociopolitical leveling mechanism between all involved, and gossip often escalates or at least maintains conflictual situations. (Besnier 2003).

## 2.2 Methods

### *2.2.1 Sample Description and Data Collection*

This research is focused on the town of Lambayeque, a medium-sized town (around 55,000 people) with a small-town feel, on Peru's northern coast. Lambayeque's limited institutional landscape is representative of Latin American small-town life, and Lambayeque has no NGOs that address IPV. A more robust description of Lambayeque as a place follows in the results section of this paper.

In my larger dissertation project, I was focused on understanding how *mujeres abusadas* navigated help-seeking for IPV. The research questions, design, methods, and analysis of this study were informed by anthropological methods and theory, feminist decolonial theory and practice, and social work informed social justice theory and practice. All data collection was done by me, in Spanish. During twenty-four months of fieldwork in Lambayeque, I collected and analyzed various types of data that are summarized in Table 1:

*Table 1: Data Collection with Mujeres Abusadas and Informal Helpers*

| |
|---|
| **General Participant Observation:** Throughout all phases of research, I participated in and observed activities of everyday life in Lambayeque. I lived with two different multi-generational *lambayecana* families; participated in daily activities like cooking and eating meals and going to the market; read local newspapers, watched tv, and listened to the radio; and spent time in a variety of public and private social spaces. Throughout my fieldwork, I took detailed field notes which I used to write memos and develop contextual descriptions of *lambayecana* life. While most of these interactions were about other aspects of daily life (e.g., day-to-day survival, raising children, local politics, social gossip about others, pop culture, etc.), situations involving IPV or conversations about IPV sometimes came up organically. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Targeted Participant Observation:** Throughout all phases of research, I spent extensive time with *mujeres abusadas*, their families, friends, neighbors, and other potential helpers in their homes and in a variety of social settings doing quotidian activities. When presented with the opportunity, I accompanied some *mujeres abusadas* as they were seeking formal IPV support services (e.g., at the police station, at the local *Centro de Emergencia Mujer*, etc.). Throughout fieldwork, I had complex interactions and informal conversations with many potential informal helpers (including *mujeres abusadas* who, importantly, all described situations in which they were potential help-givers to others) in a variety of settings and situations. | | |
| **Research Phases** | **Participants & Demographics** | **Methods, Research Activities, & Recruitment** |
| 2010 | ***n* =15 *mujeres abusadas***<br>Ages: 18-61 (1 in their teens, 3 in their 20s, 4 in their 30s, 4 in their 40s, 2 in their 50s, 1 in their 60s) | Life history interviews and participant observation.<br><br>Recruited: through personal contacts and personal introductions/snowball sampling. |
| | ***n* = 1 informal helper**<br>(1 man in his 30s; ex-husband and father of 2 interviewed *mujeres abusadas*) | Qualitative interview and participant observation with him and his family members while seeking formal services.<br><br>Recruited: through personal contacts. |
| 2015 | ***n* =14 *mujeres abusadas***<br>Ages: 23-66 (3 in their 20s, 2 in their 30s, 5 in their 40s, 2 in their 50s, 2 in their 60s) | Continued participant observation.<br><br>Recruited: from prior research participation (one woman died prior to 2015). |
| | ***n* = 1 informal helper**<br>(1 man in his 40s) | Continued participant observation.<br><br>Recruited: from prior research participation. |
| 2017-19 | ***n* = 16 *mujeres abusadas***:<br>9 new participants &<br>7 from prior phases<br><br>Ages: 23-58 (3 in their 20s, 3 in their 30s, 7 in their 40s, 3 in their 50s) | Life history interviews with new participants, follow-up interviews with continuing participants, life history calendars with all participants.<br><br>Recruited: from prior research participation, personal introductions/snowball sampling, and requests from *mujeres abusadas* who learned about my research from others and asked me to interview them. |
| | ***n* = 21 informal helpers**<br>20 new participants &<br>1 from prior phases<br>(5 men and 1 woman in their 20s, 2 men in their 30s, 7 men in their 40s, 4 men in their 50s, 2 men in their 60s, 1 man in his 70s) | Qualitative interviews with new participants, follow-up interviews with continuing participant, continued participant observation.<br><br>Recruited: from prior research participation, through personal contacts, and personal introductions/snowball sampling. |
| **Interview Participant Totals Across All Research Phases:**<br>***n* = 24 individual *mujeres abusadas***<br>***n* = 21 individual informal helpers (not including *mujeres abusadas who were also helpers*)** | | |

This research began in 2010 as four months of ethnographic fieldwork on IPV in Lambayeque for my master's degree in International Affairs (Latin American Studies) thesis. I had an academic background in Latin American Studies, Spanish Literature, and Anthropology, and had lived, studied, and worked in Peru off-and-on since 2002, and my deep embeddedness in Lambayeque goes back to 2004 through kinship and other social ties. It was this 2010 research with *mujeres abusadas* that compelled me to pursue a joint Ph.D. in Social Work and Anthropology, as I came to understand the great value in bringing together anthropological theory and methods with social work praxis. In 2015, as a joint doctoral student in Social Work and Anthropology, I conducted two months of preliminary fieldwork to refine my research questions and develop a research plan. In 2017-19, I spent 18 months conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Lambayeque. While I physically stand out as a gringa, I am now a *gringa conocida* (a familiar gringa) and am no longer a conspicuous presence in town. My blended insider-outsider status, and my fluency in the local northern coastal Peruvian Spanish dialect, allowed me to move more easily through a variety of social and physical spaces, and also located me in a social space that helped people feel comfortable sharing their stories openly with me.

Throughout all phases of research, I engaged in anthropological participant-observation, which included living with two different multi-generational *lambayecana* families and participating in the activities of everyday life like going to the market, preparing and sharing meals, picking kids up from school, and participating in a variety of private and public social spaces. During these quotidian activities, I observed and participated in many casual conversations about intimate partner violence, help-seeking, and help-giving, paying attention to both what was and what was not being said. I watched the local news, listened to the radio, and collected and analyzed news articles to examine media narratives about gender violence – along

with other topics like local politics – and facilitate conversations with *lambayecanos* about these issues (Emerson et al., 1995; Alcalde, 2009; Bernard, 2011). Through all stages and venues of participant observation I took extensive methodological, descriptive, and analytic field notes (Emerson et al., 1995; Bernard, 2011).

I worked with self-identified *mujeres abusadas* (*n*=24), conducting ethnographic life history interviews and co-creating life history calendars to understand the complexity of individuals' situations by contextualizing them within larger systems, while documenting the ways that larger systems affect individual choice, all while being attentive to diversity within groups (Freedman et al., 1988; Behar, 1994; Rubenstein, 2002; Yoshihama et al., 2005; Bernard, 2011; Yoshihama & Bybee, 2011; Hayes, 2018). I conducted semi-structured ethnographic interviews with potential informal help-givers (e.g., friends and family members of *mujeres abusadas*) (*n* =21). I was careful to include in my sample both *mujeres abusadas* who did and who did not seek-help for the IPV they were experiencing (Liang et. al. 2005). I also engaged in targeted participant observation, accompanying *mujeres abusadas* while they engaged in formal and informal help-seeking, participated in activist activities, and went about their daily lives (Pine, 2008; Alcalde, 2010; Roberts, 2012; Parsons, 2013). Throughout later research phases, I continued to have regular interactions with all the *mujeres abusadas* who participated in earlier interview phases. Seven of the *mujeres abusadas* who I interviewed in 2010 asked not to participate in additional formal interviews, instead asking me to use the recordings of their 2010 life history interviews. Interestingly, none of these seven *mujeres abusadas* were in relationships with violence in 2017-19, and they talked about their stories as though they had packaged them up and given them to me to keep.

I also did qualitative interviews and targeted participant observation with potential informal help-givers ($n$ = 21). These were in addition to the *mujeres abusadas* – all of whom self-identified as help-givers to other *mujeres abusadas* in their lives. Aside from these formal interviews, I also had complex interactions and informal conversations about help-giving with many potential informal help-givers in a variety of settings as opportunities arose.

### *2.2.2 Data Analysis*

Throughout all phases of fieldwork, I interpreted data and formulated new questions in iterative ways. During qualitative data analysis, I developed multi-level case studies (Yin, 2009) for both individuals and institutions to identify patterns and to triangulate (Denzen, 2011) varied perspectives and accounts of events (e.g., interviews with *mujeres abusadas*; life history calendars; interviews with friends/ family, service providers, and activists; clinical documents; my observations and fieldnotes; etc.).

For this paper, I analyzed my interview and participant-observation data using grounded theory methods: open and selective coding, accompanied by procedural and theoretical memoing, to identify and investigate emerging themes that I then subjected to secondary and tertiary analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1999). These analytical methods allowed for a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of how IPV is lived, experienced, and navigated by *mujeres abusadas* in Lambayeque as well as how potential informal help-givers understand and respond to solicitations of help for IPV. From this grounded theory analysis, *el qué dirán* emerged as a salient theme.

For the data analysis for this paper, I first identified all of the examples of how and when *el qué dirán* was mentioned or invoked, and then analyzed the examples to identify and categorize *el qué dirán's* many social functions. It was through this analysis that it became clear

that not only does *el qué dirán* create a barrier to help-seeking for *mujeres abusadas*, but it also precipitates violent relationships and creates a barrier to help-giving for IPV.

## 2.3 Results

### *2.3.1 Introducing Lambayeque*

On Peru's northern coast, embedded in the department of Lambayeque and the region of Lambayeque, is the town of Lambayeque (going forward references to Lambayeque refer to the town unless otherwise specified). Lambayeque is a small city based on population size (Dijkstra et. al., 2020) but feels and acts very much like a small town, especially when compared to the much larger Chiclayo – a city of over half a million people, just eight miles (13km) to the south. *Lambayecanos* frequently travel to Chiclayo for work, education, shopping, entertainment, and to access governmental and non-governmental services. Lambayeque's roughly 55 thousand inhabitants reside in an area of only roughly 2.4 square miles (6.2 sq km) – Lambayeque is just over 1 mile long by 2 miles wide – giving Lambayeque a population density comparable to that of New York City, but without any high-rise buildings. In addition to the many kinship and social connections that exist between residents of Lambayeque, the very nature of living in such close proximity means that people have extensive knowledge of what is going on in other people's lives. In Lambayeque, everyone seemingly knows everyone, and connectedness in kinship and social networks is necessary for individuals' economic and social survival.

When I asked my research participants what the most important things are that outsiders would need to know to begin to understand the culture of Lambayeque, they mentioned several social characteristics, some they saw as positive and some as negative. The first thing that most people mentioned is that Lambayeque is a very devote Catholic town. Many people attend mass daily, or at least weekly, and Catholic iconography and ritual dominates religious and secular

spaces. Lambayeque's Catholic Church, and the Peruvian Catholic Church are heavily influenced by the very conservative and patriarchal Opus Dei sect. In recent years, as has been common throughout Latin America, there is also a growing conservative evangelical presence in Lambayeque. *Lambayecanos* also pride themselves on their hospitality and generosity, commonly repeating refrains like, "*dónde comen cinco, comen diez*" (where 5 can eat, 10 can eat). Locals are quick to point out that it is often those who have the least who are most willing to share what they do have.

*Barrios* (a term sometimes used to refer to neighborhoods, but other times referring to a one or two block section of a street) are often described and treated as extended family. In the barrio everyone knows everyone, and they are often involved in each other's lives. People from the barrio will work to protect and defend the reputation of friends like they do of family, explaining, "s*i somos del barrio*" (we're from the same neighborhood), implying that a lifetime of shared experiences creates and demands the same type of fierce loyalty that blood-ties demand. A similar loyalty exists for one's schoolmates – especially those from one's *promoción* (graduating high school class). These relationships of barrio and promo are often conflated with kinship terms like *hermano* and brother (said in heavily accented English) or primo (cousin) and are used both as descriptors and as identifiers to address or introduce people.

Close social connections are key to material and social survival in Lambayeque. For most, money and material resources are always precarious, and most people live de mano a boca (from hand to mouth – meaning that the money never spends time in your pocket or a bank). As is true in all of Peru, most workers earn *su diario* (a daily wage) and are paid daily for that day's labor. That money is usually completely – or at least mostly – consumed by the next day's living expenses. While men are the primary wage earners, women are often responsible for stretching

the money to ensure that needs are met and bills are paid. Men commonly reserve some of their earnings to spend on themselves – be it for alcohol, material goods, or – in cases of infidelity – on other women. Women in Lambayeque regularly complain that when they ask their husbands for money for bills or things for themselves or the children that the answer is *no tengo* (I don't have any). They acknowledge that their husbands are paid poorly – exploited as cheap labor – and that there is never enough money to cover household expenses, but many women also observe that men always seem to be able to come up with money for drinking alcohol with other men, etc.

Because money and other resources are so tight, there are strong expectations for reciprocity and mutual support between family members (e.g., siblings), however these traditional forms of mutual aid are now increasingly coming into conflict with the shift towards a more individualistic, capitalist society. Men carry the burden of the social expectation that they be the sole provider for their family – sometimes expanding to extended family, but jobs offering a living family wage are exceedingly rare. Men are expected to help support others in their kin networks, but encroaching capitalist ideologies of individualism create feelings of shame for men who need to ask others for help. Even with these tensions and struggles, people generally make an effort to help each other out when possible. For instance, when one *mujer abusada's* refrigerator broke the day before her child's birthday and she couldn't afford to fix it or buy a new one, a friend offered to make cups of gelatin at her own house and bring them to the birthday party for the attendees to enjoy.

The social characteristics of Lambayeque that participants described as negative centered around the desire to keep up appearances, machismo, and a general culture of violence. Participants told me that everyone in Lambayeque wants to *aparentar* (to put on airs, to appear

to be something they are not) and that everyone wants to seem like their family is perfect. *Aparentar* is a preemptive defensive move to avoid being talked about and criticized in negative terms. But, since most people in Lambayeque have lots of problems – most of which stem from economic and structural problems out of their own control – participants told me that people will often talk about others and their problems as a way to deflect attention and criticism away from themselves. People report this being a constant internal struggle because while you are supposed to appear as though you are happy and everything is perfect, structural and economic problems dominate people's lives.

*Lambayecana* culture sets up unachievable standards of perfection for both men and women. This results in many people feeling frustrated and inadequate, while pretending to be superior to everyone else. Men often feel emasculated because the economic expectations of being a provider are simply not able to be met under the exploitative form of capitalism that currently exists in Lambayeque, and in Peru more broadly. Men are set up to fail in their work-lives, and many seem to also self-sabotage in their home lives. Many people suggested to me that men try to compensate for their frustration and emasculation by having affairs. Women, on the other hand, often work to perform suffering, as it is socially better to be pitied as a long-suffering woman than to be criticized for being a 'bad' woman who does not follow the prescribed gender expectations.

Participants regularly talked about *la envidia* (envy) and explained that people in Lambayeque do not want to see other people be more successful than them. Participants attributed this talk to the low self-esteem that they argue most people in Lambayeque have. The Peruvian slang word for this type of trash-talking is *la maleta* or *el maleteo,* from the slang verb *maletear*: to talk behind someone's back. People trash-talk others to minimize their

accomplishments and make them look bad. When I asked why la maleta is so common in Lambayeque, on potential informal help-giver – a man in his 50s – responded, "*Aquí reina la maldad porque la gente es infeliz*" (Here, evil reigns because people are unhappy). When people do have some success, others are quick to speculate and gossip about that success, however minor.

Participants explained that Lambayeque has lots of *chismosos* (nosey, gossipy people), and that while gossip is stereotypically thought to be women's activity, that men gossip just as much – if not more – than women. The popular explanation for Lambayeque's gossip is that people have lots of free time and little disposable income for other forms of entertainment. Some common colloquialisms about gossip are, "*Hablan porque tienen boca*" (they talk just because they have a mouth), "*No hay pal cine/Netflix*" (they can't afford to go to the movies/have Netflix), and "*Como no tiene cable en su casa…*" (since they don't have cable TV at home…). It is nearly impossible to do anything (good or bad or neutral) in Lambayeque without someone else knowing about it and talking about it. People often joke that *uno no puede ni cagar sin que todo el mundo se entere* (one can't even take a shit without the whole world finding out). In addition to the close proximity of everything, because of the heat, people often hang out on the sidewalk, or in the doorways and windows of their houses to take advantage of Lambayeque's constant wind off the ocean. This means that there are eyes always watching.

Additionally, participants described *lambayecanos* as *muy fijones* (literally: someone who notices everything, overly observant, nitpicky, critical, meddlesome). *Lambayecano* men and women are very observant and critical of any little thing they see and make a point to openly comment on it. This is a widely applied criticism, and *lambayecanos* say that people elsewhere in Peru are not so overly observant and that it would be better for everyone if *lambayecanos*

were less so. Many *lambayecanos* who move to Lima report missing living in Lambayeque but not wanting to go back because they do not want *que todos se metan en mi vida* (for everyone to insert themselves into my life). The relative anonymity of big-city life is desirable, while people also lament the loss of connection. Envy is regularly cited as a primary motivator of these kinds of commentaries. For example, if someone see someone else with a new pair of shoes, they will often say something like, "oh look Juan has a new pair of tennis shoes… and that's an expensive brand! How'd he get the money to buy shoes like that if he doesn't earn much money working construction? What kinds of [implied: nefarious] things must he be involved in?" When telling me about these kinds of commentaries, people would often say things like, *bueno que fuera que la gente haga un comentario para bien y no solo para hacer daño* (how nice it would be if people commented in ways that did good and not only to do harm).

Gossip works as a social control mechanism, designed to keep people in line with status quo expectations around all forms of social hierarchy, including socio-economic class and gender. Class in Lambayeque, where most people are poor or lower-middle-class, is not just determined by economics, rather social class is based on race, educational level, place of residence (neighborhood, type of house/residence), place of origin, family name, family reputation, degree and types of social connections, etc. All of these matter in positioning oneself in Lambayeque's social hierarchy.

Men and women alike described Lambayeque as *machista*. *Mujeres abusadas* and some other research participants described *lambayecano* men as domineering, manipulative, and violent. Women are expected to *atender* (serve, attend to) their husbands and children, and also *aguantar* (tolerate, put up with) whatever the situation may be. *Machista* behaviors and *machista* men are defended by many men and by many women in Lambayeque. Men who defend *machista*

behaviors often rely on denial and gaslighting and attempt to minimize the negative impacts of their attitudes and behaviors. Women who defend men's *machismo*, normalize it as typical and even desirable masculinity. For many women, their male relatives can do no wrong and they go out of their way to blame the men's wives for everything. For example, at one woman complained to me at length that her nephew had not attended a family gathering, speculating that *esa mujer mala* (that bad/evil woman, i.e., his wife) had pretended to injure herself so that he would stay at home with her instead. When I later asked the nephew why he had not attended the gathering, he told me that he was tired from working all week and had not felt up to going. He wanted to know why I was asking about that day, so I told him that his aunt had told me that surely his wife had faked an injury to keep him from attending. His response was, laughing, *Ay mi tía… me quiere mucho* (oh, my aunt… she loves me so much). Rather than correcting this perception of his wife, this particular man, in his 40s, is known to regularly leverage the conflict between his wife and his family to his advantage in order to get what he wants.

While *machismo* permeates many spaces in *lambayecano* life, the different expectations around courtship, dating, and marriage for girls/women and boys/men were frequently cited by participants as examples of how machismo leads to the formation of violent relationships. Lambayeque has a tradition of arranged marriages, or more frequently families arranging the marriage after a couple begins a relationship, either of which could culminate in a legal and religious ceremony or could be arrangements for a common-law type marriage. Less commonly, girls and young women who are raped are forced by their parents to marry their rapist. Peruvian law used to stipulate that a legal case of rape could be formally remedied (essentially, legally undone) by the rapist marrying the victim.

In Lambayeque, dating multiple people is seen as morally corrupt, especially for girls and women. A common refrain used to describe a woman who has dated or been in relationships with multiple people is, "*Se cambia de marido como se cambia de calzón*" (she changes husbands like she changes her underwear). As a result, couples often do not get to know each other well, and may not even like each other, when they end up becoming married or partnered. Ironically, women in violent relationships are regularly criticized and blamed for not getting to know her husband well before marrying him.

Participants also discussed Lambayeque as having a broader culture of violence and suffering. They described ways in which violence is normalized in virtually all aspects of everyday life – from poverty and all that entails, to government corruption, to the corporal punishment of children, to street crime and violence, etc. There is also a common belief among many – although there are also plenty of people who openly challenge the idea – that because they suffered or lived through something unpleasant, that others (e.g., their children, neighbors, etc.) should have to suffer and live through it too. Several participants – especially women but also some men – told me that people in Lambayeque learn violence their whole childhood, and then as an adult one has to either live it or try to un-learn it. Despite people expressing a desire to live a life without violence and negativity, there is tremendous social pressure to participate or at least tacitly accept the status quo. Especially in cases where men try to change and act in non-*machista* ways, they are openly mocked and criticized by both men and women.

### *2.3.2 El Qué Dirán (The What People May Say)*

To say that social pressures are strong in Lambayeque feels like an understatement. In many cases social pressures feel all-encompassing and all-controlling in *lambayecana* life. Gossip and shame are expertly wielded by people in Lambayeque as tools of social control to

protect or tarnish individuals' and families' reputations and to maintain local socio-political structures, including patriarchal gender norms. The phrase *el qué dirán* (the what people may say) functions linguistically as a noun and refers to a social phenomenon that exerts tremendous influence over experiences of intimate partner violence and associated help-seeking. Although gossip is a part of *el qué dirán*, it goes beyond just gossip to include *la maleta* (bad talking), and all types of commentary usually understood to be a tool of controlling the subject of discussion's behavior. Importantly, *el qué dirán* includes both what people have actually said in the past and all the imagined possibilities of how other people could react to and talk about a situation in the future. It includes gossip, shaming, moral judgement, and victim-blaming, but is not limited to any one of those.

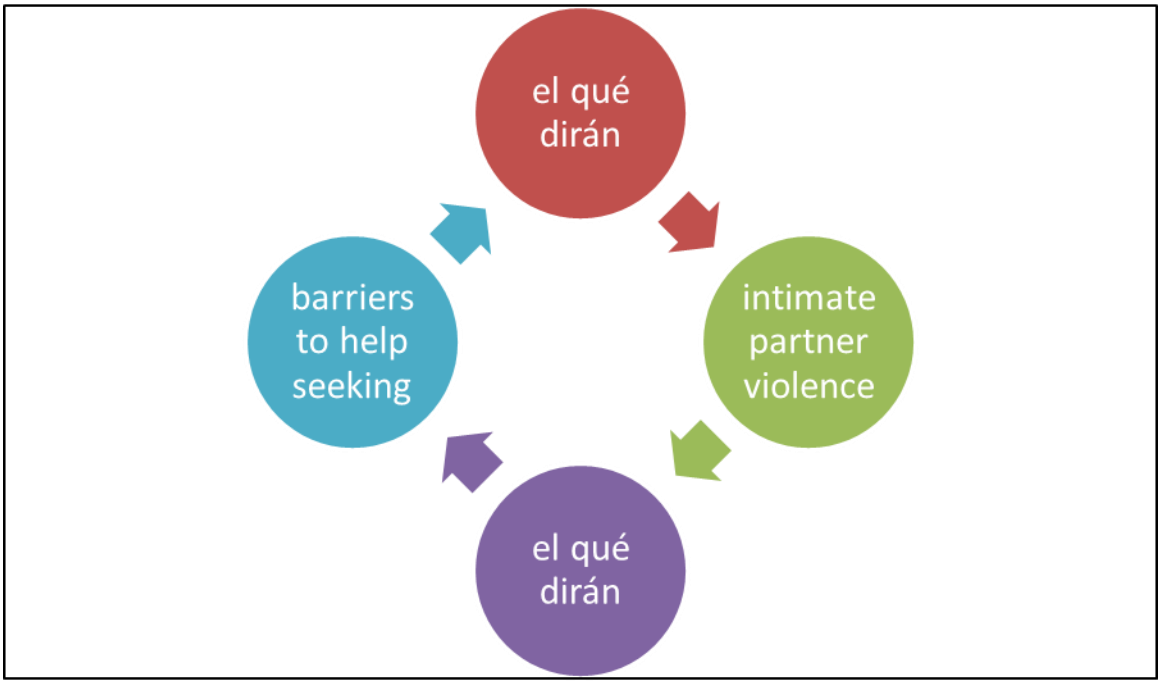
During my two years of ethnographic field work, every participant in my research named fear of *el qué dirán* as a primary deterrent to both informal and formal help-seeking around intimate partner violence. Informal helpers are people who regularly provide – or are reasonably expected to provide – support or help to *mujeres abusadas* but are not professional service providers and likely have no formal training in intimate partner violence or related service-provision fields. Informal helpers include family members, friends, and neighbors. Formal helpers are people who are professionally responsible for providing formal help and services to *mujeres abusadas*, though they may have no specific training in issues of intimate partner violence. Formal helpers include police officers, social workers, psychologists, doctors and nurses, lawyers, prosecutors, judges, etc. Formal helpers in one field often serve as gatekeepers to support and services in another field. For example, the police are a potential conduit to health services, as *mujeres abusadas* are supposed to have a medical exam as part of filing a police

report. However, the police often serve as a barrier, instead, deciding for themselves when to take reports or not and when to make referrals to health services.

As I conducted my data collection and analysis, however, it became clear to me that *el qué dirán* also plays a critical role in creating unhealthy relationships and provoking violence in relationships. *El qué dirán* is a thread that permeates and influences every life-stage and every aspect of daily life in Lambayeque. Here, I will use *el qué dirán* to introduce and illustrate the typical cycle of intimate partner violence and help-seeking in people's lives.

As illustrated in Figure 1 and described in detail below, *el qué dirán* provokes and exacerbates IPV in relationships and serves as a barrier to help-seeking for IPV. In Lambayeque, *el qué dirán* plays a critical role in cycles of violence.

*Figure 1: The Cycle of El Qué Dirán, Intimate Partner Violence, and Help-seeking*



### *2.3.3 El Qué Dirán Precipitates Unhappy and Sometimes Violent Relationships*

*El qué dirán* both provokes violence between intimate partners and serves as a barrier to *mujeres abusadas* receiving the types of informal and formal support they desire (see Figure 1). It shapes how intimate partnerships form and how they evolve. *El qué dirán* does not limit its target to adults, and both children and the children's extended family and social networks are open to critique. As I explained earlier, very often couples do not know each other well when they are partnered. As several participants explained to me, girls/women are looked at poorly if they go to their boyfriend's house or if they are seen publicly with a boy/man. For this reason, couples do not always get to know each other well before they are socially pressured into formalizing their relationship through a civil marriage, a religious marriage, or through cohabitation.

Parents worry about their daughters being seen with a boyfriend because they do not want *chismosos* (gossips) commenting on it. They worry extensively about their daughter's reputation being tarnished should the relationship not work out, which would influence what kind (quality) of partner she would be able to find in the future. One empathetic mother of a teenage son told me that she did not mind if her son's girlfriend came to their home to watch tv or hang out, but that she worried that the neighbors would start talking and what they might say about the girlfriend despite her being a "good girl." I was repeatedly told that no one wants a woman that has been with many men. These dynamics create relationships that have been rushed into and create reputations that harm young women's and men's abilities to find a partner with whom they are happy and with whom they get along. Some participants – especially women – reported feeling so much coercion from their families, and fear of *el qué dirán* more broadly, that they felt they did not have any choice but to accept formalizing a relationship with someone even if they

did not feel fully invested in it. In some cases, women were forced into relationships that they openly opposed because they had been raped and their families insisted that they be married.

Three of the *mujeres abusadas* I interviewed who experienced extreme physical, sexual, emotional, and economic violence at the hands of their partners, were forced by their families to become partnered with the man who had raped them. Dolores ran away from home as a young teenager trying to escape the sexual violence of her stepfather. During her days away, she met a teenage boy who was initially kind to her, but when she wanted to go back home, he raped her, telling her that she was now his because no one else would ever want her. Growing up, Dolores's mother had told her that it was important to remain a virgin, so she believed her rapist and thus began years of extreme violence in her life. Luz's grandmother forced her to marry a man who had broken into their house one night and raped her as a teenager, even though Luz had a boyfriend who she had planned to marry once she finished high school. In Eloísa's case, a neighbor woman asked her to help her with something and then locked Eloísa in her house overnight with her son. Despite nothing sexual happening between them, the perception of Eloísa "spending the night" at his house was strong enough that her parents arranged for them to be married. Fortunately, this seems to be less common now than a generation ago, but for many *mujeres abusadas* families' desires to avoid gossip about girls' sexuality led to them being forced into undesired relationships that were filled with violence.

In other cases, consensual sex that led to an unintended pregnancy forced relationships to be formalized even if the couple was otherwise uninterested in continuing the relationship. Much of this is due to the burden of childcare and other reproductive labor that falls entirely on women, and which often makes women economically completely dependent on men – *lambayecana* society is not economically or logistically friendly to single mothers. This was the case for Lucía

who became pregnant by her boyfriend when they were both 16 and still in high school. Upon learning about her pregnancy, Lucía's parents sent her to live with her boyfriend's family, thus placing the financial responsibility for the pregnancy and the coming child on his family.

### *2.3.4 El Qué Dirán Increases and Provokes Violence in Established Relationships*

In already established relationships, gossip and *el qué dirán* increase and provoke instances of violence in relationships with violent dynamics. *El qué dirán* seeds mistrust, distrust, and jealousy between partners. Even if what is being said is *maleta* (and, therefore, said behind the subject's back), word travels very quickly and nearly inevitably gets back to the subject. Because of the *machista* ideology that permeates Lambayeque, if someone sees people of different genders together it is assumed that they are in some kind of intimate relationship or having an affair. Seemingly inevitably, the gossip begins. Both men and women would regularly tell me that "*aquí uno no puede tener amigos*" (here, one cannot have friends [of the opposite gender]), explaining that gossip will automatically brand the relationship as something lascivious. As Ximena explained to me:

> In some families, [women] doing things [outside the home] is normal, but for others it's not. Because you're the wife and you're expected to be shut inside your house doing everything. Even if I went to the market, or took my son to the park, that's when the commentary began – the critiques, the gossip about how surely there must be some other relationship outside the home or something. No matter what you do here, the story is that you're cheating on your partner. Wherever you go, if you're a married woman and someone sees you talking with a man, suddenly he's also your partner. *Aca no puedes tener amigos* (here [a woman] cannot have [male] friends). It's even worse if you're married. And this is a small town, it's impossible to go anywhere without running into someone that you know. People are… how can I say it? I don't want to say envious… but they don't want to see other people happy or tranquil. People can't just see a happy couple; they always have to look for something to make them unhappy. I think most people here aren't happy, so they want others to be like them.

Similarly, women who want to work outside of the home are often accused of only wanting to work so they can meet other men with whom to have affairs. Camila, in her early 20s

when I first met her, explained to me that people gossiping and speculating about her sleeping with her boss – which she insists was never true – caused problems with her own husband, with her boss' wife, and ultimately resulted in her losing her job. There are also patriarchal economic entanglements in these situations, as violent husbands often want their wives to be economically dependent and under their control. In Lambayeque's *machista* society, some consider it embarrassing for a man's wife to work, as it indicates that he does not control her and that he is unable to adequately provide for his family. María, a woman in her late 30s when I first interviewed her and one of the hardest-working people I have ever met, regularly complained that her then-husband would not allow her to work, even though she explained that her only goal was for their family to *salir adelante* (to get ahead). Her husband's work was unstable, and she believes that intimate partners should work as a team for the benefit of the family. She would secretly take on informal jobs washing clothes, cooking, or cleaning houses to supplement the family income. When her husband would discover her, he would hit and berate her – saying that she surely wanted to work outside the home so that she could meet other men with whom to have sex.

Women's and men's employment statuses and success becomes an additional target of *el qué dirán*, and men who feel socially impotent (against their boss and the court of public opinion) often take out their frustrations on their wife and children. Women explain men's jealousy and distrust of their wives saying that men have a dirty conscience and therefore they think that women will act in the same "bad" ways that men act (engaging in infidelity, being sexually aggressive, occupying public spaces instead of being in the home, etc.). In Maria's case, her mother-in-law would regularly accuse María of being a disobedient wife and would encourage her son to beat her. Some *mujeres abusadas* described to me how their husbands'

mothers would encourage their sons to act violently toward their wives, citing alleged bad behavior by the women. In this way, some mothers-in-law would make the case that their sons should be diverting limited financial and material resources to them – their mothers – instead of their "undeserving" wives.

### *2.3.5 Intimate Partner Violence Provokes El Qué Dirán*

Because of the small-town characteristics of Lambayeque, intimate partner violence is often widely known about or is an open secret. While some *mujeres abusadas* do try to hide or minimize the violence they experience, it is often impossible to effectively do so. Both men and women talk and gossip about the acts of violence in sensationalist ways and speculate what provoked the violence – nearly always blaming the victim. The most common assumptions and accusations include that 1) the woman must be cheating on her husband, 2) the woman must not be adequately fulfilling her prescribed gender roles as mother and wife, and 3) the woman must have complained about something when her husband came home drunk, despite everyone knowing that "you can't reason with a drunk person."

For Carol, now in her early 40s with a son and grandson under her care, *el qué dirán* continued to haunt her even after her abusive husband, Ramón, had died. When Ramón was still alive, Carol, who suffered ongoing physical and emotional abuse by him, learned from a neighbor that he was having an affair. Shortly after Carol learned this upsetting information, Ramón fell ill. His family took him to a *brujo* (a shaman, healer) who determined that the other woman was *haciéndole daño* (harming him with witchcraft). Ramón grew sicker and eventually died. After his death, Ramón's family went to a different *brujo* who said that it was, in fact, Carol who had been harming him with witchcraft and that Carol had also been having affairs with multiple men. Ramón's family began telling everyone what the *brujo* had said, and the

gossip spread exponentially around town. Carol laughed at how ludicrous the rumors were as she told me her story, and said, "*Ya hubiera estado descoñada de tanto marido*" ([if the rumors had been true] my pussy would have been worn completely off from having so many partners).

When I asked Carol why she thought these rumors were spread about her she replied, "*la gente chismosea porque no tiene nada que hacer"* (people gossip because they don't have anything else [productive] to do). In Carol's case, her fear of *el qué dirán* shamed her into not seeking help for the violence she was experiencing while Ramón was still alive. And the gossip and rumors continued to negatively affect Carol even after Ramón's death: by alienating her and their young son, Ramón's family limited her access to material and social support as she forged her way as a young widow and newly single mother.

### *2.3.6 El Qué Dirán as a Barrier to Help-Seeking*

The agency of *mujeres abusadas* around help-seeking is shaped and often constrained by what people are actually saying in the present situation as well as the fear of the imagined possibilities of *el qué dirán* in the future. Awareness and fear of *el qué dirán* often keep women from seeking either informal or formal help for intimate partner violence. Interestingly – and for many women – infuriatingly, *el qué dirán* is not often weaponized against men regarding their use of violence against their intimate partners and does not function to shame men into stopping their violent behaviors. Women consistently complained to me about this double standard, expressing their resentment at the fact that even women who are *bien dedicadas* [very dedicated] to their homes and famies and who are fulfilling their prescribed gender roles are gossiped about. One woman, describing to me her frustration with this double standard said, throwing her arms in the air in exasperation, "*mujeres que somos bien dedicadas… y para que alguien que ni es tu familia te viene a joder*" (we women who are very dedicated [to our homes and families]

[dramatic pause] and for someone, who isn't even your family [meaning: husband's family] comes to bitch at you and criticize you [and cause more problems]).

Women, especially, complained that people do not gossip in helpful ways. Women said they wished that people, for instance, would publicly criticize and shame men for their infidelity more frequently, but explained that often people (especially men, but also women) 1) do not want to put their friendship at risk, 2) fear that they will not be believed, 3) are afraid of payback/retribution/vengeance from the man being talked about, 4) do not want to be accused of being a gossip/sticking their nose in someone else's business. Many men celebrate among themselves their *pendejadas* (sneaky, cunning, bad behavior – usually meaning having a sexual relationship(s) with someone who is not their formal partner[3]) as a sign of *machista* superiority and also provide cover stories for each other.

Despite these double standards, people – who, like people everywhere, do not like to think of themselves in a negative light – often act as though that their gossip is well-intentioned and meant to be helpful. But as Iris, a woman now in her early 40s, explained, even well-intentioned words are not enough. She told me, "*A la gente le encanta chismear, pero nadies*[4] *te da una solución. Nadies dice, ven para ayudarte"* (People love to gossip, but no one gives you a solution. No one says, come here so I can help you).

*Mujeres abusadas* have sophisticated understandings of the potential consequences of *el qué dirán*, and make very calculated, strategic, informed decisions about whether to seek help and from whom. Abused women gauge their own social positionalities (e.g., identities and

[3] Note that *pendejo* (the subject who does the *pendejada*) and *pendejada* (the action or behavior) have a very different meaning in Peru than in other Spanish-speaking countries. Literally, *pendejo* is the Spanish word for pubic hair. In Peru, a *pendejo* is a person who is mischievous, cunning, and who tricks or takes advantage of others. In other Spanish-speaking countries *pendejo* can mean, for instance, stupid or incapable (Mexico, El Salvador), fearful (Costa Rica), young (Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay), etc.

[4] *Nadies* with an "s" is typical in the *lambayecano* dialect of Spanish, especially among those from lower socio-economic classes.

relative power) (Bograd, 2005; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Boesten, 2010; Grzanka, 2014; Muñoz et al., 2020) against others' and engage in rational readings of the social terrains they must navigate, often making calculated decisions to not seek help despite wanting access to support and resources. Publicly denouncing – formally or informally – violence by one's husband is a serious violation of social norms and there are significant social and economic risks in doing so. In Lambayeque, any kind of help-seeking, which makes "personal" issues public, is treated by many as a deviant act. For many, the act of publicly denouncing violence and seeking help is seen as much more deviant than a man abusing his wife. When acts of physical violence are extreme, people will verbally acknowledge that they are 'bad,' but tend to be very reluctant to get involved.

Because of this, *mujeres abusadas* work hard to perform "good" womanhood to try to avoid being so easily blamed for the violence they experience. *Machista* ideology, which falsely divides women into two binary categories 1) *mujer de la casa* (a woman of the home) and 2) *mujer de la calle* (a woman of the street) – a parallel to the virgin/whore complex, pressures women into performing their gender in ways to show that they are 'of the home' and not 'of the street.' This performance of good womanhood is important if the woman is going to garner any support from informal helpers. Women work hard to prove themselves deserving of support (emotional and material), as many potential informal helpers – including friends and family – are reluctant to take their own social risks and offer support to someone who may be deemed socially undeserving. Being perceived as 'of the street,' or as a woman who *más le gusta ser mujer que madre* (enjoys being a woman more than being a mother) serves as a legitimization of men's violence towards their wives. Both men and women regularly evaluate and critique other women's style of womanhood in these terms. Several of the *mujeres abusadas* I interviewed told

me about being judged, for example, for going to parties. They argued to me that these critiques are unfair because they attend the parties with their husbands or other relatives, and never went to parties until they had fulfilled their household responsibilities.

Despite feeling let down by their families who often do not defend or support them, *mujeres abusadas* regularly told me how important family is. Publicly extolling the importance and supreme value of family connections is a common trope in day-to-day conversations, and one that is often performed on social media through sharing of memes and photos with excessively sentimental captions about the importance of family and about how much they love their family. But these declarations of family are an important public performance of loyalty that attempts to urge reciprocity of both feelings and actions from their husbands. These are emotional tactics aimed to publicly *aparentar la familia feliz* (appear to be an idealized happy family) in hopes of guilting the man into being more loyal to his family. Sometimes, in cases of infidelity where the other woman is known, they are intended a as a sign to the other woman that the 'real' wife is not going to willingly end the relationship. These emotional ploys have important material consequences as most women in Lambayeque are not in a position to economically support themselves and their children, even in the best of times. *Mujeres abusadas* whose husbands are cheating on them often talk about how they are not going to let the men leave and forget about their financial responsibilities to their real wife and their children. When times are bad one becomes even more dependent on the support of others. Laura, a woman in her early 40s explained, "*La familia es lo más importante de la vida, porque cuando tú te enfermas, ¿quién te cuida?*" (Family is the most important thing in life, because when you get sick, who is going to take care of you?). *Lambayecana* women cannot always count on support from their in-

laws, and therefore must diligently work to maintain and cultivate the support of their own families by trying to avoid giving reasons to victim-blame the *mujeres abusadas*.

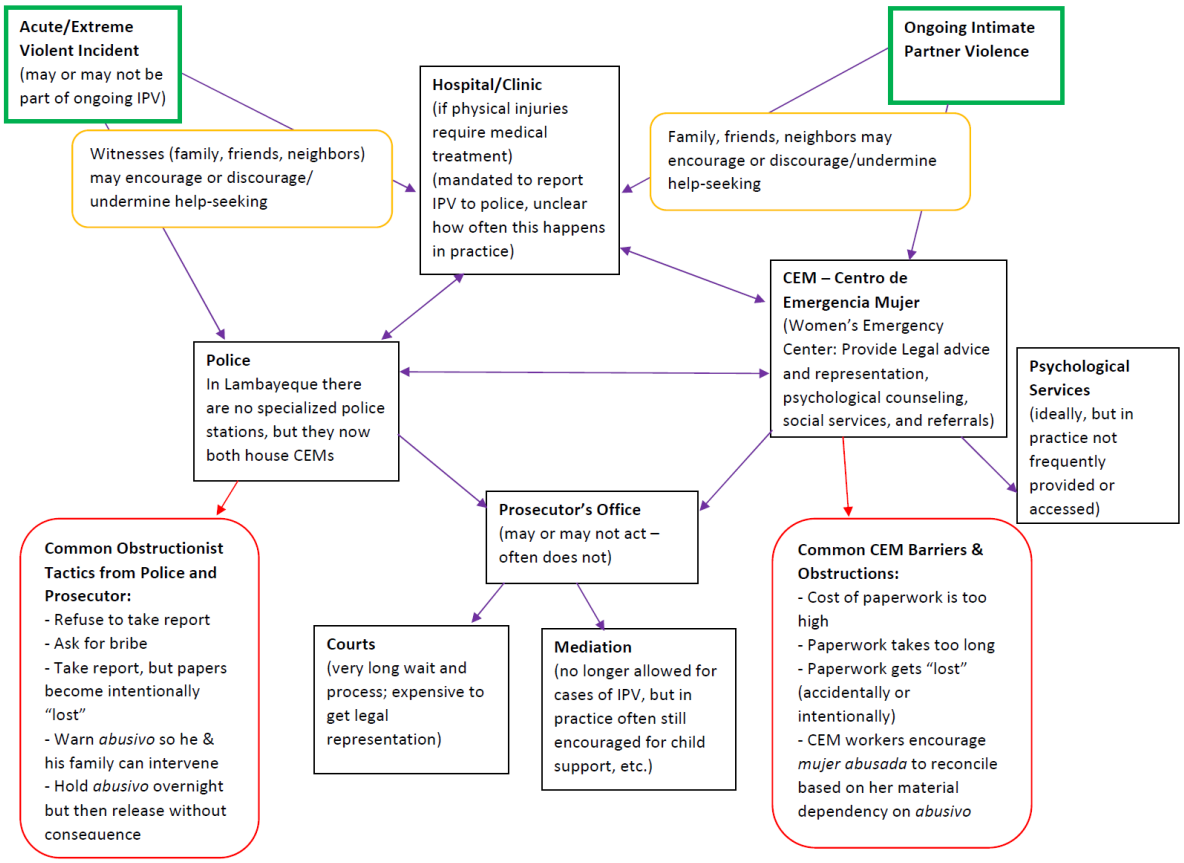
### *2.3.7 Seeking Help in Lambayeque – An Overview*

In Lambayeque, and as the literature on help-seeking suggests for Latinx populations cross-nationally, *mujeres abusadas* most often first seek help from informal helpers – most often family, but sometimes close friends or neighbors. Then, if *mujeres abusadas* determine the situation to be severe and not something that can be "handled privately," they will then escalate their help-seeking to formal channels. Formal help-seeking is even more common if one or more informal helpers are supportive of seeking formal help. The three main entry-points to formal supportive services for *mujeres abusadas* in Lambayeque are the Peruvian National Police (PNP), the *Centro de Emergencia Mujer* (CEM), or – less frequently and usually only in cases of extreme injury – a medical provider at a local hospital, health post, or private clinic.

In Figure 2, I diagram the common formal help-seeking paths taken by *mujeres abusadas* in Lambayeque. The green boxes are the situational starting points for formal help-seeking by *mujeres abusadas*. While not discrete categories themselves, I separate ongoing intimate partner violence from acute/extreme violent incidents because they tend to provoke different responses from *mujeres abusadas* and their potential helpers. The black boxes are the institutional service providers who serve *mujeres abusadas* in Lambayeque, and include the police, hospitals and clinics, and the *Centros de Emergencia Mujer*. The yellow rounded rectangles indicate mitigating social pressures by family, friends, neighbors, etc. that may either promote or discourage formal help-seeking. The purple arrows show typical directional paths of entry points and referrals to formal service providers. The red arrows show typical directional paths to obstacles to formal services, and the red rounded rectangles identify institutional barriers to

formal-help-seeking for *mujeres abusadas*, which may discourage or completely stop their help-seeking attempts.

*Figure 2: Diagram of Common Formal Help-Seeking Paths Taken by Mujeres Abusadas in Lambayeque*




### *2.3.8 Seeking Informal Help*

Because *mujeres abusadas* often try to hide or silence the violence they experience from family and friends, potential informal helpers often learn of the violence through gossip. *Mujeres abusadas* often try to manage the violence on their own, until it becomes "too much," or someone finds out. Sometimes the *mujer abusada* will ask for help while other times a concerned friend or family member will bring up the violence. In Lambayeque, *mujeres abusadas* reported first seeking help from family, friends, or neighbors, but especially from sisters or close friends.

It is important to note, though, that while friends are often the most emotionally supportive, they seem to rarely get directly involved in efforts to confront the abuser or to provide material or economic resources. These are expectations more typically reserved for family and the potential consequences for the helper getting involved in these ways are more severe. When *mujeres abusadas* in Lambayeque do discuss violence with family members and, to a lesser extent, with friends, they are frequently blamed for the violence and denied the types of support they want. These are some of the most common things *mujeres abusadas* reported being told when complaining about the violence they experience:

- *"Hijita, tú te lo buscaste." (Daughter, y*ou got yourself into this.)
- *"Tú ve como solucionas tu problema."* (You figure out how you're going to fix this problem of yours.)
- *¿Qué? Tú no conocías como era cuando te metiste/casaste?* (What? Didn't you know what he was like when you got involved with him/married him?)
- *¿Y quién te mandó a abrirte las piernas?* (And who sent you there to open your legs?)
- *Así es el matrimonio.* (That's how marriage is.)
- *Más te gusta ser mujer qué madre.* (You're more interested in being a woman than a mother.)

Often, the parents of the *mujeres abusada* will talk to the husband's parents in an attempt to intervene and resolve the couple's problems. Women told me that this tactic, though one of the most commonly employed, is rarely effective at stopping violence. Mothers-in-law will often defend their sons' violent behaviors and blame and trash-talk the daughters-in-law instead. When a *mujer abusada* seeks help from family, the family nearly always encourages her to stay in the relationship for the 'benefit of the children.' Interestingly, several *mujeres abusadas* told me that no amount of family intervention stopped the violence until their sons were old enough (but still living at home) to defend their mothers by physically fighting their fathers. Sadly, these same women told me that some of these same sons that defended them now abuse their own wives. Valeria, a woman in her 50s who experienced extreme physical violence from her husband, relied on her teenaged sons to defend her for over a decade. Now that they are all older and in

relationships of their own, Valeria is extremely disappointed and ashamed that one of her sons has been beating his wife. Valeria has tried talking to him about it, but his use of violence continues.

*Mujeres abusadas* regularly told me that they feared people finding out about the violence because the husband – or the husband's family – would simply kick her out of the house and refuse to give her alimony or child support. This, then, creates a new logistical and economic burden for the families of *mujeres abusadas* who often do not have the physical space or resources to support their daughter and her children. Like I described in Carol's case, these types of victim blaming and *maleteo* are forms of social violence that work in conjunction with IPV and that can have both social and economic consequences both for the *mujeres abusadas* and their families who often do not have the space or economic resources to house and care for a newly single mother with children. For this and other reasons, mothers of *mujeres abusadas* usually encourage their daughters to give their abusive husbands another chance.

Several people explained to me, though, that this is slowly changing. A common piece of advice from older women to younger women and girls is to get an education because "that is the one thing that no one can ever take away from you." They are also increasingly encouraging their daughters to get an education and to have a profession so as to not be dependent on anyone. Among younger generations, mothers are increasingly encouraging their daughters to file police reports, though that is not always a successful option. Lucía, a woman then in her late 30s is fiercely protective of her daughter Alejandra, then in her early 20s. Fortunately, Alejandra had previously disclosed her ex's threats of violence to the security guards at her workplace. When Alejandra's ex-boyfriend and father of her daughter showed up to her office drunk and with a gun, Alejandra's co-workers' quick thinking got her out of the building through a back door

before her ex could reach her. Both Lucía and her ex-husband Joaquín insisted that Alejandra file a police report. Joaquín called me to accompany them to the police station while Lucía stayed with Alejandra's daughter. The police officer refused to take a report because Alejandra and her ex were no longer living together. When I cited the Peruvian law's definition of who can commit intimate partner violence – which includes ex-intimate partners – the police officer tried to throw me out of the police station, which I resisted. Eventually Alejandra became frustrated and stormed out of the police station without a report ever being filed. The next day Lucía went to the ex's house and yelled at him, telling him that he was never to come near Alejandra or their daughter ever again, and that they did not need or want any child support from him – that Alejandra's parents and grandparents would support them. Lucía and Joaquín's support of their daughters' educations and professional careers – and thus financial independence – is not yet the norm but is becoming increasingly common in Lambayeque.

Another reason m*ujeres abusadas* choose not to seek informal help for violence is because the sudden public awareness of the violence often provokes more physical violence, especially between women's male relatives (fathers, brothers, sons, uncles, cousins) and the abusive husband and his male relatives. Women find this dynamic exhausting, as they now have another type of violence that they have to try to navigate, manage, and temper. Several *mujeres abusadas* told me that they tried to hide the violence they were experiencing from their brothers, saying things like, *¿De que me sirve tener a mis hermanos en Picsi o heridos*? (What good does it do me to have my brothers in Picsi [the local prison] or injured?). Laura, whose brothers learned many years ago about the violence she experienced, described to me how her brothers still think about what happened to her every time they get drunk. Laura does not like having to remember and re-live the violence she experienced, nor does she want to have to prevent or

negotiate the resulting violence between her brothers and her husband every time they drink together. She is afraid that when drunk they will fight again, remembering the past. She expressed how exhausting it is for her to have to manage all of these men's feelings in addition to her own.

*Mujeres abusadas* are acutely aware that reporting violence – formally or informally – may escalate violence to feminicide or attempted feminicide. Research on intimate partner violence has long found that women are at the greatest risk for being killed by their partner when they try to leave the abusive relationship. Feminicide is a problem in Peru that has garnered significant public attention over the last several years, though this is usually in the form of sensationalist reporting about "crimes of passion" that has resulted in little meaningful change for women's safety (Alcalde 2009).

Between 2015-2021, the Peruvian government recognized and documented 897 cases of feminicide of adult cisgender women (INEI, 2022). The number increases when including the feminicides of minors and trans women. Violence against women did not slow during Peru's COVID-19 lockdown. Intimate partner violence continued at high rates, while women struggled to report and receive help for violence during quarantine, and CEMs were temporarily closed due to the pandemic. Very troubling trends were made even more evident during the COVID-19 lockdown: the increase in violence against women and girls, including rape (3,763 cases of violence reported between March 15 and May 8, 2020, and 226 cases of sexual abuse of a child in the same time period) (El Comercio, 2020), the number of feminicides (at least 132 in 2020, though this is likely a low count (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2020a) and the significant number of women who were reported missing during lockdown (3568 cases between January and August 2020, of which 2557 were children or teens) (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2020b).

The department of Lambayeque registered 19 feminicides between 2017-2021 (INEI, 2022). Although Lambayeque's rates of feminicide and attempted feminicide are lower than many other departments' in Peru, *mujeres abusadas* regularly reported the fear of being killed by their partner as a reason for trying to hide or minimize the public knowledge of the violence they experience. Lucía's sister was disappeared in Lambayeque in 2004, and despite substantial evidence and an eye-witness account that she was murdered and dismembered by her husband, her family has never received justice. Despite a warrant for his arrest and Lucía's family and friends telling the police where the husband is hiding out, he has yet to be arrested.

There are many reasons that informal helpers do not provide help to *mujeres abusadas* which will be explored in-depth in chapter 3 of this dissertation, but for the purposes of this chapter I will highlight a few of the social barriers to providing help. Dolores, a *mujer abusada* in her 40s who had experienced extreme violence in the past with her own ex-husband, told me about her frustration and fear at hearing her neighbor regularly beating his wife and the wife's cries for help. She told me that she wants to intervene, but she is afraid for her own safety: "*¿Qué pasa si el hombre ese me hace algo a mi?*" (What happens if that man does something to me?). There is also a pervasive idea in Lambayeque that "*Los terceros salen sobrando*" (third parties are superfluous). Many potential helpers worry about revenge being enacted against them and worry about facing other types of social consequences – like the husband's family and friends' trash-talking and starting rumors about the helper.

For this reason, many people told me that if they try to intervene, they will only try one time. Offering help is seen as socially risky by informal helpers, and helpers get angry with *mujeres abusadas* when advice and help is not taken the first time it is offered. One young man in his early 20s, Gregorio, described to me a time in which he tried to help a friend leave her

abusive boyfriend, but she was too scared. Gregorio was resentful that he had risked helping her, only for her to not take his help. When she asked Gregorio for his support again in the future, he told me that he yelled at her, saying "*Ya te quise ayudar una vez y no quisiste. Estás ahí porque has querido*" (I already tried helping you once and you didn't want it. You're in that situation because you chose to be). When I gently suggested to Gregorio that it often takes women several attempts to leave an abusive relationship, he responded, "*Ah, yo no sé, ya no es mi problema. Yo quise ayudarla y no ha querido. Que se joda*" (Eh, I don't know, but it's not my problem anymore. I tried to help her, and she didn't want it. She can fuck off).

Iris, a woman in her early 40s who experienced violence from her husband when they were younger, explained to me why she thought her siblings did not intervene more despite knowing about the violence. She believes that her siblings did not intervene because they knew she was not going to leave her husband and that their involvement would create a risk for them without resolving any of her problems. She told me, "*Tu familia te conoce y sabe que cosa estás capaz – o no – de hacer*" (Your family knows you and knows what you are capable – or not – of doing).

Informal help is regularly denied, subtly or directly, to *mujeres abusadas.* When *mujeres abusadas* are denied informal help, they become even more reluctant to seek informal or formal help elsewhere. *Mujeres abusadas*, as they explained why they did not seek formal services for intimate partner violence, regularly told me, "*Si mi propia madre/hermana/amiga no me quiere ayudar, ¿qué puedo esperar de un desconocido*?" (If my own mother/sister/friend won't help me, how can I expect a stranger to help me?). This fear, coupled with the common knowledge that formal services – even when provided – are often inadequate or harmful in other ways, further demotivates *mujeres abusadas* from seeking formal help.

### *2.3.9 Seeking Formal Help*

If *mujeres abusadas* feel that the violence is so severe that they cannot manage it 'in private' and they have the support of an informal helper (often a friend or sister), they will seek formal supportive services. *El qué dirán*, however, hinders new state initiatives designed to formally serve *mujeres abusadas* and reduce violence. Formal service providers – like police officers, social workers, psychologists, doctors and nurses, lawyers and prosecutors, and judges – who are gatekeepers to services and resources, also figure in these local social and kinship networks and participate in gossip and victim-blaming. Service providers are raised, socialized, and formally educated in this same social context and they continue living as part of it in their personal and professional lives. Most service providers do not receive adequate professional training on intimate partner violence to challenge normative colloquial ideas. Formal service providers often repeat the same types of victim-blaming and discrimination that one hears in informal spaces. Service providers regularly offer or deny support based on victims' and abusers' positionalities in socio-political networks, and some ask victims and abusers for bribes to tip the scales.

In the town of Lambayeque, formal service providers are often not trusted, but there are also not any viable formal alternatives such as feminist NGOs or grassroots organizations offering support to *mujeres abusadas*. The women I worked with are very critical and suspicious of formal service providers, and many do not trust them to treat *mujeres abusadas* well or to maintain confidentiality. Ironically, the *mujeres abusadas* who most need public services are also the most likely to be denied them due to discrimination and corruption. Women and men in Lambayeque repeatedly told me that people will receive services if the service provider personally knows them or they have *conocidos* (inside or well-connected contacts), are *de una*

*buena familia* (from a good family), *si tiene un apellido conocido* (if they have a well-known surname), or if they are economically or politically powerful. Paradoxically, the women with the most socio-economic power and the most access to formal services are also the most likely to never access them due to the embarrassment it would cause them and their family to be airing their problems so publicly. People with the economic resources to resolve family violence through private lawyers usually choose to do so to avoid *el qué dirán*.

The Peruvian National Police (PNP) are often the first point of service provision for victims of violence. *Mujeres abusadas* in Lambayeque are reluctant to involve the police for a number of reasons, but corruption and the abuse of power were among the top reasons. Flor, a women whose husband kicked her in the stomach when she was seven months pregnant, was told that if she wanted to file a police report that she would have to bring in 1000 sheets of printer paper because they did not have any paper at the police station to take a report. When she slyly responded by telling them that she would call her uncle – a higher-up in the police force who she mentioned by his title and full name – and ask him to bring her the paper, the officer's story quickly changed and suddenly he found all the office supplies he needed.

Service providers sometimes protect and defend abusive men based on their personal relationships. Because Lambayeque is a close-knit town, it is not uncommon for the abusive husband to be a distant family member, *de barrio* (from the neighborhood), or is *promo* (from the same graduating class) with the police officers taking reports. Far too frequently, police will refuse to take or file the report, or the report gets intentionally "lost" after it is filed.

In cases where abusive men do not have personal connections, they will often resort to bribes. Because men work outside the home more frequently than women, they are more likely to have money or to be able to borrow money with which to bribe police officers, prosecutors,

etc. Generally speaking, corruption and nepotism are common in Lambayeque and, as I was told by many people, "*Las leyes aquí favorecen al que tiene mas dinero y poder*" (The laws here favor whoever has the most money and power).

Valeria recounted to me the time her son called the police as she was being severely beaten by her husband, but the police told her son that they did not have gas for their truck. The police said that when his father calmed down a little, he and his mother should bring him to the police station in a moto-taxi.

Another *mujer abusada*, Felicia, has been stabbed by two different partners. Her ex-husband stabbed her, stole all of her saved money while her family took her to the hospital, and then hid from the cops who made no effort to find him. Felicia told me, reflecting on the incident, "*No sabíamos de leyes. No teníamos ni un conocido. Pero él era de la familia [un apellido conocido]. Él tenía conocidos*" ([My family] wasn't familiar with the laws. We did not have one personal contact [in the police]. But [my ex-husband] was from the [a well-known surname] family. He knew people). When her next partner also stabbed her, and she stumbled out into the street, bleeding, no moto-taxi would stop to take her to the hospital because the moto-taxi drivers who passed by were afraid of "getting involved." Felicia's partner's family paid off the police and he got off with a small fine, though she was never paid any restitution.

Because police officers who take reports are supposed to refer *mujeres abusadas* to services, their unwillingness to file reports often becomes a stopping point for other formal help-seeking. Unfortunately, even when they do seek services elsewhere, *mujeres abusadas*' experiences with other types of service providers like social workers, psychologists, and medical providers are not much better. *Mujeres abusadas* described to me how they were blamed for the violence by formal service providers who echoed the same types of things they had heard from

family and friends. Formal service providers often minimize the violence and encourage the *mujer abusada* to stay in the relationship, especially if she is economically dependent on her husband (as most women in Lambayeque are) and if they have children (as most do).

Like police officers who get angry if *mujeres abusadas* later withdraw a police report, social workers and psychologists often grow frustrated, blaming and sometimes belittling *mujeres abusadas* for not following through on formal procedures, even when there are economic barriers causing the woman to do so. Dolores, who had 4 children under the age of 5 when she tried to separate from her violent husband was yelled at by a social worker for not following up on the child-support paperwork she had started. She explained to me, crying as she remembered, that she needed a notarized copy of each of her children's birth certificates, which was going to cost 8 soles each (a total of around $9 US, at the time). But the lines are long to get copies of birth certificates and the first time she went, the clerk was on vacation for the entire month of February – she had lost an entire day's wages only to find out she would have to try again in several weeks. She never went back. She sobbed, begging me to understand that it was not because she did not care about her children – as the social worker had accused her – but that 32 *soles* was a lot of money, and she was already struggling to feed her children, and she simply could not miss another day of work.

Hearing about the bad experiences of other *mujeres abusadas* with service providers discourages other women from seeking services. Several *mujeres abusadas* told me that when they were considering going to the police station or the government-run Women's Emergency Center for help that other women would tell them "*Ahí no te hacen caso"* (They won't help you there). Other women explained their decision to not seek help from the police or the Women's Emergency Center telling me, "*¿Para qué ir si me van a tratar mal? No me van a ayudar*" (Why

go if they're going to treat me badly? They're not going to help me). When I asked Lucía, the woman whose sister had been disappeared, why she thinks women in Lambayeque do not seek help for violence more often, she responded matter-of-factly, "*Mira lo que pasó con mi hermana, pues. Saben que no van a hacer nada las autoridades*" (Look at what happened to my sister. [*Mujeres abusadas*] know that the authorities are not going to do anything [to protect them]).

*Mujeres abusadas* also explained that available services do not align with or meet their most pressing needs. I was told that *mujeres abusadas* often do not follow through on formal processes because they are seen as a waste of time and money. Even if *mujeres abusadas* are given protection orders or child support orders, they are weakly enforced if enforced at all. Psychological counseling was also seen as ineffective and a waste of time by many *mujeres abusadas*. Sara poignantly told me, "*La ayuda psicológica solo te ayuda en el momento, pero no te cambia tu realidad*" (Psychological help only helps you in the moment, but it doesn't change your reality).

Because of these entangled social barriers to seeking informal and formal help, violence often continues unchecked, though *mujeres abusadas* strategize to avoid and minimize violence in their day-to-day lives. Some *mujeres abusadas* never directly seek informal or formal help. This strategy of minimizing violence, though, requires the *mujer abusada* to assume the burden of protecting the reputation of her abuser.

In the universe of social and material fears cultivated by *el qué dirán*, new forms of violence emerge: the (real or imagined) denial of help/care and help/care that does harm. Many *mujeres abusadas* express a lack of hope, and an expectation of suffering becomes a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy in their lives. Many *mujeres abusadas* told me that no matter what women do they are criticized. Some common responses given when I asked *mujeres abusadas* why they do

not ask for help were: "*¿Pa qué*? (What for?) and "*Una como mujer, tenemos que sufrir*" (As a woman, we have to suffer). Never asking for help guarantees a lack of help. When should-be-helpers are absent or ineffective, not expecting anything from anyone is less of a disappointment than asking for support and being denied. Some *mujeres abusadas* do not ask for help because they are too afraid of facing the possibility that someone they love is unwilling to care about or for them. They know this is a possibility because they are already experiencing something similar with their husbands, but the thought of their parents or siblings – someone who is their "real" family – not caring about them is an even bigger and more painful betrayal. Sometimes *mujeres abusadas* will go out of their way to rationalize their family's behavior of not helping, citing not having space for extra people to live or money to care for them, which is also often true. Family can be willing or unwilling to help and family can be simultaneously able or unable to help. Any motivations for not helping are, for *mujeres abusadas*, painful, but rationalizing them as an economic barrier rather than a personal choice makes it slightly more tolerable.

Supportive friends try to counter the pressures of *el qué dirán*, telling *mujeres abusadas*, "*Tú no vives de lo que dice la gente"* (You don't live off of what others say). This is intended to give emotional support and strength to *mujeres abusadas*, but the reality is that *el qué dirán* has very real social and material impacts on women's lives. *El qué dirán* negatively impacts women's emotional wellbeing, it affects their social inclusion and often leads to increased isolation, and it limits their access to economic and material resources. Because of these complicated socio-economic conditions, lots of people stay in very unhappy relationships. Several *mujeres abusadas* repeated similar explanations of why they stay in unhappy and violent relationships: "*¿Y? ¿De qué voy a vivir? ¿De dónde van a comer mis hijos?* (And? What am I

going to live off of? From where are my kids going to eat?) and "*Me quedé porque* s*e junta el hambre con la necesidad*" (I stayed because hunger meets up with need).

### 2.4 Discussion and Conclusions

*El qué dirán* functions as a negative social regulator that reinforces and protects *machista* social norms that privilege men's reputations – which are closely tied to access to and control over economic and material resources – over women's safety and women's lives. Several women told me that no matter what women do, they are criticized: "*Si se queda, joden. Si se va, joden*" (If she stays with him, people bitch about it. If she leaves him people bitch about it). It may seem that I have painted a pretty bleak picture, and in fact lots of *mujeres abusadas* expressed feelings of hopelessness in the face of intimate partner violence. Despite the focus of this paper, Lambayeque is not some terrible place filled with terrible people. It is a complex place, with many micro-, mezzo-, and macro- factors that make life extremely challenging for some people. There are many happy things and happy stories about Lambayeque, but they are not the focus of this paper. *Lambayecanos* are generally jovial and very quick-witted, and they place a high value on family and other social relationships. Visitors to Lambayeque are consistently impressed by the warmth and generosity of *lambayecanos*, but like IPV most anywhere in the world, the violence is often hidden below the surface of the everyday. This paper is working to uncover what is not often openly talked about. These dynamics are socially silenced by abusers and others complicit in the abuse. The *mujeres abusdas* with whom I worked often told me that I was the first and only person to whom they had ever told their whole story.

Stories of IPV anywhere involve suffering – IPV is awful wherever it is happening. In Lambayeque, because of how general economic precarity creates need and the local socio-economic organization often creates the economic dependence of women on men, gossip and *el*

*qué dirán* as a form of social control becomes much more powerful than it may be in other places. Silencing – ironically through this form of speech aimed at silencing victims – makes violence difficult to prevent or to respond to. The *mujeres abusadas* who participated in my research engaged in a decolonial practice of resistance (though they did not describe it these theoretical terms) by giving their *testimonios* (personal testimonies). *Testimonios* often engage in what Davalos (2008, p. 154) calls 'speaking secrets,' refusing "silences around sexuality, homophobia, domestic violence, and internalized oppression." Madsen (2015, p. 256) urges decolonial feminists to "attend to the brutal facts of violence against women and listen to these stories of suffering that we would prefer not to hear." Madsen (2015, p. 266) warns, however, of the danger of these *testimonios* being appropriated "by dominant gender paradigms and ideologies that "pre-script" such discourse," and argues that one must actively resist harmful and conservative male narratives that serve to minimize and normalize violence.

Sadly, hopelessness is normalized for many *mujeres abusadas* in many aspects of everyday life in Lambayeque. But this is only one small piece of a much larger picture, and even in this small piece there are glimmers of hope. *Mujeres abusadas* are not passive victims. Even when constrained by what can feel like impossible circumstances, they creatively find ways to resist and reduce violence in their everyday lives. My research found that *mujeres abusadas* are more likely to seek supportive services if they already have social and emotional support from friends and family, and if they have higher levels of formal education which facilitates economic independence. Feeling secure in support from social networks empowers women to seek all kinds of help and to demand their rights to public services be met. Feeling relatively safe and supported in their social networks empowers *mujeres abusadas* to seek all kinds of help. While *mujeres abusadas* sometimes do not have much hope for themselves, they have significant hopes

for their children and regularly explain and justify the sacrifices they make as efforts to make their children's lives better.

Much social work research on intimate partner violence focuses on developing best practices for interventions, but these do not have much impact if people will not access services due to fear, shame, or distrust, or because the best practices do not align with what *mujeres abusadas* really want and need. Peru, for instance, has passed several new laws on gender violence in the last few years, and has made some effort to expand and improve services to *mujeres abusadas* – primarily by co-locating *Centros De Emergencia Mujer* in police stations, but it is still too soon to really evaluate what effect this change may have. My research found that *mujeres abusadas* do want supportive services, but for them to access and benefit from these services in meaningful ways, the services need to meet *mujeres abusadas*' needs, and – perhaps most importantly – the service providers need to earn their trust.

## Chapter 3 *¿Los Terceros Salen Sobrando?* Are Third Parties Superfluous?: How the Sociocultural and the Structural Shape Help-Giving Relationships for Intimate Partner Violence in Lambayeque, Peru

Over 69% of women in Lambayeque, Peru self-report experiencing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in adulthood (INEI, 2013). Both the literature on help-seeking for IPV and this research have found that women seek both informal (e.g., friends, family, neighbors) and formal (professional service providers) support for IPV, but often appeal first to informal helpers like family, friends, and neighbors. M*ujeres abusadas* (local term: abused women) in Lambayeque, Peru regularly express frustration with informal help-givers' support, often classifying it as non-existent, insufficient, or ineffective.

This ethnographic study of helping relationships around IPV in Lambayeque asks: who are informal helpers and what are their relationships to *mujeres abusadas*? This research examines expectations of help and help-seeking/giving relationships by both *mujeres abusadas* and informal help-givers. It asks what kinds of help are commonly asked for, and how these asks are made directly or indirectly. And, conversely, it asks how offers of help are made or denied, directly or indirectly. This research also explores how helping relationships around IPV are influenced by the interactions between individuals' intersectional social positionalities, and how these interacting positionalities shape and define socio-cultural expectations and power dynamics between the people involved – including *mujeres abusadas*, *abusivos* (local term: abusers), and potential helpers. Through decolonial feminist analysis of *lambayecano* social and structural power systems, this research examines what discourages and inhibits informal support for many

*mujeres abusadas* and what motivates and facilitates successful support in other instances. Finally, this research importantly asks what *mujeres abusadas* and informal helpers wish had been different – an important insight when considering how to reduce barriers to future informal help-giving for IPV.

This research's findings counter some common assumptions about IPV and informal help-giving. The literature on informal help-giving for IPV often assumes that potential informal-helpers are supportive of help-seeking and serve as a protective force against IPV. The literature also frequently assumes that the people who are "supposed" to help (e.g., family, friends) do. This research found, however, that in Lambayeque (and likely elsewhere) help-giving relationships are far more complex and shaped by multiple individual, socio-cultural, and material factors. The social positionalities of *mujeres abusadas* and of potential help-givers, the relationships between individuals' positionalities, and people's embeddedness in webs of relationality make IPV difficult to prevent and to respond to. What this research found is that potential informal help-givers navigate complex contexts and that their decision-making processes are shaped and constrained by a mix of micro-, mezzo-, and macro-factors. This research found that oftentimes people who are expected to offer help are unwilling or unable to help because of a series of complex circumstances that shape and constrain their choices. By critically examining help-seeking relationships, rather than relying on common assumptions about why informal helping for IPV often does or does not sufficiently happen, this research is able to illuminate many of the socially invisiblized barriers to help-giving. These barriers to informal help, coupled with dysfunctional formal helping systems that are frequently more harmful than helpful, exacerbate the negative impacts of IPV on *mujeres abusadas* and allow violence to continue.

## 3.1 Literature Review

### *3.1.1 Help-Seeking*

In this section I will interchangeably use the terms “victim” and “survivor” since that is what these literatures use, unless I am specifically talking about women in Lambayeque, in which case I will continue to use *mujeres abusadas*. Liang et al. (2005) offer a fairly comprehensive and promising theoretical framework for understanding IPV help-seeking. They identify three iterative (non-linear) stages of help-seeking: 1) defining the problem, 2) deciding to seek help, and 3) selecting a source of support. Importantly, they recognized that in defining the problem, one cannot rely on *a priori* "professional" assessments of the problem; for meaningful research, an investigation of local/individual conceptualizations must be considered. How is IPV being constructed/named by the people who are experiencing it? How are different formal and informal helpers defining problems, defining IPV? How are formal and informal helpers influencing victims' conceptualizations? The definition of IPV for an individual or group is not static – it is changing, circumstantial, and impacted by outside influences including people, institutions, and wider sociocultural norms (Liang et al., 2005).

When deciding to seek help, one must recognize something as a problem and determine that they either need or want outside help to resolve it. These decisions are always in flux, responding to changing circumstances. As with defining the problem itself, deciding whether or not to seek help is also impacted by outside people, institutions, and sociocultural norms and expectations, as well as the cost, accessibility, and the perceived appropriateness of seeking different types of help. Additionally, having the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) to know how/where to seek help is very important, and is often tied to socioeconomic class standing. Finally, understanding the selection of a source of support requires examining how the victim

comes to conceptualize the problem, as this will determine what kind of support to seek (Liang et al., 2005).

Victims' relational styles affect their decisions about what kinds of support to seek. Many victims will weigh the pros and cons of different support sources and will attempt to assess/predict the helpfulness of different support sources. Often, because of the material/practical demands (e.g., money, childcare, etc.) of formal help services, informal help is also needed. This is not a linear process – victims continuously re-evaluate their options and decisions as circumstances change and as options of support become available or are denied to them (Liang et al., 2005).

A review of the literature on help-seeking for Latinas (in the US and Latin America) for IPV finds that a common motivator for Latina women choosing to leave a violent relationship was feeling that they should not expose their children to the violence and that they could no longer protect their children from the violence (Alcalde, 2010; Parson, 2010; Salazar et al., 2012; Frías, 2013). Perhaps the most common motivator for seeking help, though, was an increase in the severity/frequency of physical violence and/or experiencing multiple types of violence – e.g., both physical and sexual violence (Parson, 2010; Flicker et al., 2011; Sabina et al., 2012; Salazar et al., 2012; Frías, 2013). Other studies noted that help-seeking was instigated by a cognitive shift to understanding the behavior happening inside of the relationship as violence (Salazar et al., 2012). Studies engaging a more structural analysis– like Sagot's impressive 10-country qualitative study – found that victims were most empowered to seek help by, "support from close persons; favorable economic or material conditions; good information, sometimes obtained from public campaigns; and the existence of appropriate services that respond to women's needs and expectations" (2005, p. 1313).

### *3.1.2 Informal Help-Seeking*

Liang et al. (2005) list the following as important examples of support offered informally by family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and others: emotional support, advice, encouragement, affirmation, material assistance, financial support, babysitting, and offering a place to stay. These types of support – and their importance to survivors – are echoed throughout the results of many studies. Seeking informal help was a common first step for the survivors included in these studies, as they sought help from friends and family before going to state or nonprofit agencies or only sought help from informal sources (West et al., 1998; Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006; Brabeck & Guzmán, 2008, 2009; Alcalde, 2010; Perrin et al., 2011; Sabina et al., 2012; Salazar et al., 2012; Frías, 2013; Kyriakakis, 2014; Postmus, 2015). These studies highlight the importance of informal help-seeking for victims of IPV. Kyriakakis argues convincingly that considering the important role of family, formal services need to take into account informal support and to try not to inadvertently destroy these networks when providing support guidance (e.g., moving away breaks up social networks). She suggests formal service providers seriously examine how to incorporate family/friends into "safety planning, trauma recovery, socialization, childcare procurement, educational and job-seeking plans" (2014, p. 1111).

It should be noted, however, that informal supports sometimes discourage both informal and formal help-seeking based on conservative ideas about marriage and ideas about IPV being “normal” (Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006; Brabeck & Guzmán, 2008; Alcalde, 2010; Kyriakakis, 2014; Silva-Martinez, 2015). Survivors who have poor relationships with their families in places where personal problems are not to be shared outside of family networks often feel that they cannot seek informal support (Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006; Salazar et al., 2012; Kyriakakis, 2014). Mixed findings on the helpfulness of families as informal support, however, should not be

particularly surprising – different families have different histories, traditions, expectations, and material conditions that influence their ability and willingness to be supportive of IPV survivors.

Researchers need to be careful to not assume that a valuing of family in Latino cultures means that Latino families are infallible. Additionally, though the literature refers to this as "informal" help-seeking, it is critical to examine the ways in which kin and social networks are "formalized" and have expectations of roles, relationships, and responsibilities. Calling this "informal" help does not mean that it is a free-for-all, unbounded by social norms, expectations, or moral imperatives. In fact, in some ways, expectations around informal help-seeking and giving are more rigid than in formal service relationships.

### *3.1.3 Formal Help-Seeking*

Liang et al. (2005) and others note that important examples of formal support include services from: police, criminal justice system, social service agencies, medical services, crisis hotlines, mental health services, clergy, IPV advocacy groups, and IPV shelters. Formal help-seeking often occurs in parallel to informal help-seeking or after informal strategies have failed (Alcalde, 2010). Survivors often found formal help-services most useful when they linked them to and facilitated additional services (Brabeck & Guzmán, 2008).

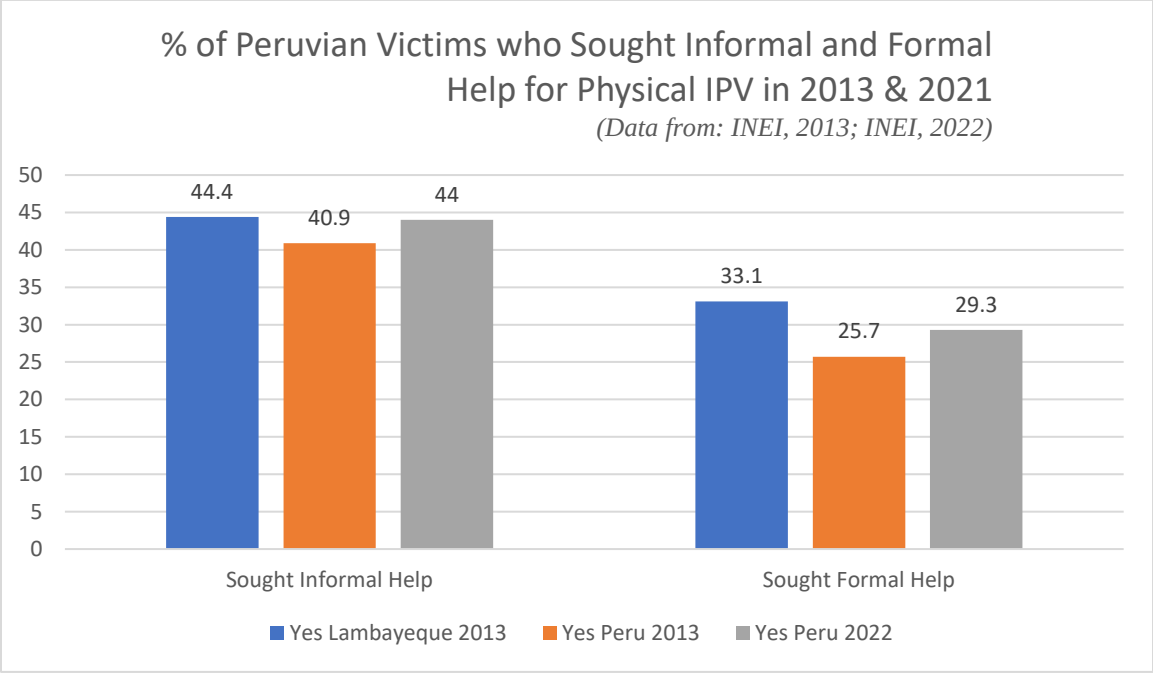
Barriers to formal help-seeking are most commonly associated with fear and shame. Survivors may be fearful of increased violence should the perpetrator find them out. They may also fear being discriminated against or treated poorly by institutions like the police, the criminal justice system, healthcare services, etc. (Sagot, 2005; Alcalde, 2010; Silva-Martinez, 2015). Survivors may also lack basic resources like cash, transportation, and personal identification documents required to access formal services (Brabeck & Guzmán, 2008; Alcalde, 2010; Mookerjee et al., 2015). Other survivors may be unable to take time off work to seek services

(Parson, 2010; Perrin et al., 2011). A lack of services that met the women's expectations, including expectations for privacy, or services that were perceived to be ineffectual were also barriers to formal help-seeking (Sagot, 2005; Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006; Alcalde, 2011; Flicker et al., 2011; Salazar et al., 2012; Frías, 2013; Kyriakakis, 2014; Silva-Martínez, 2015). In other cases, a lack of knowledge about available services and where to go for help limited victims' formal help-seeking (Moracco et al., 2005). Importantly, this research moves beyond asking, "what services did you use?" to also asking *mujeres abusadas*, "what supports do you wish were available to you?"

### *3.1.4 Findings On Help-Seeking from Peru's Government Data*

National studies by Peru's *Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática* (INEI, 2013; INEI, 2022) found that in 2021, 44% of Peruvian *mujeres abusadas* who experienced physical abuse in 2021 sought out informal help.[5] This was a slight increase from 40.9% in 2013. Only 29.3% of *mujeres abusadas* who experienced physical abuse in 2021 sought out formal help (see Figure 3), up from 25.7% in 2013. Unfortunately, the 2022 INEI report does not break down the statistics by department. The 2013 study, however, found that in the department of Lambayeque, these numbers were slightly higher, with 44.4% of *lambayecana mujeres abusadas* (*n*=199) seeking informal help, and 33.1% seeking formal help (INEI, 2013).

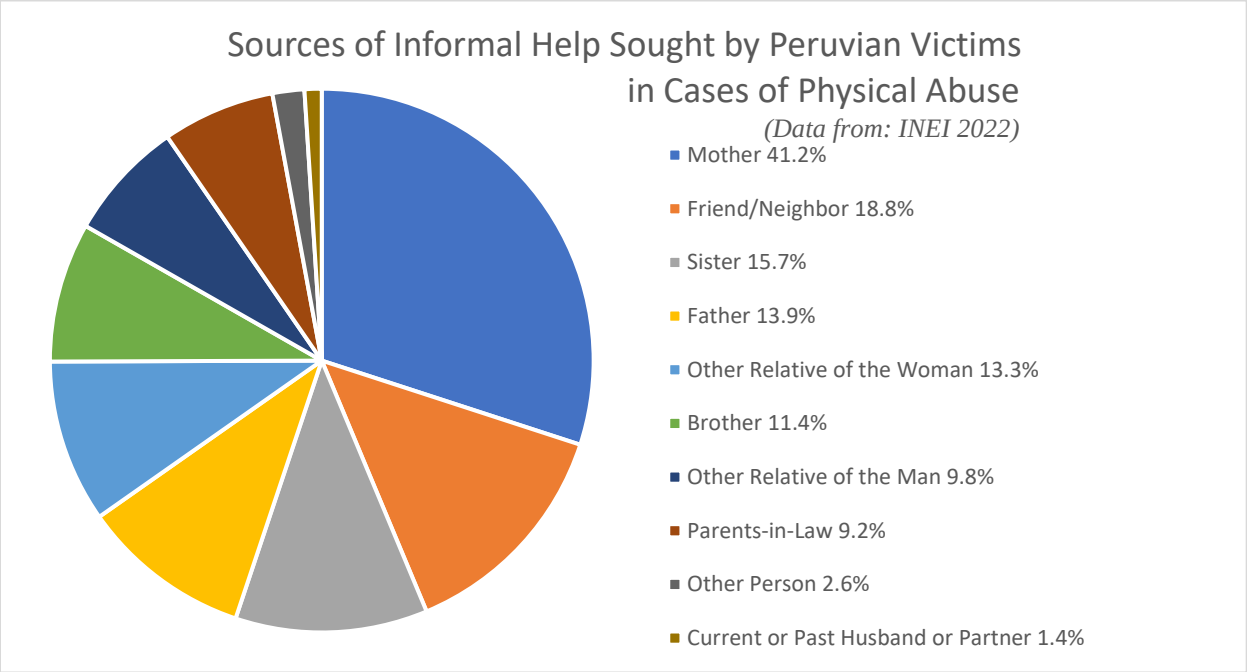
*Figure 3: Bar Graph of the Percentage of Peruvian Victims who Sought Informal and Formal Help for Physical IPV in 2013 & 2021*




[5] The n= for Peruvian women seeking help is not defined in the 2022 INEI report.

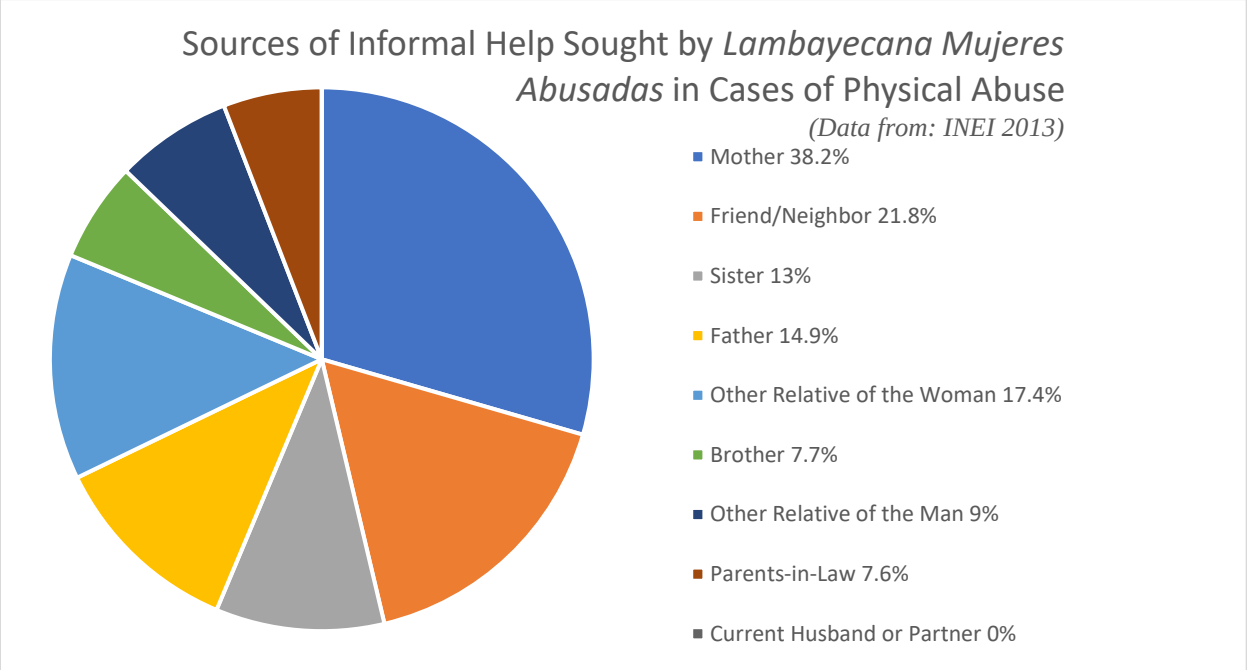
Of the 44% of *mujeres abusadas* experiencing physical violence in 2021 who sought out informal help, the sources of support included: their mothers (41.2%), a friend or neighbor (18.8%), a sister (15.7%), their father (13.9%), another family member of the *mujer abusada* (13.3%), a brother (11.4%), another family member of the *abusivo* (abuser) (9.8%), the parents of the *abusivo* (9.2%), another person (2.6%), or their current or previous partner (1.4%) (see Figure 4).

*Figure 4: Pie Chart of Where Peruvian IPV Victims Sought Informal Help in Cases of Physical Abuse in 2021*



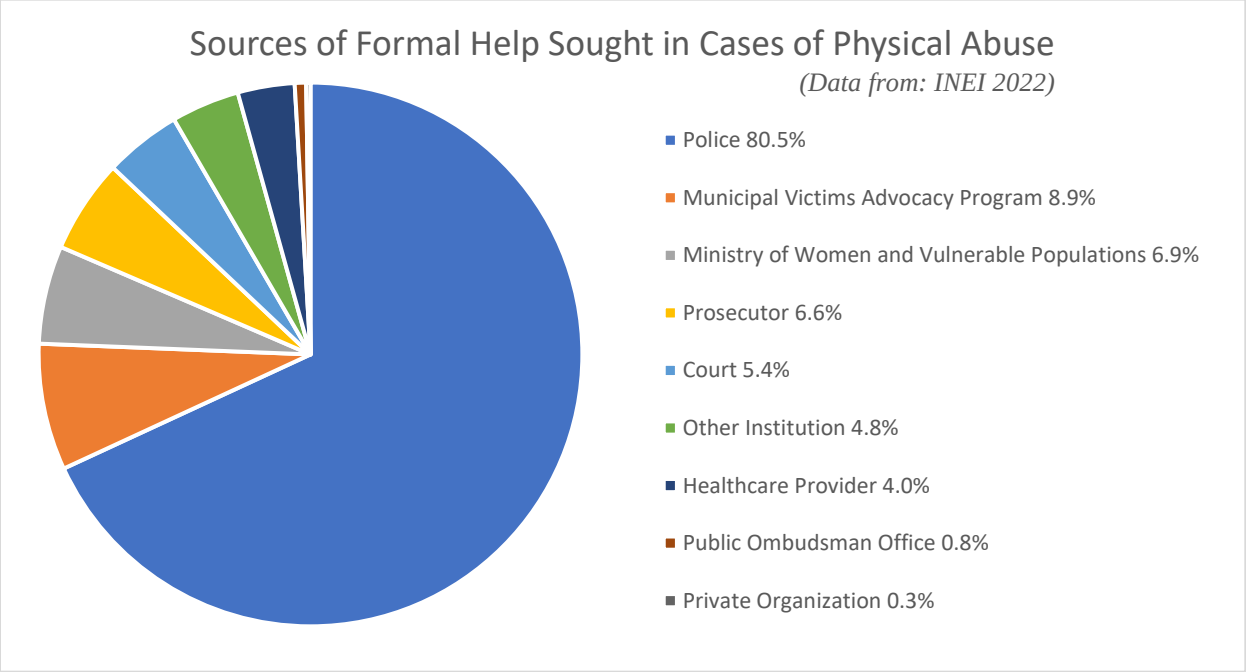
Results were similar for *lambayecana mujeres abusadas* in 2013. Of the 44.4% of *lambayecana mujeres abusadas* experiencing physical violence in 2013 who sought out informal help (*n*=88), the sources of support included: their mothers (38.2%), a friend or neighbor (21.8%), a sister (13%), their father (14.9%), another family member of the *mujer abusada* (17.4%), a brother (7.7%), another family member of the *abusivo* (abuser) (9%), the parents of the *abusivo* (7.6%), or their current or previous partner (0%) (see Figure 5).

*Figure 5: Pie Chart of Where Lambayecana Mujeres Abusadas Sought Informal Help in Cases of Physical Abuse in 2013*



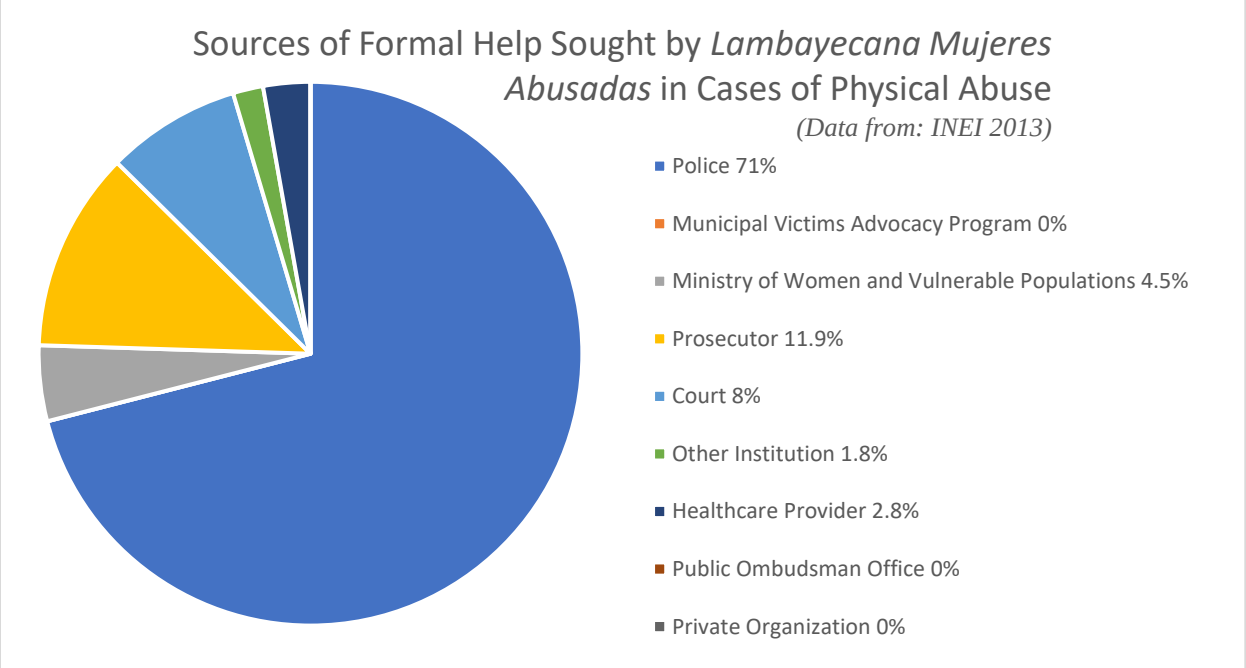
Of the 29.3% of Peruvian victims of IPV who sought out formal help for physical violence in 2021, 80.5% went to the police, 8.9% went to DEMUNA (a municipal level victims advocacy program), 6.9% went to a MIMP program like a *Centro de Emergencia Mujer* (CEM – Women's Emergency Center), 6.6% went to the prosecutor's office, 5.4% went directly to a court, 4.8% went to an "other" institution, 4% went to a healthcare provider, 0.8% went to the Public Ombudsman Office, and 0.3% went to a private organization (see Figure 6) (INEI, 2022). These numbers reflect the low numbers of available private IPV programs and the dependence of most *mujeres abusadas* on public services.

*Figure 6: Pie Chart of Where Peruvian IPV Victims Sought Formal Help in Cases of Physical Abuse in 2021*



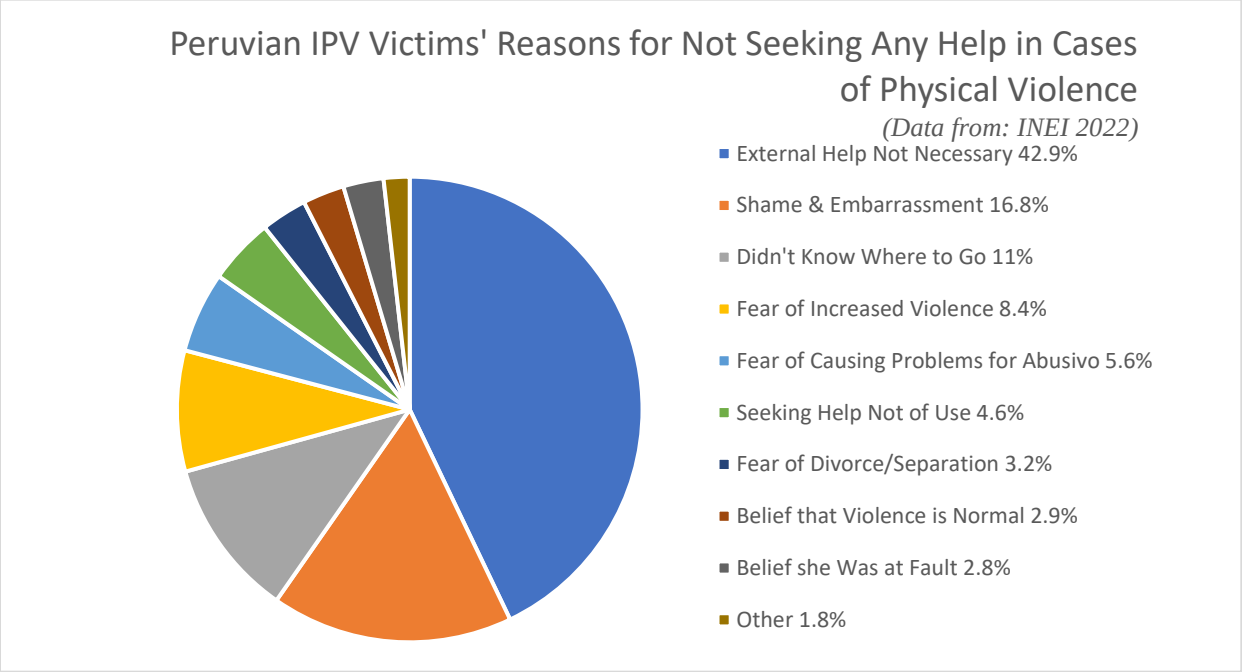
Of the 33.1% of *lambayecana mujeres abusadas* who sought out formal help for physical violence in 2013 (*n*=46), 71% went to the police, 0% went to DEMUNA (a municipal level victims advocacy program), 4.5% went to a MIMP program like a *Centro de Emergencia Mujer* (CEM – Women's Emergency Center), 11.9% went to the prosecutor's office, 8% went directly to a court, 1.8% went to an "other" institution, 2.8% went to a healthcare provider, 0% went to the Public Ombudsman Office, and 0% went to a private organization (see Figure 7) (INEI, 2013). Like the nationwide statistics, these numbers reflect the low numbers of available private IPV programs and the dependence of most *mujeres abusadas* on public services, and also reflect the limited number of some public services in more rural areas.

*Figure 7: Pie Chart of Where Lambayecana Mujeres Abusadas Sought Formal Help in Cases of Physical Abuse in 2013*



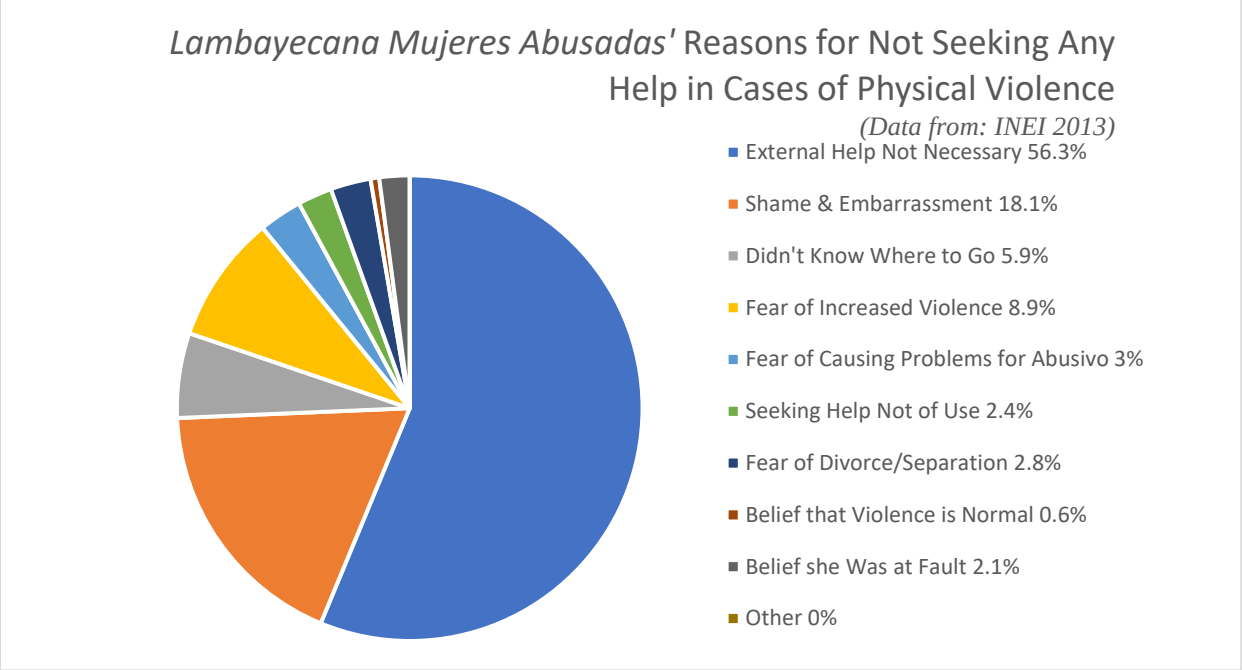
This same study (INEI, 2022) asked the Peruvian *mujeres abusadas* who had been physically abused but who had not sought any kind of help what their reasoning was for not seeking help. The reasons given included: external help was not necessary (42.9%), shame and embarrassment (16.8%), did not know where to go (11%), fear of increased violence by *abusivo* towards her or her children (8.4%), fear of causing problems for the *abusivo* (5.6%), feeling that seeking help would not be of any use (4.6%), fear of divorce or separation (3.2%), belief that violence is a normal thing that happens in life (2.9%), belief that she was at fault (2.8%), other reasons (1.8%) (see Figure 8).

*Figure 8: Pie Chart of Reasons Peruvian IPV Victims Gave for Not Seeking Any Help in Cases of Physical Violence*



The 2013 study (INEI, 2013) also asked *lambayecana mujeres abusadas* who had been physically abused but who had not sought any kind of help (*n*=133) what their reasoning was for not seeking help. The reasons given included: external help was not necessary (56.3%), shame and embarrassment (18.1%), did not know where to go (5.9%), fear of increased violence by *abusivo* towards her or her children (8.9%), fear of causing problems for the *abusivo* (3%), feeling that seeking help would not be of any use (2.4%), fear of divorce or separation (2.8%), belief that violence is a normal thing that happens in life (0.6%), belief that she was at fault (2.1%), other reasons (0%) (see Figure 9).

*Figure 9: Pie Chart of Reasons Lambayecana Mujeres Abusadas Gave for Not Seeking Any Help in Cases of Physical Violence*




Because the INEI (2013, 2022) studies were conducted using data collected from police reports and case files collected by CEMs, and data from the prosecutors' offices through the Peruvian Public Ministry, we can safely assume that while these data show some important patterns, they are not reflective of the complete lived experiences of all *mujeres abusadas* –

especially when considering how many *mujeres abusadas* never engage formal support systems. Importantly, these studies have small sample numbers and did not allow, for example, for *mujeres abusadas* to give more than one reason for not seeking help.

### *3.1.5 Informal Help-Giving*

How potential informal help-givers understand what IPV is and what they consider to be violent or non-violent behaviors (and/or unacceptable and acceptable behaviors) impacts if, when, how, and why people respond to violence (Minto et. al., 2022). One major area of interest in research on help-giving is an attributional analysis of blame for intimate partner violence, examining how and to whom bystanders and potential help-givers attribute blame for the violence and how that attribution influences bystander intervention (e.g., Witte et. al, 2006; Sullivan et. al., 2010; Stewart et. al., 2012; Eigenberg & Policastro, 2016; Cinquegrana et. al., 2017; Parker et. al., 2020; Pagliaro et. al., 2021; Dyer et. al., 2022; Wijaya et. al., 2022; Hall et. al., 2023). Perceptions of blame can shape if, how, and when potential help-givers are willing to intervene in some way. Observers of violence make decisions about who is to blame for violence based on a variety of factors and circumstances, including the demeanor of the victim prior to the violent act (Witte et. al., 2006); perceptions about certain qualities of the victim and/or the aggressor (Witte et. al., 2006; Hall et. al., 2023); the severity of the violence (Witte et. al., 2006); the sex/genders of the bystander, the victim, and the aggressor (Witte et. al., 2006; Stewart et. al., 2012); ideas about the morality of the actions of the victim and aggressor leading up to the violent act (Cinquegrana et. al., 2017; Pagliaro et. al., 2021) etc. Others have examined the role of labels (e.g., victims vs. survivors vs. battered women) in shaping the perception of women experiencing intimate partner violence (Romero-Sánchez et. al., 2021).

Much of the current literature on help-giving explores potential help-givers' anticipated behaviors based on hypothetical scenarios (Waterman et. al., 2021). Mead and Kelty (2021), for instance, used a fictional vignette to evaluate the impact of friendship and ingroup bias on attribution of blame and social rejection of the perpetrator of IPV. Leon et. al. (2022) used unique vignettes to evaluate whether the hypothetical bystander would report the instance of IPV and to identify characteristics of the bystanders and the vignettes themselves that influenced reporting. Gracia et. al. (2009) used hypothetical scenarios to evaluate the impact of perceived severity and personal responsibility on bystanders' willingness to intervene.

In their studies of disclosure recipients' perceptions for IPV (Edwards & Dardis, 2020) dating and sexual violence (DSV) (Mauer et. al., 2022) found that negative social reactions to the victims' disclosures led to less empathy and more feelings of victim-blame, feeling burdened by the disclosure, and feelings of confusion or ineffectiveness from the recipient of the disclosure. Disclosure recipients who had more positive social reactions were more empathetic to the victim, were less likely to blame the victim or find the disclosure burdensome, and had fewer feelings of confusion or ineffectiveness (Mauer et. al., 2022). Disclosure recipients who had a history of IPV or DSV victimization were more empathetic to the victim (Edwards & Dardis, 2020; Mauer et. al., 2022). Being a woman and greater frequency of IPV victimization by the victim or by the disclosure recipient, a closer relationship with the victim and a less-close relationship with the perpetrator all led to more positive reactions (Edwards & Dardis, 2020). Men and people with post-traumatic stress symptoms were more likely to blame the victim or find the disclosures burdensome. Feelings of confusion and ineffectiveness were higher for those recipients experiencing depressive symptoms, those receiving the disclosure from a stranger or an acquaintance, and those who engaged in less frequent discussion about the violence (Edwards &

Dardis, 2020; Mauer et. al., 2022). Banyard et. al. (2010) examined the impact of disclosure of sexual assault on friends who are disclosure recipients finding that women recipients had more positive responses and fewer feelings of confusion or ineffectiveness than men, but women also reported higher levels of emotional distress as a result of the disclosure. McKenzie et. al. (2022), Gregory et. al. (2017), and Latta and Goodman (2011) also found that friends and other informal supporters often experience emotional distress and feelings of being burdened with an overwhelming responsibility for the wellbeing of their friends. Kamke et. al. (2023) found that in cases of disclosure of substance-involved sexual assault to informal recipients, negative reactions were most common, and family members were more likely than friends to have negative social reactions.

In their systematic review of the literature on informal helpers for IPV, Davies et. al., (2023) found that there are normative factors, individual factors, and situational factors that are associated with help-giving. Here, normative factors include social norms and beliefs about what others think is "right" and how others are actually behaving. Individual helping factors include individual beliefs about help-giving, which include self-efficacy, acceptability of IPV, social responsibility, and experiences of violence. Finally, situational factors include relationships between help-givers and help-seekers, the context in which the abuse occurs, attributions of responsibility, empathy, perceived risk, the survivor's readiness for change, and emotional responses to the violence. The authors acknowledge that a limitation of this study is that the review was limited to articles in English, with an over-representation of studies conducted in the United States. Additionally, only four of the articles (13% of those included in the review) considered actual help-giving behavior, rather than hypothetical intention.

Waterman et. al. (2021) encourage researchers to examine actual help-giving responses whenever possible. A few researchers have taken up this task, looking both at conceptual frameworks of understanding and actual actions taken. Rivera-Cuadrado (2021) conducted thirty in-depth interviews with people who received disclosures of sexual violence to develop a theoretical framework of how potential help-givers make sense of disclosures and evaluate the "worthiness" of the victim who is seeking help. These included: the relationship between help-seeker and help-giver and whether it seemed appropriate to ask for help in that context, ideas and stereotypes about gender, shifting ideas about need over time, and an evaluation of post-assault behavior and its alignment with ideas about manifesting trauma and recovery. Beeble et. al. (2008) conducted a telephone survey of help-givers' offers of support to victims of IPV, and found that women, younger people, those who supported criminal justice interventions for perpetrators of IPV, and people who perceived IPV as an issue in their communities were more likely to offer help. Emotional support was the most common, offered by 88% of helpers, followed by connection to formal support by 49%. Instrumental support was the least common, with only 15% of helpers offering the victim financial assistance, a place to stay, or otherwise helping them to leave the violent relationship. McKenzie et. al. (2022) conducted fifteen in-depth interviews with college students who were friends of IPV victims. They identified two main categories of help-giving – "taking action" to address the IPV and "being there" for the friend – that were rooted in helpers' perceptions of their role and notions of friendship.

Importantly, Liang et. al. (2005), Banyard et. al. (2010), Edwards and Dardis (2020), Mauer et. al. (2022), and McKenzie et. al. (2022) all suggest that programs that target improving perceptions of the victim, increasing empathy and effectiveness, and decreasing attitudes that support or accept IPV could help to reduce negative reactions and increase positive reactions to

disclosures of, which could improve informal help-giving for victims of violence. Informal help-givers can help victims reconceptualize IPV, can offer important support, and can serve as an important link to formal services (Liang et. al., 2005). Edwards and Dardis (2020) also highlight the importance of supporting potential-help givers in learning how to manage their difficult emotional responses when receiving disclosures of violence, as feelings of shock and fear are associated with both positive and negative responses to disclosures. Recognizing the importance of supporting informal help-givers, a group of researchers at the University of Bristol are developing a research project to "develop, produce and pilot a tailored intervention designed to meet the needs of informal supporters of DVA [domestic violence and abuse] survivors" (University of Bristol, 2019).

Most of the current help-seeking and help-giving literature examines these two aspects of the helping relationship separately. This research builds on the growing body of literature about help-seeking and help-giving for IPV by creating a space for *mujeres abusadas* and informal helpers to describe their help-seeking and help-giving decisions and experiences in-depth. This research interviewed both *mujeres abusadas* and potential informal helpers (e.g., family, friends) in their social networks, gathering multiple perspectives on expectations, asks, actions taken, and rationales for help-seeking and help-giving. Few studies have engaged the family and friends of survivors, and even fewer have engaged them in conjunction with the victim. This research engaged culturally relevant potential help-givers beyond just parents and friends, and included other extended kin and fictive kin, like grandparents and godparents (Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006). In this research, godparents, aunts and uncles, and extended cousins have played important in providing informal support to *mujeres abusadas* when more immediate family members were unable or unwilling to do so.

Liang et. al. (2005, p. 82) remind us that, "qualitative research and a client centered intervention approaches are needed to stretch our understanding beyond generic, professional conceptualizations of help-seeking—toward models that more accurately capture the diverse experiences of battered women in defining IPV, their decisions to seek help, and the types of help they choose." This research both troubles and expands the categories of informal and formal help-seeking. Through explorations of individual, familial, and social expectations at the micro-, mezzo-, and macro-levels and the examination of informal help-givers as well as those who deny help, this research sheds light on barriers that go unrecognized in the current literature as well as conceptual and practical expansions of what help is and the ways it can be given effectively or ineffectively.

## 3.2 Methods

### *3.2.1 Sample Description and Data Collection*

As part of my larger dissertation project, the data for this paper were collected in the town of Lambayeque, Peru – a densely populated town of around 55,000 people residing in an area of less than 3 square miles. The very nature of living in such close proximity, in addition to the many kinship and social connections that exist between residents, means that people have extensive knowledge of what is going on in other people's lives. In Lambayeque, everyone seemingly knows everyone, and close social connections in kinship and social networks are necessary for individuals' economic and social survival. For most, money and material resources are always precarious, and most people live *de mano a boca* (from hand to mouth) – meaning that the money never spends time in one's pocket or in a bank. Because material resources are so tight for many people in Lambayeque, there are strong expectations for reciprocity and mutual support between family members (e.g., siblings, parents, and children). These traditional forms

of mutual aid, however, are now increasingly coming into conflict with the shift towards a more individualistic, capitalist society.

Due to Peru's governmental centralization in the capital, Lima, and a few other large cities, Lambayeque has a limited institutional landscape. While there are a few governmental services in Lambayeque that purport to serve *mujeres abusadas*, in reality these services are insufficient and frequently ineffective. Lambayeque has no NGOs that respond to gender-based violence. This elevates the importance of and reliance on informal helpers in cases of IPV in Lambayeque.

The data collection related directly to this paper focused on the help-seeking experiences of *mujeres abusadas* and the help-giving experiences or potential informal helpers, along with some data collection focused on service relationships between *mujeres abusadas* and formal service providers. Like the larger dissertation project, the research questions, design, methods, and analysis of this paper were informed by anthropological methods and theory, feminist decolonial theory and practice, and social work informed social justice theory and practice. I conducted all data collection in Spanish. During twenty-four months of fieldwork in Lambayeque, I collected and analyzed various types of data which are summarized in Table 2:

*Table 2: Data Collection with Mujeres Abusadas and Informal Helpers*

| |
|---|
| **General Participant Observation:** Throughout all phases of research, I participated in and observed activities of everyday life in Lambayeque. I lived with two different multi-generational *lambayecana* families; participated in daily activities like cooking and eating meals and going to the market; read local newspapers, watched tv, and listened to the radio; and spent time in a variety of public and private social spaces. Throughout my fieldwork, I took detailed field notes which I used to write memos and develop contextual descriptions of *lambayecana* life. While most of these interactions were about other aspects of daily life (e.g., day-to-day survival, raising children, local politics, social gossip about others, pop culture, etc.), situations or conversations involving IPV and help-seeking/giving sometimes came up organically. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Targeted Participant Observation:** Throughout all phases of research, I spent extensive time with *mujeres abusadas*, their families, friends, neighbors, and other potential helpers in their homes and in a variety of social settings doing quotidian activities. When presented with the opportunity, I accompanied some *mujeres abusadas* as they were seeking formal IPV support services (e.g., at the police station, at the local *Centro de Emergencia Mujer*, etc.). Throughout fieldwork, I had complex interactions and informal conversations with many potential informal helpers (including *mujeres abusadas* who, importantly, all described situations in which they were potential help-givers to others) in a variety of settings and situations. In the third research phase (2017-19), I paid particular attention to potential informal helpers and help-giving relationships. | | |
| **Research Phases** | **Participants & Demographics** | **Methods, Research Activities, & Recruitment** |
| 2010 | ***n* =15 *mujeres abusadas***<br>Ages: 18-61 (1 in their teens, 3 in their 20s, 4 in their 30s, 4 in their 40s, 2 in their 50s, 1 in their 60s) | Life history interviews and participant observation.<br><br>Recruited: through personal contacts and personal introductions/snowball sampling. |
| | ***n* = 1 informal helper**<br>(1 man in his 30s; ex-husband and father of 2 interviewed *mujeres abusadas*) | Qualitative interview and participant observation with him and his family members while seeking formal services.<br><br>Recruited: through personal contacts. |
| 2015 | ***n* =14 *mujeres abusadas***<br>Ages: 23-66 (3 in their 20s, 2 in their 30s, 5 in their 40s, 2 in their 50s, 2 in their 60s) | Continued participant observation.<br><br>Recruited: from prior research participation (one woman died prior to 2015). |
| | ***n* = 1 informal helper**<br>(1 man in his 40s) | Continued participant observation.<br><br>Recruited: from prior research participation. |
| 2017-19 | ***n* = 16 *mujeres abusadas***:<br>9 new participants &<br>7 from prior phases<br><br>Ages: 23-58 (3 in their 20s, 3 in their 30s, 7 in their 40s, 3 in their 50s) | Life history interviews with new participants, follow-up interviews with continuing participants, life history calendars with all participants.<br><br>Recruited: from prior research participation, personal introductions/snowball sampling, and requests from *mujeres abusadas* who learned about my research from others and asked me to interview them. |
| | ***n* = 21 informal helpers**<br>20 new participants &<br>1 from prior phases<br>(5 men and 1 woman in their 20s, 2 men in their 30s, 7 men in their 40s, 4 men in their 50s, 2 men in their 60s, 1 man in his 70s) | Qualitative interviews with new participants, follow-up interviews with continuing participant, continued participant observation.<br><br>Recruited: from prior research participation, through personal contacts, and personal introductions/snowball sampling. |
| **Interview Participant Totals Across All Research Phases:**<br>***n* = 24 individual *mujeres abusadas***<br>***n* = 21 individual informal helpers (not including *mujeres abusadas* who were also helpers)** | | |

The research methods for this paper are very similar to those described in chapter 2 of this dissertation. Data for this paper were collected across all three phases of research (24 months total) and included general and targeted anthropological participant observation. The data used in this chapter draw heavily on semi-structured ethnographic with interviews with potential informal helpers (*n*=21) and semi-structured ethnographic interviews and life history calendars with *mujeres abuasadas* (*n*=24), who importantly shared their perspectives as both help-seekers and help-givers in different situations. My sample intentionally included some potential help-givers who had given help and others who had denied help, as well as *mujeres abusadas* who did and who did not seek help. When given the opportunity, I also accompanied *mujeres abusadas* while they engaged in formal and informal help-seeking. In addition to formal interviews, I had regular complex interactions and informal conversations about intimate partner violence, help-seeking, and help-giving with many *lambayecanos* in a variety of contexts.

### *3.2.2 Data Analysis*

The research questions for this paper emerged from the earlier research phases. Across all phases of fieldwork, I used iterative strategies to interpret data and to identify new questions that were then incorporated into the research. For this paper, I developed multi-level case studies (Yin, 2009), using multiple data sources (e.g., interviews with *mujeres abusadas*, life history calendars, interviews with friends/family, observations with service providers, my general and targeted participant-observation fieldnotes, etc.), around individuals and potential help-givers to identify help-seeking and help-giving patterns and to triangulate (Denzen, 2011) recollections and interpretations of events.

I analyzed the data using grounded theory methods, including open and selective coding, accompanied by procedural and theoretical memoing, to identify and investigate emerging

themes that I then subjected to secondary and tertiary analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1999). These analytical methods allowed for what cultural anthropologist Geertz (1973) called a "thick description" of how help-seeking and help-giving relationships for IPV are lived, experienced, and navigated by *mujeres abusadas* and potential informal help-givers in Lambayeque. For the data analysis for this paper, I first drew on the case study data to write meticulous descriptions of all the examples of barriers and facilitators to informal and formal help-seeking that I observed and that were described to me by *mujeres abusadas* and other research participants. I did the same for the many examples of barriers and facilitators of informal help-giving that were described to me by potential informal helpers and *mujeres abusadas*, and that I observed. Next, I analyzed the barriers and facilitators, what people told me about them, and traced their root causes. It was during this analysis that I identified how barriers and facilitators to help-giving for IPV are deeply similar, but whether something becomes a barrier or facilitator is dependent on the contextual circumstances of the individuals involved. Through this analysis, I identified four larger descriptive categories of barriers and facilitators.

## 3.3 Results

### *3.3.1 Social Locations, Social Embeddedness, and Relative Positionalities in Lambayeque*

Intimate partner violence is a social phenomenon. Despite popular misconceptions that frame it as a simply a private matter between partners, IPV is deeply shaped by socio-cultural context and how IPV happens and is responded to is a social matter involving many actors. Likewise, help-seeking and help-giving are social phenomena. Understanding the social and relational factors that shape and constrain both IPV itself as well as help-giving is a critical component to understanding the barriers and facilitators to help-giving in Lambayeque (or

anywhere). An intersectional analysis of social positionalities (Bograd, 2005; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Boesten, 2010; Grzanka, 2014; Muñoz et al., 2020) of *mujeres abusadas*, *abusivos*, and help-givers in Lambayeque along with a close analysis of *lambayecano* social dynamics and how the particularities of embeddedness in local kin and social networks shapes and constrains people's options for help-seeking and help-giving is key to understanding why effective help-giving is so challenging. Equally important is an understanding and analysis of the social structures and material constraints that shape people's lives in both obvious and more subtle ways. There is no one-size-fits-all formula. Individuals' identities and the broader social and structural contexts greatly influence what becomes a barrier to or facilitator of help-seeking and help-giving. While the data here are particular to Lambayeque, the intersectional analytic strategy and simultaneous attention to the micro-, mezzo-, and macro-systems at play could be applied to any socio-cultural context.

Lambayeque is a small town on Peru's northern coast. Day-to-day life in Lambayeque, for most people, is at least somewhat precarious. As is common throughout Peru, most people earn daily wages for their work and live *de mano a boca* (from hand to mouth) – meaning that the money one earns goes directly to basic necessities, like food, and does not spend time in peoples' pockets or in the bank. *Lambayecanos* are often scrambling to make ends meet and thus rely on embeddedness in traditional systems of reciprocity through kinship and other social networks to navigate survival. Though this is changing with younger generations, and poor women have always had to work, Lambayeque's traditional gendered ideal is that men work in wage labor and women in reproductive labor (all the labor necessary to keep a household and a family running). Because individualist capitalist values have been imposed without a significant

change in or need for social expectations of reciprocity, there is a constant conflict between these two systems and ideologies, which creates internal and inter-personal conflict for many people.

Furthermore, the precariousness of wage labor (both in terms of stability and pay) under this capitalist system makes the entire system's functioning highly dependent on ongoing reciprocity networks and the existence of a parallel informal economy. For example, people who work in formal jobs (e.g., in an office or factory) consume in the informal economy (e.g., buying at markets rather than grocery stores) because their low wages do not allow them to consume in the formal economy (Draper, 1985). Because of Lambayeque's general economic precarity, people share material resources like money, food, and housing, often resulting in extended families and multiple generations living together under one roof. Embeddedness in kinship and social networks is key to social and economic survival. Multiple generations frequently live under the same roof in tight quarters and sharing and expectations of reciprocity are both common and necessary for survival. Widespread need often creates competition for money and other resources, a situation that is exacerbated for women who are often financially dependent on men – fathers, brothers, partners, and sons – while being responsible for nearly all reproductive labor, including figuring out how to budget and spend the money their husbands' give them.

Extended family living together also shapes notions of privacy – rather than an individualized concept, privacy often takes a familial form. In Lambayeque, there is a strong social expectation to keep private issues private. Individuals and families care deeply about maintaining "good" reputations and avoiding embarrassment and secondhand embarrassment. The sentiment behind the common Latin American saying, *la ropa sucia se lava en casa* (dirty laundry gets washed at home, i.e., don't air your dirty laundry) is a strongly held principle in Lambayeque. In order to maintain good individual and family reputations, *lambayecanos* are

often careful what information they share openly and publicly. Fear of e*l que dirán* ("what people may say" a phrase that functions as a noun) is a strong social enforcer of the status quo in Lambayeque[6].

While intimate partner violence is broadly considered *algo malo* (something bad), it is also largely normalized and tacitly accepted as a normal part of how things are in many intimate relationships. Even when IPV is not accepted as normal, *lambayecanos* often make an effort (though are frequently unsuccessful) to keep the violence a secret. *Mujeres abusadas* are often encouraged to stay silent about the violence they are experiencing both because making the violence publicly known would make the family the subject of gossip and because there are often too many barriers to actually providing the *mujer abusada* with effective help. By encouraging silence, some potential informal help-givers avoid having to get involved in ways that are uncomfortable or impossible. While *lambayecanos* are known throughout Peru for being extremely friendly, outgoing, and generous – and they are all of these things – these same expectations of relationality and reciprocity create conflicting social expectations and pressures under strained economic and structural conditions. This mismatch of social expectations (community-based support and reciprocity) and material reality (individualist capitalism and artificial scarcity through an export-oriented economy) creates barriers to help-giving around IPV for informal help-givers.

Socially, who you are and who you know matters a lot in Lambayeque. Social connections are conduits offering access to power, resources, and an ease of accomplishing things. Social connections often determine whether one will be successful in bureaucratic processes or not, or in whose favor conflicts will be resolved. Because Lambayeque remains,

[6] The impacts of *el qué dirán* are explored in-depth in chapter 2 of this dissertation.

socially, “a small place,” family names may automatically include or preclude someone from certain situations or opportunities. Many *lambayecanos* – especially older people – seem to maintain a multi-generational mental genealogy and geography of the whole town. It is not uncommon to be asked if you are from the [Family Name] of ABC Street or of XYZ street, and then, after answering, be told in intricate detail all the ways this person knows your family members.

### *3.3.2 Intersectional Analysis of Social Locations of Mujeres Abusadas, Abusivos, and Helpers*

Figure 10, below, shows the interconnectedness of the many social positionalities – and their corresponding intersecting oppressions – that impact help-giving around IPV – either as a *mujer abusada* (abused woman), as an *abusivo* (abusive man), or as a helper. In instances of intimate partner violence, all of these social positionalities intersect individually for the *mujer abusada*, for the *abusivo*, and for potential helpers in important but distinct ways. Each individual’s race, ethnicity, nationality, age, socio-economic status, kinship and social ties, geographic location, religion, gender, and sexual orientation interact in complex relational ways within and between individuals. None of these are discrete categories, and Figure 3 is simply an attempt to help clarify the many entanglements. These blends of social positionalities also intersect in the complex relationships between these three (or more) actors – *mujer abusada*, *abusivo*, and help-giver – in critical ways that highlight the power differentials that are created by the ways in which individuals’ identities intersect differently. As Boesten (2014, p. 130) explains, "Importance should be attributed to the interaction between factors, peoples, and institutions that foment and normalize violence against women in all population groups but make some women more vulnerable than others because of historically developed structural violence. Social vectors of differentiation shape vulnerability."

*Figure 10: Intersectional Social Locations that Impact Occurrence of and Response to Intimate Partner Violence*


Importantly, social locations are not discrete categories and in lived experience they are deeply connected and inseparable, as is suggested by Figure 3. While there is not space here to examine each of these social locations and their relationalities in depth, a few key examples from my data in Lambayeque should illustrate the types of analysis that are necessary for deep understanding.

*Gender*: Cis-women and trans folks experience gender violence more frequently and more severely than cis-men, though it is important to note that cis-men can and do also experience IPV. In Lambayeque, organizations working with victims of IPV focus on protecting

cis women, as they are seen as more deserving of and in need of protection (as compared to trans women or cis or trans men). The majority of *abusivos* are cis-men, and this analysis will assume *abusivos* are men unless otherwise noted. When cis women act in violent ways, it is often in self-defense or as "punishment" for men's "bad behavior." For example, a few *mujeres abusadas* described hitting their husbands when they discovered infidelity or when their husbands came home very drunk. This violence is often physical or emotional, but rarely do women in Lambayeque have the material resources to make men dependent on them or the social power to control them in coercive ways.

Potential help-givers include both men and women, though the expectations for each are gendered in important ways. There is a socio-cultural idea and expectation that women should be both more interested in helping and better at helping. This is an extension of gendered roles about caregiving and nurturing. There is also an expectation of empathy between women. This, however, does not often hold up in real life experiences – other identities, especially relational identities – often trump gender solidarity. When women deny help to other women, there is much more disappointment from the *mujer abusada* than if a man helper denies a *mujer abusada* help. The unfulfilled expectation of gender solidarity often feels like a betrayal, even when the *mujer abusada* can track the logic driving the helper's behavior and loyalties. While men are socially expected to be "protectors" of women and girls, this mainly applies as mediated through social relations – fathers protect daughters, brothers protect sisters, sons protect mothers. Activist organization around IPV is one of the clearest examples of where gender solidarity (women helping women) is both preached and practiced. Activists I interviewed all had an intentional gender analysis of the causes and responses to IPV.

*Race and Ethnicity*: Race is a social construct. While it is often colloquially reified and treated as a biological absolute, race is the physical expression of phenotype that is categorized through historical, socio-cultural processes. In Lambayeque, *mujeres abusadas* are of all races, but white women and mestiza women with lighter skin tones are seen as both more deserving of and in more need of protection. Women with darker skin tones – perceived as *negras* (Black), *indias* (Indigenous), or darker-skinned *mestizas* are less likely to receive empathy, help, or protection in response to IPV. Similarly, men of all races act violently towards their partners, however bystanders are less likely to believe that white and men with lighter skin tones act violently towards their partners and are more likely to believe that men with darker skin tones act violently. When enacted by men with darker skin tones, IPV is frequently blamed on a "lack of education," *machismo*, poverty or a low socio-economic status, or their "culture".

White supremacist ideas serve as a strong barrier to help-giving (specifically in determining who is "deserving" of help), but in my research I did not find examples of positive race-solidarity. Racialized notions of who "tends to be violent" are closely intertwined with socio-economic class and geographic location of residence. *Mujeres abusadas* who have darker skin tones or who are being abused by men with darker skin tones are often treated poorly or are simply dismissed when seeking help. Both residents of Lambayeque and activists organizing around IPV employ intersectional analytical frameworks that identify race as an important influence on how negatively people are treated in society, including by formal service providers like police, doctors, etc.

The cultural identity or perceived cultural identity of individuals may or may not align with their perceived race, and race and ethnicity are often entangled in popular discourse. Women who are perceived to indigenous (often based on phenotypical characteristics) are

thought to be more likely targets of violence for "cultural" reasons. It is widely believed by non-Indigenous folks in Peru that violence is an inherent part of Indigenous/Andean cultures and is just "their nature." Importantly, this ethnocentric belief is not supported by the anthropological record (e.g., Poole, 1994; Alcalde, 2010; Theidon, 2013; Boesten, 2014). Nonetheless, Indigenous women are seen as both victims of their culture as well as victims of violence. Men of all ethnicities act violently towards their partners, but discriminatory racist and ethnocentric ideas about *indios* and *negros* as racialized cultural groups that are inherently violent are common in Peru. A common Peruvian refrain is *Amor serrano: más me pegues, más te quiero* (Andean love: the more you hit me, the more I love you). This racist and ethnocentric caricature equates Andean cultures with violence and savagery, as opposed to the imagined post-colonial "modern" culture that obfuscates and justifies its own deep-rooted violences in lingering colonial ideologies of "saving" the so-called savages from themselves as part of Peru's modernizing project. Colloquial phrases like *se puso indio* (he became an Indian) or *como negro* (like a Black man) are commonly and unironically used by Peruvians to describe the violent behaviors of non-Indigenous and non-Black men. As with race, stereotypes and perceptions held by potential help-givers about the *mujeres abusadas'* and the *abusivos'* ethnicities impact what kinds of violence they dismiss as normal or inevitable, and when they see a more urgent or justified need to intervene. Potential helpers, including formal service providers, often draw on these same racialized and racist tropes that circulate among the general population.

### *3.3.3 Mujeres Abusadas' Help-Seeking from Informal Helpers for IPV*

*Mujeres abusadas* engage in complex, strategic decision-making around help-seeking for IPV. Generally, the approach to help-seeking could be described as harm-reductionist. Though the *mujeres abusadas* I interviewed did not describe it in those terms, their strategies included

little expectation of big changes, and rather focused on making the situation less bad than it was. Many women did not want to leave their relationship – they just wanted the violence to stop (or at least be reduced to a more tolerable level). But it is also challenging for many women in Lambayeque to envision a "successful" life without a husband due to the social and material reality of *lambayecana* life. Worrying about how they would financially support themselves while also performing all of the household's reproductive labor was the biggest and most frequent obstacle to leaving an abusive relationship that *mujeres abusadas* reported to me. Many women said things like, *Y si me voy, ¿quién le va a dar a mis hijos?* (And if I leave, who is going to give [money] to my children?). Child support, whether given informally or formally mandated – and often not given at all, is rarely enough to cover the child's expenses, let alone a household's expenses.

*Mujeres abusadas* strategically consider individuals, networks of people, and the broader context when making decisions about help-seeking. They described to me several types of help and support that they wanted and needed, which included: informational, relational, and material supports. *Mujeres abusadas* specifically mentioned wanting emotional support for themselves, support intervening with the *abusivo*, accompaniment to and information about formal services, material support (money, etc.), residential support (housing, etc.), and social support (childcare, finding a job, networking for social-connections, and managing gossip and social power, etc.).

Informal helpers include family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and acquaintances who are not trained to provide formal support or services to victims of IPV. In Lambayeque, except for in instances of extreme physical violence, *mujeres abusadas* usually seek informal help. *Mujeres abusadas* regularly described first trying to hide IPV from others. Most of the *mujeres abusadas* I worked with described trying to hide the violence from family members – especially

from their children. But, because many homes are crowded and house extended families, hiding violence is often difficult. *Mujeres abusadas* tell their children to run outside or to hide under a bed when violence escalates. When younger children do try to intervene in the violence, *mujeres abusadas* strongly discourage – often minimizing what is happening and reassuring the children, even as the violence unfolds – to attempt to protect the children mentally and physically.

When *mujeres abusadas* decide to seek help, it is usually because the violence has reached a degree of severity and/or frequency that they consider intolerable. They often appeal first to those who live in their homes – parents, siblings, in-laws, and sometimes older children – especially older sons, once they are big enough to physically confront their fathers. Valeria, for instance, relied heavily on her two teenaged sons to protect her against her husband's attacks. While under ideal circumstances she would not have wanted her sons to know about the violence or get involved, she felt that their fighting their father to keep him from abusing their mother was the only viable path to stopping the physical violence. Because in-house relatives likely already know about the violence, there is often less initial embarrassment for *mujeres abusadas* when asking for help. In-home help-seeking is generally targeted at stopping, or at least lessening, violence. *Mujeres abusadas* know that if everyone is living together, family likely will not be able to offer alternative places to stay, for example, so the primary focus is on reducing harm within the relationship.

In addition to logistical calculations, *mujeres abusadas* also make careful assessments of family members' attitudes and relative positions of power, knowing that household power dynamics, patriarchal ideologies, and normalized ideas about IPV can result in family members refusing to help. In some cases, family members respond to requests for help by instead encouraging and justifying the violence – often as punishment for what they see as the woman

not “acting right” or when they are in direct competition for material resources. In María’s case, her mother-in-law actively provoked and escalated violence, telling her son in one horrific fight, “*Ya, mátala ya pues!”* (Come on, go ahead and kill her!).

*Mujeres abusadas* also appeal to extended family that reside elsewhere for help, though the tactics are twofold. They appeal to the *abusivo’s* family – often his parents – to try to convince them to intervene and convince their son to stop using violence, in an attempt to preserve the relationship. When appealing to their own family members, however, the most common asks from *mujeres abusadas* are for material supports like money and shelter – often with the (sometimes reluctant) intention of leaving the relationship. Even with their own families, these are not easy asks.

The *mujeres abusadas* who shared their stories with me, regularly described learning in childhood that gendered forms of physical, sexual, emotional, and economic violence is a normal – though undesirable – part of intimate relationships. This is a social lesson that girls and women are taught repeatedly and in multiple ways throughout their lifetimes. A lifetime of socialization into pervasive gendered violence in public and private spaces teaches women that violence is to be expected. They are also taught in more subtle ways through socialization processes to *not* expect help in responding to or resisting gendered violence. Girls and women do not necessarily need to have directly experienced these violences to internalize these social lessons. While girls may or may not be exposed to violence in their childhood homes, in public spaces in Lambayeque gendered violences permeate virtually every social scene and from a young age, girls hear and witness them. Girls become targets of street harassment (catcalling) from a young age and are often targeted on their way to and from school. A 2019 study found that a majority of girls are pressured by educational institutions to wear skirts to school, which the girls feel results

in increased sexual harassment both in and outside of school and negatively impacts girls' ability to participate fully and be treated equally in the school setting (Yllanes Nauca, 2019).

The popular media in Peru thrives on scandal and hyper-sexualization. Newspaper stands on street corners are papered with popular dailies that feature *calatas* (pictures of naked or nearly naked women) and sensationalized news stories. As the problem of feminicide in Peru has garnered more public attention over the last decade – in large part due to feminist activists forcing the topic to be addressed – these *periódicos chicha* (chicha newspapers, dailies that are directed at the popular masses) describe murders of women in lurid detail, often referring to crimes of passion and jealous rage (Alcalde 2009). *Telenovelas* (soap operas) romanticize suffering for love, including various forms of dramatized and hypersexualized violence. Daily TV talk shows and Peruvian reality shows heavily feature scantily clad women, with sometimes cartoonish plastic surgery, playing into stereotypical gendered cliches and male fantasies. Popular music also thrives on themes of jealousy, cheating, and suffering for love.

Witnessing gendered violence between adults – parents, other relatives, and neighbors – was common in the childhoods of *mujeres abusadas*. Several *mujeres abusadas* also described their own – sometimes extreme – experiences of violence in childhood – including emotional, physical, economic, and sexual abuse by parents, stepparents, and other relatives. Many told me detailed stories of how their mothers failed to protect them from their fathers and other male relatives. *Mujeres abusadas like* María, Camila, and Dolores, explained that not being able to trust their own mothers to believe, protect, and support them did significant psychological damage to them. They learned that even when they would confide in their mothers to disclose the abuse, their mothers either did not believe them or would not act to protect them. Once the situation became so evident that it was undeniable, their mothers sent them away, which as girls

they interpreted more as a punishment (blaming the victim) than a protection because they were not sent to places that were safe. They were, instead, sent to other equally unsafe and abusive people and places – abusive fathers, stepparents, etc. As Dolores explained as she recounted her own story to me, many girls and women learn to silence their victimization rather than risk being blamed or punished for the violence. While they had come to accept that violence from men was "normal," their mothers' failure to protect them (sometimes because they were unwilling, other times they were unable) was emotionally devastating.

The *mujeres abusadas* I interviewed described deep feelings that their parents had violated the expectations of how a parent should protect their children: instead of their parents protecting and nurturing them, they hurt them with physical, sexual, economic, and emotional violence and neglect – including victim-blaming. Girls in these familial situations learned that those who are supposed to love, protect, and care for them cannot be trusted to do so. Das (2007) describes this phenomenon as experiencing a loss of context and being abandoned by the everyday. Psychologists call this betrayal trauma. Abuse that occurs within and across groups that are (or are supposed to be) trusted, results in feelings of betrayal by the victim that go beyond the harm of the abuse itself (Gómez and Freyd, 2019). Betrayal trauma may come from institutional betrayal (e.g., abuse by a teacher or priest), family betrayal (abuse by a family member), and cultural betrayal (abuse by someone with a shared identity like an ethnic minority or LGQBTIA+ status) (Gómez and Freyd, 2019). These categories are not discrete and, in fact, interact in important ways – for instance, a *mujer abusada* who is abused by her husband (family) may be denied help by her own family (family betrayal), and blamed for the violence by a social worker who shares her same gender and cultural identity (institutional and cultural betrayals).

This cultivated lack of trust was traumatizing in childhood and, for many *mujeres abusadas*, contributes significantly to how they build and navigate relationships in adulthood. For these women with traumatic childhoods, the trauma shapes both the construction of intimate partner relationships, but also informs other relationships, including relationships with potential informal and formal helpers, a pattern that is commonly seen in cases of betrayal trauma (Gómez and Freyd, 2019). These women have learned since childhood that it is not safe to trust others. Many *mujeres abusadas* came to believe that it is better to remain silent than to ask for help and be denied. This is a lesson that begins in childhood but carries on throughout adulthood: it is more emotionally painful and damaging to be disappointed by those who are supposed to love and care for you (e.g., parents, siblings) than it is to hide the violence one is experiencing. *Mujeres abusadas* explained to me that if they do not ask others for help, then they cannot be disappointed by that help being either inadequate or flat-out denied.

For many of my participants, parental inaction in response to violence was the earliest lesson in the normalization of gendered violences against women and girls and the expectation that victims hide and silence the violence they experience. From a young age – and through both observation and direct experience – girls learn that it is better to remain silent than to be blamed, punished, rejected, or forced out of their homes. They also learn that what should be obvious sources of help are not actually available to them. This denial of help is normalized through these repeated interactions and is projected onto other potential helpers as well. *Mujeres abusadas,* when talking with me about their help-seeking strategies, regularly said things like, *¿si mi propia madre no me ayuda, que me va a ayudar un desconocido?* (if my own mother doesn't help me, how can I expect a stranger [e.g., a formal service provider] to help me?). This suspicion, unfortunately, often gets confirmed as reality when service providers and institutions who are

designated to serve *mujeres abusadas* also participate in victim blaming and the silencing of victims.

Aside from concerns about whether their families have the economic ability or willingness to help, *mujeres abusadas* fear that disclosing IPV – especially to male relatives – will trigger additional violence between the male relatives and the *abusivo*. In interviews, *mujeres abusadas* regularly posed rhetorical questions like, *¿De qué me sirve tener los dos heridos, o en la cana, o peor?* (What good does it do me to have both [men] injured, or in jail, or worse?). Violence between men creates additional caregiving demands for women, in addition to additional economic burdens, and this fear alone creates a significant barrier to informal help-seeking. An incarcerated man often means not only a lost income for the household that now needs to be compensated for, but there are also additional material burdens for the family that often fall on women. Women often must figure out how to budget from now even fewer funds to meet household needs and provide their incarcerated family member with some money to purchase food and other items that they need for survival on the inside.

*Mujeres abusadas* will sometimes appeal for help to friends and friendly neighbors, though like with family, these are requests that must be navigated carefully. Due to the close proximity and open construction style of houses, neighbors are often already aware of IPV through witnessing or overhearing things. Established social networks of people who grew up together and *son barrio* (are from the same neighborhood/block – an important social network tie in Lambayeque) can encourage some intervention and support – for instance two *mujeres abusadas,* Iris and Carol, described to me how they frantically banged on the neighbor's door and screamed for help when they heard their friend Laura being severely beaten by her husband. Laura was unable to get to the door during the attack, and continued to hide in her home for days

afterward because she was so covered in bruises. She felt embarrassed that her friends heard what happened, and guilty that Iris and Carol had potentially exposed themselves to violence from her husband. The social consequences of intervening can be particularly negative, awkward, and long-lasting due to the homes' geographic proximity. Over a decade later, Iris and Carol still resent Laura's husband and refuse to interact socially with him. Laura knows this and must carefully navigate her social time with her friends, mostly engaging when her husband is working or after he has fallen asleep or passed out drunk.

In addition to the impacts of geographic proximity, social ties in Lambayeque are often close and complex. Women are often friends, but their husbands are also often friends with each other, and men's social relationships often outweigh women's social relationships because women are forced to rely so heavily on men for their material survival.

### *3.3.4 Mujeres Abusadas' Formal Help-Seeking for IPV*

While this paper focuses on relationships with informal help-givers, it is important to understand the relationship between informal and formal help-seeking and -giving. In Lambayeque, there is significant distrust of formal institutions. Being a small town, Lambayeque does not have any grassroots organizations or NGOs dedicated to responding to IPV. Public services are the only local option for formal help-seeking. In instances of extreme physical violence, people may call the police (Peruvian National Police – PNP) to report IPV. There are two police stations in Lambayeque – one in the center of town and one in San Martin, one of Lambayeque's *pueblos jóvenes* (shanty town in various stages of development/formalization). While larger cities in Peru have specialty women's and family police stations that specialize in these types of social problems (Jubb et. al., 2010), there aren't any in Lambayeque. The PNP are notoriously bad at responding to IPV and other forms of gender violence, and regularly engage in

victim-blaming, bribery, and other forms of corruption (Alcalde, 2011). In addition to wanting to avoid public attention, *mujeres abusadas* also try to avoid these often-traumatic police interactions. The police, however, are important gatekeepers to other services like the legal system (both mediation and the courts, which are required for things like civil divorce) and forensic medical exams and other medical care.

Lambayeque does have three *Centro de Emergencia Mujer* (Women's Emergency Center – CEM) offices, run by the *Ministerio de la Mujer y Poblaciones Vulnerables* (Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations – MIMP). One is a standalone office in the center of Lambayeque, and the others are co-located offices in the two police stations – one of which opened towards the end of my fieldwork and the other which opened after I completed my fieldwork. Peru greatly expanded the number of CEMs throughout the country from 116 in 2011 to 430 in 2022, to 431 in 2023, focusing the expansion mainly on offices co-located in police stations (Ministerio de la Mujer y Poblaciones Vulnerables [MIMP], 2011; MIMP, 2022; MIMP, 2023a; MIMP, 2023b). The motivation for the colocation is to ensure that *mujeres abusadas* have advocates trained in IPV present when arriving at the police station. While it is too soon to know how this co-location will impact the culture and actions of the PNP, *mujeres abusadas* expressed some concerns about locating the CEMs in police stations, since one benefit of standalone CEMs was being able to get support without having to go to the police station – which increases risks of privacy breaches, stigma, danger of retaliation, and corruption. Additionally, many *mujeres abusadas* want to get support without having to involve the criminal-legal system.

If *mujeres abusadas* suffer physical injuries from IPV, they may or may not go to local hospitals or clinics. This depends on what kind of insurance they have access to, whether they

have money to spend on medicines and medical supplies, and whether or not they feel they can care for their injuries on their own. *Lambayecanos* know that the local hospitals and clinics often provide poor quality services, frequently requiring hours-long wait times, insufficient supplies and medicines that then must be purchased out of pocket, and poor treatment by staff, nurses and doctors. In 2015, Peruvian law changed to make healthcare providers (along with educators) mandated reporters (to the PNP) of suspected physical or sexual violence (El Peruano, 2015). It is unclear how often healthcare providers invoke this mandated reporting, or whether it is a positive intervention for *mujeres abusadas*. Many of the women (*mujeres abusadas* and other women) I asked about the new mandated reporting law were unaware of the change but said that they thought it was a good idea. However, when I asked them if they were the victims, would they want mandated reporting, they universally responded that they would not want mandated reporting for themselves because it should be their decision what to do next.

### *3.3.5 Barriers to Informal Help-Giving*

Through my data analysis, four categories of barriers and facilitators to help-giving emerged: 1) informational, 2) relational, 3) material, and 4) experiential. The barriers are examined in detail below (see Table 3), and the facilitators are examined in the following section (see Table 4). These categories of barriers and facilitators are not discrete, though, and, in fact, influence and interact with each other in important ways – both within and between individuals. For the purposes of this research, I am defining barriers to informal help-giving as the things that discourage or inhibit offering different kinds of help and support. Though it is true that sometimes potential help-givers to not want to offer help, in many cases, potential informal helpers want to help *mujeres abusadas*, but are constrained by internal or external contextual circumstances that limit their real or perceived options for action. Often, the potential helpers are

acutely aware of these constraints, but sometimes these constraints are non-conscious because they result from normalized ideas and everyday realities. When potential helpers are aware of the constraints they are under, they sometimes use other barriers as an excuse to cover their embarrassment, shame, or discomfort about the primary barrier to their being able to help. For instance, because it is embarrassing and shameful to be so resource-poor that one (especially men) cannot support their own family member, helpers often resort to victim-blaming tropes to shift the responsibility for intervention away from the helper and back onto the *mujer abusada*.

*Table 3: Categories of Barriers to Informal Help-Giving with Examples and Analysis*

| Categories | Barriers | Analysis |
|---|---|---|
| **Informational** | Stigma, Mis/Dis-Information, Insufficient Information, Awareness of Barriers and Information About Others' Negative Experiences that Leads to Feelings of Helplessness | Some of these are rooted in socio-cultural ideas, others in structural inequalities, and others in internalized and normalized ideas about IPV. |
| **Relational** | Conflicting Family or Social Loyalties, Social Dependence, Relative Social Positionalities and Related Social Norms and Expectations | These are rooted in interpersonal power dynamics that emerge from socio-cultural and structural processes. |
| **Material** | Limited Money/Resources, Financial Dependence (Individual or Family), Limited Space at Home or a Rented Home | These are rooted in the imposition of capitalist economic structures that necessitate and exacerbate economic inequality. |
| **Experiential** | "This happened to me, and I turned out fine."<br>"That's just how things are."<br>"The abuse was my fault." | These are examples of how individuals internalize and normalize the abuse they have experienced or witnessed across the lifespan. |

*Informational Barriers to Informal Help-Giving:* The kinds of information that people have access to and experience with strongly influence their notions about acceptable and appropriate verbal and actionable responses to intimate partner violence. Informational barriers in Lambayeque, most frequently fall under three categories: 1) a lack of knowledge or misinformation, 2) stigmatizing and/or normalizing ideas about IPV, and 3) an awareness and

analysis of barriers resulting in internalized feelings of helplessness. Like the broader categories of barriers and facilitators, these, too, overlap and interact within and between individuals.

*Lack of Knowledge & Misinformation*: Many potential informal help-givers in Lambayeque – like *mujeres abusadas* themselves – described to me a frustrating lack of knowledge about what to do in certain situations, how to help, what formal help and services exist, and what options they had. During interviews, I asked what services exist for *mujeres abusadas* in Lambayeque and was regularly told that there were none – despite there being two *Centros de Emergencia Mujer* (CEM) (government run Women's Emergency Centers) in Lambayeque, along with two police stations, and several medical posts/clinics/hospitals. The idea that there are no formal services for *mujeres abusadas* in Lambayeque stems both from a) a lack of common knowledge about the types of services available at these places – especially at the CEMs, and b) a distrust of the people who work at these services and the institutions themselves. For example, because the police so frequently engage in victim-blaming and retraumatize victims of IPV, they are not recognized as meaningful or quality sources of help.

In other instances, potential helpers have inaccurate information that they have heard from others. Rumors spread quickly in Lambayeque, and misinformation about many subjects spreads rapidly through face-to-face interactions and through social media (especially through Facebook and WhatsApp groups). Because formal services for *mujeres abusadas* are often frustratingly denied or poorly delivered, rumors about mistreatment or a lack of services are often uncritically believed, even if they are partially or completely untrue.

Helpers often described feeling unsure of how to help and afraid of inadvertently making situations worse. Because potential helpers are often constrained in multiple ways across multiple types of barriers, getting involved in another person's problems and helping can often

feel overwhelming and scary. Many helpers did not feel they had the necessary knowledge, material resources, or social connection to offer meaningful help. Helpers were also unsure where to seek reliable information and were reluctant to seek out information due to institutional distrust, as well as other time and resource constraints. Despite differing degrees of knowledge of formal support options, helpers often struggled to imagine ways to safely and effectively navigate helping *mujeres abusadas*.

*Stigmatizing & Normalizing Ideas about IPV*: Intimate partner violence, except for extreme cases of physical violence, is often normalized in Lambayeque. *Mujeres abusadas* are regularly told "*así es el matrimonio"* (that's how marriage is), or are asked questions like, "*¿Y? ¿Para qué te casaste si tú sabes cómo es él?*" (So? Why did you get married if you know how he is). Beliefs that IPV is a normal and acceptable part of a relationship, that women in abusive relationships secretly like the abuse (or else they would leave), and that suffering is an integral part of women's social role are common in Lambayeque. While not all do, many women and men in Lambayeque subscribe to these normalized beliefs about IPV, tacitly accept them, and promote them to others through both conversation and actions. These normalized ideas about IPV deter potential help-givers from offering emotional support or other kinds of help because many people see IPV both as a normal part of an intimate partner relationship and as a private matter between the couple. The normalization of IPV in Lambayeque can undermine informal helpers' willingness to confront violence in their social networks. Openly confronting violence is oftentimes considered more deviant than the IPV itself.

*Internalized Feelings of Helplessness and Hopelessness*: *Lambayecanos* often express a learned helplessness or hopeless resignation to their situation based on a lifetime of experiences with violence (both interpersonal and structural), hearing about and witnessing others' bad

experiences seeking or giving help for IPV, and having been socialized into understanding violence as a normal part of intimate relationships. There is a prevailing feeling that getting involved is hopeless, both because informal help is often challenging to give effectively and formal help is not meaningful or truly available. These feelings are often very distressing for people who want to help but feel like they cannot do so effectively. These internalized feelings of helplessness affect both *mujeres abusadas* and potential help-givers and impact how help-seeking and help-giving are navigated.

Potential helpers often believe that there is not any way to actually help someone with "personal problems" like IPV. Getting involved is seen as a lost cause. A common refrain in Lambayeque is "*los terceros salen sobrando"* (third parties are superfluous – meaning that no one likes an outside party getting involved), and, in explaining this dynamic to me, people would often add on "*y terminan perdiendo"* (and end up losing out). A common concern among potential helpers is that by trying to help, one or both of the people involved in the violence (or their families) may later turn on the helper. To be seen as *metiche* (overly involved in someone else's private business) is undesirable and may be socially punished through gossip, ostracization, and, in some cases, physical violence.

Additionally, these feelings of helplessness and hopelessness are fueled by perceptions of formal services like the police, medical facilities, and CEMs as useless, harmful, and/or a waste of time and money. Because helpers have often heard about others' bad experiences with formal service providers and have experienced firsthand the excruciating frustration of trying to navigate most any Peruvian bureaucracy, helpers often openly discourage *mujeres abusadas* from seeking formal help, telling them that seeking formal help is a waste of their time. Unfortunately, this advice is frequently accurate.

*Relational Barriers to Informal Help-Giving*: *Mujeres abusadas* often rely on informal helpers to exert social pressure on abusers to stop abuse. For informal helpers in Lambayeque, though, offering help often comes into conflict with their own need to preserve social ties and acquire and/or conserve material resources. Relational barriers are rooted in social embeddedness, intersectional social locations, and interpersonal power dynamics that emerge from socio-cultural and structural processes. Very often, potential informal help-givers fear that getting involved and offering help will cause negative social, material, or even violent consequences for the help-giver. Expectations around hierarchies of loyalty strongly influence who will defend whom. Blood relations demand the highest expectations of unquestioned loyalty, even in cases of what is recognized as bad behavior. Numerous potential informal helpers told me things like, *yo sé que está mal, y le digo, pero es mi hermano… ¿que puedo hacer pues?* (I know that it's bad, and I tell him, but he's my brother… what can I do?). Implied in that type of statement is the feeling that the relationship the potential help-giver has with the *abusivo* prevents the help-giver from intervening with the *abusivo*. Were these potential help-givers to feel empowered to get involved in ways that exert real pressure, they could potentially exert more meaningful influence than any other group of help-givers.

For many potential help-givers in Lambayeque, there is a strong tension between having *vergüenza ajena* (secondhand embarrassment for another's bad behavior) and the inability and/or reluctance to sever strong social ties. While blood family ties are the strongest, other kinship ties, and fictive kin ties like being *compadres* (co-parents: the relationship between the parents and godparents of a child), *promoción* (high school classmates), *barrio* (having grown up in the same neighborhood), etc., also have strong expectations of loyalty. Especially in men's social relationships to each other, patriarchal values and *machista* double-standards are the norm. In

one group of male friends who were *promo* and with whom I interacted socially over many years, some of the men got very upset with one friend over his verbal expression of interest in potentially dating the ex-wife of another friend who had been divorced for many years. This resulted in his being excluded from the social group for a couple of years, though he was slowly let back in over time. In this same group of friends, however, another man, Miguel, beat his wife so severely that she had to be hospitalized and none of the friends, to my knowledge, ever addressed it in his presence. When talking with a couple of the guys about what had happened, I asked if either of them had brought it up to Miguel. One of them quickly and matter-of-factly replied that it was not any of his business to get involved, and that his own father had abused his mother and, "if it was good enough for my parents, it's good enough for anyone." The other friend, having noticed my expression of horror at such a callous and dismissive response pulled me aside later and said that while he did not agree with his friend's assessment of the situation, or with the violence itself, that it simply was not worth it to get involved because people do not listen and *los terceros salen sobrando* (third parties are superfluous).

Potential help-givers also expressed significant frustration about *mujeres abusadas* who do not take action – for any variety of reasons – in the way(s) the help-giver expects or wants them to. When talking about people in violent relationships, *lambayecanos* (men and women) regularly say things like, *¿Qué está esperando? ¿Que la mate? ¿Que la golpée para que haga algo?* (What's she waiting for? For him to kill her? For him to beat her in order for her to do something [about her situation]?). These types of critiques are nearly always directed at the *mujer abusada,* and while people may criticize an *abusivo* who is "excessively" abusive, rarely is there an open critique about how he continues to be abusive. Interestingly, these frustrations are regularly expressed both about actual events in the past and about imagined future realities.

*Lambayecanos* get angry and resentful if help is offered but is not accepted or not adequately appreciated. For instance, Carol, herself a former *mujer abusada,* was frustrated that she treated her fourteen-year-old daughter-in-law and grandson well, but that the daughter-in-law still wanted to return to her parents' home. She complained to a group of women friends as we sat and talked one afternoon: "*La tratan bien y se va, de repente quiere a alguien que la haga cagar, de repente eso le gustaría*" (Everyone is nice to her and she leaves, maybe she wants someone who beats the shit out of her, maybe she'd like that). Carol was frustrated that despite working hard to financially support her son, his partner, and their child, her sacrifice was not appreciated. Roberto, a young man in his early twenties similarly expressed his frustration to me about a former female classmate and friend of his who was in a violent relationship. He described talking with her and giving her advice about what she should do. Getting involved in a couple's problems involves a degree of social risk and people get mad when they take that risk "for nothing." He told me that they talked for a long time, but that in the end she stayed with her abusive partner. When I gently asked if maybe there were reasons she stayed even if she did not really want to, he sternly told me that what she does now is not his problem. He then explained to me that a person only offers advice and help one time, and then "*si no te hace caso, ya que se friegue*" (if they do not listen to you [and do what you say], then they can go to hell). Potential help-givers in Lambayeque, like *mujeres abusadas,* are afraid of *el qué dirán* (what people may say) and of being accused of being a *metiche* (a busybody who gets overly involved in other people's business). Potential informal help-givers worry that getting involved will reflect poorly on them in the long term, especially if the couple experiencing violence stays together or gets back together. Sara, a woman whose sister has experienced IPV in her decades-long relationship

explained to me, “if you complain to your brother-in-law about IPV [against your sister], then you are the one who ends up looking bad when the couple gets back together.”

Many people described bad past experiences and imagined possible future bad experiences – both others’ and their own – of trying to offer help only for things to go awry for the *mujer abusada* or for the helper. One of the biggest concerns is about potential fights – physical or verbal – between the *abusivo* and his family and the helper. Some *mujeres abusadas* described their fears (based on past experiences or imagined futures) of their male relatives getting into fights as a result of offering help or intervening in IPV. Both men and women describe a desire to avoid others coming to *hacerle roche* (publicly embarrass them) by confronting them directly or by spreading gossip and rumors. Potential helpers regularly talked about not wanting to get involved because they wanted to *evitar problemas* (avoid problems) in their own life.

Potential help-givers also identified their own social locations and social connections as a frequent barrier to their feeling comfortable offering support to *mujeres abusadas*. Particularly those of low social and economic class expressed discomfort in helping when they did not feel able to draw on more powerful connections in either informal or formal networks. They explained that they did not have the social connections necessary, in Lambayeque, to facilitate what they, the helpers, considered meaningful support like leveraging access to formal help, a place to live, or borrowing money.

*Material Barriers to Informal Help-Giving for IPV:* Material barriers to informal help-giving are rooted in the imposition of capitalist economic structures that necessitate and exacerbate economic inequality in Lambayeque. As explained above, money, material resources, and space are usually in short supply. Even potential help-givers who desperately want to help

frequently do not have the money necessary to do so. In some cases, especially among women who do not themselves participate in wage-labor, potential help-givers are limited by the usually small amount of money their husbands give them. They have to work financial magic to keep food on the table and their own household afloat, and there is rarely extra money available to help others. Women also worry that their husbands would be angry if they were to find out that some of his income was going to meeting someone else's needs. Because women are not typically the ones earning the household's money through wage labor, they feel less empowered than the men to use it as they see fit.

In cases where extended family is living together, potential informal help-givers may be reluctant to intervene in cases of IPV because they – like the *mujer abusada* – are at least partially dependent on the *abusivo* (e.g., the house is owned or rented by the *abusivo*). In cases where family is living separately, very often family members do not have space in their homes to bring in a *mujer abusada* and her children. In rented rooms, apartments, or houses – which make up a significant portion of Lambayeque's real estate – landlords often restrict the number of people they will allow to live in the space or will increase rent if they realize that more individuals are living in the space. In addition to rent, families must consider the costs of additional food, clothing, personal care items, school materials, and more. Because securing child support is a huge bureaucratic challenge for poor women (just getting certified copies of children's birth certificates is cost prohibitive and unreasonably time consuming for many *mujeres abusadas*), *mujeres abusadas* and their families cannot count on economic support from the children's father. And, even in cases where child support is ordered, the amount is usually so low that it does not have any meaningful impact on a family's finances. When child support is ordered but not paid, there is weak enforcement. But, when it is enforced, men may be sent to

prison for non-payment, which, women are quick to point out, solves nothing. Being incarcerated takes away men's ability to earn money and creates additional financial burdens for women.

Because the socio-cultural expectation in Lambayeque is that the husband should earn enough to support his wife and children, many men feel a lot of shame and inadequacy around their inability to do so. When I would discuss money with men, they would lament never having enough to truly make ends meet, let alone to live the type of lifestyle they desire for themselves. Although I would regularly have candid conversations with men about how the structuring of the economic system made it nearly impossible for a working-class person with a family to thrive and they could clearly describe the structural economic barriers they faced, they still experienced a lot of feelings of embarrassment and shame. In Lambayeque, and in Peru more broadly, there is a conflicting double-economic-ideology in which there is a huge push for capitalist individualism and independence (which is socially tied to masculine performance) that is being juxtaposed with a cultural norm of reciprocity and mutual aid. Within this ideological conflict, giving help is seen as a source of pride while receiving help is a source of shame. Peru's capitalist development has created an even greater need for mutual aid because, so few people have formal jobs (70.5% of Peruvian workers worked in the informal economy in 2022 (La Cámara, 2023)), informal and formal wages are far from sufficient, and predatory credit schemes have become the norm – thrusting the most vulnerable into inescapable cycles of debt. For these reasons, many *mujeres abusadas* are extremely hesitant to ask to move in with parents or other family members. Instead, they try not to embarrass their families by not putting them in the position of having to say they cannot help because there is not adequate room or money.

*Experiential Barriers to Informal Help-Giving for IPV*: Experiential barriers to informal help-giving for IPV have to do with how individuals internalize and normalize the abuse they

have experienced or witnessed throughout their own lives. These experiential barriers have to do with how traumatic events were processed and made sense of in the moment and over time. How trauma gets processed often depends on the types of support people receive before, during, and after the traumatic event. As explained above, IPV, like many kinds of violence in Lambayeque are normalized. Many individuals have internalized and normalized the abuse they experienced, and this internalization is reflected in a number of common statements made by *lambayecanos*, like:

- "This happened to me [e.g., my parents beat me when I was a child; my father beat my mother], and I turned out fine."
- "That's just how [marriage, relationships] are."
- "I lived through [traumatic event] so others should have to live through it, too."
- "It was my fault that [traumatic event] happened."

In many cases, people are simply repeating the narrative that they have heard throughout their lives. They tacitly accept that violent abuse is a normal part of life, including in childhood and in intimate partner relationships. Their abusers blamed them for the abuse, and others did not meaningfully intervene. For many, this tacit acceptance is a coping mechanism that prevents them from having to critically engage with their own memories and experiences. Violence is a part of daily life for many in Lambayeque, but there are few opportunities for critical reflection or creative reimagining of alternatives.

### *3.3.6 Facilitators of Informal Help-Giving*

My research found that, importantly, barriers and facilitators to offering informal help to *mujeres abusadas* often center on the same categories, but the holistic context of individuals' and potential help-givers' lives shapes whether these factors function as barriers or facilitators. Facilitators of informal help-giving are defined as the things that motivate or facilitate offering different kinds of help and support. Like the barriers to informal help-giving, the facilitators (see

Table 4) are informational, relational, material, and experiential. Unlike the barriers to help-giving, which were often at least partially non-conscious to the help-givers, informal help-givers who were successful seemed to be more fully cognizant of what it was that made help-giving possible. Another important difference from the barriers is that rather than stemming from shame, the facilitators of informal help-giving tend to result from the empowerment of and by the help-giver.

*Table 4: Categories of Facilitators to Informal Help-Giving with Examples and Analysis*

| Categories | Facilitators | Analysis |
|---|---|---|
| **Informational** | Critical Analytic Frameworks, Knowledge About Services & Rights or Access to a Knowledgeable Person, Information About Others' Positive Experiences | These are rooted in an access to reliable information and critical analytic frameworks. |
| **Relational** | Supportive Family and other Social Loyalties, Social Independence, Relative Social Positionalities and Related Social Norms and Expectations, Social Connections to People in Positions of Power | These are rooted in strong, supportive familial relationships based in stability and access to material independence and social power. |
| **Material** | Adequate Money/Resources, Financial Independence (Individual or Family), Ample Space at Home or a Self-Owned House | These are generally rooted in a higher socio-economic class standing. |
| **Experiential** | Externalize the Abuse:<br>"This happened to me, and I don't want it to happen to others."<br>"IPV is not normal or natural."<br>"I didn't deserve to be abused." | These are tied to supportive relationships and critical analytic frameworks. |

*Informational Facilitators of Help-giving:* As with informational barriers, informational facilitators of help-giving are shaped by the kinds of information that individuals have access to and experience with. Informational facilitators in Lambayeque fall into two primary categories: 1) critical analytical frameworks, and 2) access to reliable practical knowledge.

Potential help-givers who have – consciously or non-consciously – developed a critical analytic framework for how they view *lambayecana* society are more able to challenge the normalization of IPV in their own thinking. They often work to push others to critically interrogate aspects of quotidian life that are otherwise tacitly accepted by many *lambayecanos*. These critical analytic frameworks held by individuals are not generally fiercely ideological or rigid, nor are they necessarily theoretically consistent. They most often include elements of feminist analyses that include a critique of patriarchal power structures and structural and economic power analyses that come out of Marxist, (De)Colonial, and Latin American Dependency Theories. These critical analytic frameworks help *mujeres abusadas* and potential help-givers to critically analyze intimate partner violence, and to begin to understand the structures in place that help to maintain the status quo. Critical analysis helps *mujeres abusadas* and help-givers to externalize the blame for the violence and increases their readiness for change.

Access to practical knowledge about how to confidently and successfully navigate situations and bureaucracy comes from several sources. Some individuals are knowledgeable about available services, how to navigate bureaucratic obstacles, and one's rights in doing so from formal educational or professional experience. Others learn from their own or others' practical experiences. Positive outcomes are particularly encouraging and empowering. Other people, who may not themselves have this practical knowledge, may have social contacts they can rely on who do have this knowledge and experience, and who can offer guidance and support. *Mujeres abusadas* frequently talked about the importance of moral support and having someone accompany them to seek formal services, especially if they perceived that person as being more knowledgeable than them about their rights and the bureaucratic processes – or if that person had an inside contact whose personal connections they could leverage in their favor.

During my fieldwork, several women asked me to accompany them for these reasons, but even my presences and advocacy often were not enough to get them meaningful support.

*Relational Facilitators of Informal Help-Giving*: The two biggest relational facilitators of informal help-giving are 1) not being heavily dependent on a partner or on kin or social networks for one's basic survival and 2) having social connections with people in power. Relative social independence is often tied up with relative economic independence, as discussed below. This relative social independence, however, while related to material resources is not purely economic. Activists, for instance, create social roles for themselves on the margins of "normal" society and create social spaces in which those social roles are legible to others.[7] Socio-economic class in Lambayeque is as much about social class as it is about economic class. Poor families can still be of a "good name" and families who do not historically have social power in Lambayeque (e.g., migrants from other regions of Peru) can become wealthy and wield new economic power while remaining on the social margins.

Social connections and access to people in places of power – especially within government institutions like the police, the prosecutor's office, state-run hospitals, etc. – are often necessary to get things done. Name-dropping, or being able to call a relative or a friend (or being able to call a friend who can call their relative or friend) in a place of power is a key bureaucratic lubricant in Lambayeque. But these social connections function in both directions in cases of IPV. In chapter 2 of this dissertation, I told the story of how the police requested a bribe from Flor –a women whose husband kicked her in the stomach when she was seven months pregnant – in exchange for taking a police report. She name-dropped her uncle, a high-ranking police officer and the police suddenly treated her case very seriously. Her husband was even

[7] The role of activists is explored in-depth in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

detained by the police and held overnight in the local jail. By the next morning, however, her father-in-law, who has a "good surname" and worked closely with many lawyers and politicians in town, had arranged for the police report and the entire case to disappear from the official record.

*Material Facilitators of Informal Help-Giving*: Having adequate resources to offer monetary or other material support to *mujeres abusadas* is a prime facilitator of help-giving in Lambayeque. Unfortunately, this is not common, and even when someone has the resources they may or may not be willing to help for other reasons outlined above. Financial independence (individual or familial) allows potential help-givers to make less constrained decisions about what kinds of material support to provide. Having a home with ample space – especially if that home is privately owned – enables more flexibility in supporting *mujeres abusadas* through housing alternatives. Financial independence also allows informal helpers to offer monetary support through loans or mutual-aid style gifts of cash. Lucía, for instance, made a conscious and deliberate decision to make herself financially independent when her daughters were young and her now ex-husband had two additional children with a neighbor. Lucía's current partner is extremely supportive of her working outside of the home, and together they have built an economically and emotionally stable partnership. When Lucía's daughter, Alejandra, began having problems with the father of her own daughter, Lucía was able to help support Alejandra financially. For several years Lucía had Alejandra's oldest child living with her so that Alejandra could focus on working, finishing her education, and stabilizing her personal life.

*Experiential Facilitators of Informal Help-Giving*: A number of potential informal help-givers, especially women who had witnessed abuse towards her mother or another female relative or who had experienced violence themselves in childhood or adulthood, had developed a

critical consciousness around IPV that challenges the normalization of violence. Rather than internalizing the abuse, they learned to externalize it. They frequently said things like:

- "This happened to me, and I don't want it to happen to others."
- "IPV is not normal or natural."
- "I didn't deserve to be abused."
- "I lived it, so I don't want anyone else to have to live it."

Developing these critical analytic frameworks as a result of their own experiences of violence and betrayal seems to be tied to having supportive relationships with people who also employ critical analytic frameworks. Some of these influences include activists who are deliberately working to raise consciousness around gender-based violence (which will be examined in-depth in chapter 4 of this dissertation), but for the *mujeres abusdas* I worked with in Lambayeque, the influences were more organic. For example, Lucía, who experienced emotional and economic abuse in a prior relationship, and whose sister was disappeared by her violent husband, is determined to not allow these patterns to repeat for herself or for her daughters. Lucía was lucky to have the support of her own parents and her in-laws, which allowed her to finish her high school education and begin working despite becoming pregnant at sixteen. Camila, on the other hand, did not finish high school due to her parents' abuse and neglect of her and her sister. However, Camila had a few years of respite from the violence – living with her godparents in a stable home – during her formative pre-teen years. Those few years showed her that, contrary to her childhood and her later teenage years, a stable home life without violence is possible. Even though her life is shaped by the chaos of poverty and a sometimes-unreliable husband, Camila desperately wants something different for her daughters, and regularly tells me that it is her duty to raise her daughters differently than she was raised because she does not want them to live the kind of life that she was forced to live.

### *3.3.7 What Mujeres Abusadas and Informal Help-Givers Wish Could Be Different*

The interviews I conducted with *mujeres abusadas* and informal help-givers were filled with sadness and frustration, along with moments of both hopelessness and resilience. I made a point to end each semi-structured interview with the question, "What kinds of help do you wish existed?". It felt important to remind my interviewees and myself that things do not have to be this way – that things can be different. The answers they gave are incredibly achievable, even without massive social change and the overthrow of capitalism (both of which would also help quite a lot).

*Education*: They suggested that there should be better comprehensive education about child abuse and IPV in schools but were unsure what would be age-appropriate for different grades, suggesting that people "who know more about it" should develop and teach the curriculum. Several people suggested that the school program should not just focus on abuse but should also teach students how to develop healthy and supportive relationships. Many people also suggested that a similar education should happen in parallel for parents through the schools' parent associations to teach them about healthy relationships and healthy family dynamics, to break cross-generational patterns of violence.

Both *mujeres abusadas* and informal helpers also said there should be more of an effort to hold formal service providers accountable so that so much help-giving does not depend on untrained, informal helpers. By providing formal helpers with better training on IPV (most police officers and many psychologists and social workers in Peru receive no education on IPV as part of their professional training), services would improve and *mujeres abusadas* would be less reluctant to access them. Likewise, the formal service systems need to be better resourced, less

corrupt, and more effective to ensure that *mujeres abusadas* are being supported rather than extorted by service providers.

*Enhanced Community-Based Support*: *Mujeres abusadas* and informal help-givers said that there should be more community-based organization and capacity building around IPV. They suggested that by drawing on existing neighborhood leaders who emerge organically, communities can build trusted support networks that are better attuned and matched to *mujeres abusadas*' needs. By building on existing relationships, community-based organizers can educate people about their rights and what resources exist in Lambayeque already and develop new resources that are directly responsive to community needs. Several people suggested the government should fund a *promotoras* (health promotor) style program which would further resources and legitimize the help-giving role and would also create important employment opportunities for women – providing them with an independent income and healthcare benefits.

## 3.4 Discussion and Conclusions

### *3.4.1 Drawing Connections & Implications for Social Work Research and Practice*

This paper examined the social and structural complexities of help-seeking and help-giving relationships, and unsettles common assumptions made in the literature about informal help-giving. The findings of this research challenge the understanding of "barriers" and "facilitators" as predetermined, discrete categories. The four categories that emerged – informational, relational, material, and experiential – were descriptive of both the barriers to and facilitators of informal help-giving for IPV. Whether something in these categories served as a barrier or facilitator of informal help-giving was influenced heavily by the relationality between *mujeres abusadas*, *abusivos*, and potential informal help-givers, as well as structural factors that shaped and often constrained possibilities.

Through an intersectional power analysis, this paper shows how the complexity of context and relationality impact what may be considered a barrier or a facilitator in a given situation. While this paper deeply explores the local context of Lambayeque, Peru, this type of analysis could be applied to any local context in order to disentangle and understand how social positionalities impact the ways in which IPV and help-giving are operationalized. Researchers, practitioners, and policy makers in any context can gain a much deeper understanding of these social problems by following these steps:

a) Do an intersectional analysis of the identities and social positionalities of each person involved.
b) Do an intersectional analysis of how each person's identities relate to each other(s)' within the larger systems of interlocking oppressions and privileges.
c) Do a relational analysis between individuals to identify relational power structures and differentials (remembering that power is always situational and relational).

While the help-seeking literature rightly highlights the importance of informal help-giving as a potential facilitator of formal help-seeking, this paper further complicates the situation by identifying the ways in which denials of or breakdowns informal help-giving can create their own betrayal trauma that strongly discourages further informal or formal help-seeking. Because Lambayeque's formal services are so inadequate, dysfunctional, and often explicitly harmful for *mujeres abusadas*, informal help takes on an even more important role, that sadly often goes unmet. Both *mujeres abusadas* and potential help-givers are constrained by their own embeddedness in kinship and social networks that are closely tied to their social and material survival, making it risky to challenge the status quo.

Social Work researchers and practitioners cannot assume that informal helpers can or will help. Being able to help is dependent on myriad factors, many of which the helpers are not, themselves, in control of. Very often people want to help, but are constrained by their knowledge, their positionalities, their social embeddedness, and/or their fear. Social Work research and practice should work toward deeply understanding the communities they work in, building on the expertise of local residents, and use that knowledge to develop grassroots prevention and intervention programming and local capacity building to better prepare potential helpers to be effective helpers. I echo the calls of Liang et. al. (2005), Banyard et. al. (2010), Kyriakakis (2014), Edwards and Dardis (2020), Mauer et. al. (2022), and McKenzie et. al. (2022) for service providers and policy makers to consider and include potential informal helpers in IPV policy and practice.

### *3.4.2 Comments on Methodology and Limitations*

One limitation of this study is that I did not have many opportunities to directly observe help-seeking or help-giving as it happened. Though I did observe some help-seeking interactions, most of what I learned was told to me after the fact by *mujeres abusadas*, help-givers, or other observers. It is possible that some of these retellings were affected by people's recall bias, or that people self-censored due to embarrassment or other feelings. Observing informal help-seeking first-hand was difficult because I was never present when extreme acts of violence were actually happening, and because due to the shame and embarrassment many *mujeres abusadas* feel when asking for help, those requests are usually made in private, and even then, in hushed tones.

When I was able to engage in participant observation around help-seeking, it was primarily in cases of navigating formal services. In fact, several of the *mujeres abusadas* I worked with asked me to accompany them when seeking formal services because they said I

knew what the laws and what their rights were better than they did. They also felt that by going with a *gringa* of a higher socio-economic class, they may be treated better by the service providers. This strategy regularly failed. Service providers, including social workers, psychologists, lawyers, and doctors and nurses – but especially police officers – regularly prevented me from entering their workspaces citing privacy issues. If the *mujer abusada* and I were successful in convincing them that I was a friend who was there to offer support (and I was), I would be asked to leave as soon as I spoke up to question or challenge what the *mujer abusada* was being told. Depending on how critical the situation was, I sometimes politely waited outside, while other times I argued and insisted on staying. Either way, the *mujer abusada* I was accompanying would tell me, as we left, that she was glad that someone had witnessed how poorly she had been treated, and said things like, "If they treated you, a *gringa*, like that, imagine how they treat us when we go alone."

## Chapter 4 "An Other" Paradigm of Help: The Impact of *Ni Una Menos Lambayeque's* Activist Work on Help-Seeking and Help-Giving for Gender Based Violence in Lambayeque, Peru

This paper aims to identify and deepen understandings of how activist work around gender-based violence (GBV) in Lambayeque, Peru interacts with and influences the help-seeking of *mujeres abusadas* (abused women). *Mujeres abusadas* is the local term for abused women, and does not suggest an evaluation of individual agency, unlike the terms "victim" and "survivor" in the USA. As a social worker and anthropologist, I choose to use local terms, when possible, as to not inadvertently apply or impose US-conceptions of important culturally defined concepts. By carefully and closely examining the activist organization and activities of *Ni Una Menos Lambayeque* (Not One Fewer [Woman Alive] Lambayeque), I show how these activists[8] are building and creating new forms of helping for *mujeres abusadas*.

In this paper, I broadly define gender-based violence (GBV) as violence that has gendered dynamics or implications. The limited research on GBV in Lambayeque found that GBV, including intimate partner violence (IPV, violence between people who are or were in an intimate relationship), is pervasive in the department of Lambayeque. According to the Peruvian National Institute of Statistics (INEI) in 2013, over 69 percent of *lambayecana* (from Lambayeque) women self-report having been controlled or abused emotionally, physically, or sexually by their partner (INEI, 2013), and self-reporting for GBV typically under-represents the

[8] I refer to those involved with NUML as both activists and organizers. While there are important distinctions between these terms, I use them interchangeably here, as NUML includes and engages both. See section 4.2.2., below, for additional discussion of this.

scope of the problem in Latin America, including in Peru (Bott et al., 2012). My own research in Lambayeque, going back to 2010, has found that most women report having experienced multiple forms of gender violence – like street harassment, sexual harassment at school and in the workplace, and sexual assault – often beginning in childhood or adolescence. My research, along with other Latin American-based research and the work of the activists in this study, also found that both IPV and GBV are deeply intertwined with multiple other forms of social and structural violence like racism and poverty.

Embeddedness in kinship and other social networks is key to one's material and social survival in Lambayeque. Due to the close-knit structuring of the town (both geographically and socio-culturally), it is extremely difficult to keep things private. There are also strong social pressures that normalize and silence GBV (see chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation). In my broader dissertation research, a fear of *el qué dirán* ('the what people might say') dominated discussions about help-seeking and help-giving. The phrase "*el qué dirán*" functions linguistically as a noun that refers to a social phenomenon that exerts tremendous influence over experiences of intimate partner violence and associated help-seeking. *El qué dirán* goes beyond just gossip to include strategic and malicious bad-talking, shaming, moral judgements, victim-blaming, and all types of subtle and overt commentary socially understood to be a tool of controlling the subject of discussion's behavior. *El qué dirán* includes both what people have actually said in the past and all the imagined possibilities of how other people could react to and talk about a situation. Despite the significant challenges to privacy, there is tremendous pressure in Lambayeque to keep family secrets a secret, and oftentimes publicly seeking help for GBV is treated and punished as a worse violation of social norms than the emotional, physical, or sexual

violences being denounced. These dynamic social forces create unique barriers for *mujeres abusadas* in Lambayeque.

Social work researchers and practitioners are interested in better understanding GBV to develop effective prevention efforts, reduce the incidence of GBV, develop interventions to decrease the severity of violence, and help individuals and their families access support – which includes consciousness raising so that they feel deserving of help. Understanding how victims of GBV navigate help-seeking requires deeply understanding the socio-cultural and material contexts in which the violence is happening and identifying both barriers and facilitators to seeking help. It also requires an understanding of how potential help-givers – informal or formal – navigate help-giving, including the barriers and facilitators they face. There is little research on help-seeking for GBV in Latin America and Peru, and literatures outside that context lack the socio-cultural nuance to effectively describe and diagnose these complex social problems.

The literature on help-seeking largely fails to examine activism and its roles in help-seeking and help-giving, instead treating them as discrete categories. Some research (e.g., Liang et. al., 2005) includes activism within the category of formal help-giving. My research found, however, that in Lambayeque, activists play an important role in shaping help-seeking and help-giving behaviors and opportunities and constitute an important third category of help. Social change work is different but not separate from intervention work, and the lack of attention to activism as a form of help in much of the literature limits understandings of informal and formal help-seekers and help-givers.

During my twenty-four months of ethnographic field work in Lambayeque – during which I set out to understand how *mujeres abusadas* navigated help-seeking using anthropological ethnographic research methods and a feminist decolonial framework – it became

apparent that activism does not exist outside help-seeking and help-giving relationships. I began to explore activism on GBV more deeply and came to ask:

1. What kinds of activism is the grassroots activist group Ni Una Menos Lambayeque (NUML, Not One Fewer Woman Alive Lambayeque) doing around GBV and why?
2. What are the impacts of their activism on help-seeking and help-giving for GBV?

Analysis of this ethnographic data found that NUML's activism impacted local help-seeking and help-giving in four key ways: First, their community education and organizing illuminate the local socio-cultural and material conditions that help-seekers and help-givers must navigate, and they identify how existing supportive options need to be tailored to better meet *mujeres abusadas*' needs. Second, their activism helps to reduce barriers to informal and formal help-seeking and help-giving. Third, their activist work helps facilitate informal and formal help-seeking and -giving. Fourth, their organizing augments informal and formal help-seeking and help-giving options by creating alternatives like mutual aid supportive services, systems change, socio-cultural change, and prevention efforts. It was through ethnographic and feminist decolonial approaches to research that these dynamics were revealed.

While social work research has identified commonalities in how GBV manifests cross-culturally and has identified and developed many types of support important to victims, there are many important socio-cultural and material differences that may render policy and practice responses ineffective or even harmful. For these reasons, this research builds on anthropological understandings of gender and violence, feminist decolonial theories, and social justice principles in its methods and analysis. These methods, which included meticulous observations of social processes through operationalizing decolonial feminist theory, allowed me to connect theoretical and practical questions about GBV and social change. This approach provided a lens to see

where and how power is operating, and to uncover the many ways in which activism, help-seeking, and help-giving interact and play out in *mujeres abusadas*' everyday lives.

Decolonial approaches to research emphasize an attention to "*otros saberes"* – other knowledges and other ways of knowing – rather than uncritically creating knowledge from places of hegemonic power. Decolonial theorists often argue that decolonalitity should be conceptualized as *un paradigma otro* – written intentionally in English as "an other" paradigm to emphasize its distinction from hegemonic paradigms (Mignolo, 2008, 2011a; Escobar, 2007). By examining activism as "an other" paradigm of help-giving, we are able to develop a more robust understanding of how networks of help-giving and help-seeking are structured and how they function in the particular *lambayecano* context.

## 4.1 Literature Review

This literature review summarizes three key bodies of theoretical and applied knowledges that are especially relevant to this paper. First is an overview of anthropological approaches to the study of GBV in the Latin American region. Second is an overview of decoloniality theory and feminist decolonial theory and praxis and how it relates to understanding and responding to GBV. Third is an overview of the literature on help-seeking and help-giving for intimate partner violence in Latin America and among Latinas in the US.

### *4.1.1 An Anthropological Approach to Gender Violence in Latin America*

Anthropologists have long observed that gender alone is not enough to explain gender violence, and that we must also consider the complex socio-cultural, economic, political, historical, etc. contexts in which violence manifests. Violence is fundamentally a socio-cultural construct whose dimensions are shaped by culture, ideologies, history, symbolic structures, and

social structures, and cannot be understood only in terms of their physicality (Scheper-Hughes, 1992; Robben & Nordstrom, 1995; Kleinman, 2000; Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004; Merry, 2009). Most anthropologists who study gender violence agree that there is no one universal explanation for gender violence – including gender itself (e.g., patriarchy). Ethnographic depictions focus more on how societies define acceptable and unacceptable forms of violence and explore the personhood and agency of victims within socio-cultural, social-service, and legal frameworks, which often contradict and undermine each other (e.g., Moore, 1994b; Kleinman et al., 1997; Das & Kleinman, 2000, 2001; Kleinman, 2000; Van Vleet, 2002; Farmer, 2004a, 2004b, Utas, 2005; 2010; Biehl, 2005; Merry, 2006, 2009; Das, 2007; Hautzinger, 2007; Lazarus-Black, 2007; Bodley, 2008; Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009; Alcalde, 2010; Parson, 2013). Because violence is constructed socio-culturally, there is an inseparable link between individuals/individual actions and social/structural determination (Bourgois, 2004), with the power and meaning of violence rooted in the cultural dimensions of violence (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004).

As both gender and violence are conceptualized and enacted in diverse ways cross-culturally, a heteronormative patriarchal explanatory framework fails to account for violence in same-gender/sex couples (Merry, 2009), between members' broader kin networks like mothers- and daughters-in-law (Harvey, 1994; Van Vleet, 2002), or in social services (Mulla, 2014). Gender also interacts in important ways with race and class to impact how, when and by/to whom gender violence happens (Alcalde, 2007b). As Parson (2013, p. 12) explained, "the violence, the material and psychological subjugation, and the attendant suffering are rooted in social ills, not in individual bodies and minds, though that is where the suffering and violence are made manifest."

When violence exceeds the "normal" or "acceptable" moral bounds – determined by a variety of individual and socio-cultural factors – victims may choose to seek legal or social services. Examining (and/or emphasizing) victims' agency within constrained circumstances (e.g., resource-poor individuals seeking help in research-poor contexts) is a main area of concern for anthropologists studying gender violence (e.g., Alcalde, 2010; 2011; Parson, 2010; 2013). They highlight how issues of structural violence stemming from racism, inequality, conquest, occupation, colonialism, poverty, hunger, social exclusion/ marginalization, kinship patterns and family organization, humiliation, warfare and civil conflict, impunity, migration, urbanization, corruption, and economic disruptions are inseparable from interpersonal gender violence and make individuals increasingly vulnerable to victimization (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004; Merry, 2009; Alcalde, 2007a, 2007b, 2010; Parson, 2010; 2013; Wies & Haldane, 2011, 2015a, 2015b; Boesten, 2010, 2014). Merry (2009, p. 185) asserted that a good anthropological approach to gender violence, shows clearly that efforts to change gender violence must understand the practice in terms of audiences that support it, the institutions that treat it lightly, and the structures of inequality that benefit from the kinds of control and power that it provides."

Women's and men's identities and positions of power are challenged when women decide to seek external help around violence (Van Vleet, 2002; Merry, 2006; Parson, 2013), and when moral rights and responsibilities clash with legal rights and responsibilities. As Moore (1994b, p. 141) noted, "Individuals are multiply constituted subjects, and they can, and do, take up multiple subject positions within a range of discourses and social practices. Some of these subject positions will be contradictory and will conflict with each other." Van Vleet (2002, p. 165) observed this in Bolivia, explaining that Andean women who seek help from the police or the courts put themselves, "into a potentially contradictory position, having to take on non-native

Andean notions of family, gender, and femininity as well as racial and class stereotypes and language, literacy, and financial barriers."

### *4.1.2 Feminist Decoloniality*

Developed by Latin American scholars across social sciences, especially in Anthropology, Sociology, Latin American Studies, and Literature, decoloniality theory examines how power and hegemonic logics developed in highly contextualized ways specific to the (de)colonial experiences of peoples in Latin America, including race, class, and gender. The project known as modernity/(de)coloniality (MC) is an interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological project that originated in Latin America, emerging most notably from the US/Mexico borderlands and the Andean region of South America. Decoloniality challenges notions that knowledge is "disembodied and independent of any specific geohistorical locations," and argues that European hegemony since the Renaissance creates and disseminates that perception (Mignolo, 2011b, p. 1). Coloniality emerges from colonization. Colonization includes,

> the historically specific acts of colonialism through which one nation imposes its sovereignty on another, [while] coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerge in the context of colonialism, which redefine culture, labor, intersubjective relations, aspirations of the self, common sense, and knowledge production in ways that accredit the superiority of the colonizer. (Mendoza, 2016, p. 114)

Decoloniality is not a narrow, single-minded agenda. Rather, it encompasses,

> …all kind of work and projects that engage in the struggle between forms of colonial control (racially and patriarchally base[d]) and strategies of liberation, self-empowerment and freedom to build a non-imperial colonial world. And that engage the struggle not only as resistance but as re-existence: de-linking from the mono-cultures of the mind and engaging, adventurously, in building a pluri-versal world. (Mignolo, 2008, n.p.)

Decoloniality, as “an other” option, is not aiming to be the only option. However, recognizing decoloniality as “an other” option, it makes it apparent that all other paradigms – including eurocentric modernist hegemony – are also options and “not simply the irrevocable truth of history that has to be imposed by force and fire” (Mignolo, 2011a, p. 21).

Decolonial theorizing in and about Latin America has been dominated by men, and while attentive to power, violence, and race, it lacks a profound attention to gender. Feminist decolonial theorists critique decolonial theory for not having an intersectional understanding of how gender intersects with race and sexuality as they have been constructed through the (de)colonial experience (e.g., Lugones, 2007; Escobar, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2008; Mignolo, 2008, 2012; Arvin et al., 2013; Mendoza, 2016). Latin American feminist decolonial theorists, however, have much to offer research and theorization on gender violence. The coloniality of power and the coloniality of gender, as Grosfoguel (2008) observes, is an important and useful complication to intersectionality theories in that they add a nuanced examination of the social construction of race and gender in the (de)colonial context. Salem reminds us that a truly decolonial approach that is “intersectional and unapologetically subaltern” (2014, n.p.) will allow us to examine the coloniality of gender as it is, rather than how we imagine it to be. “This may mean that categories such as class, race, sexuality, and even gender don’t mean what intersectionality theorists think they mean, or don’t intersect in the ways previously assumed” (Salem, 2014, n.p.). Salem adds that, "A decolonial approach would necessitate moving past the individualistic liberal ontology underpinning much of feminism today, including some strands of intersectionality" (2014, n.p.). Espinosa Miñoso is similarly critical of some intersectional international feminisms and so-called "third world" feminist meetings. She observed that instead of working toward true decolonization,

> The space of feminist solidarity without borders has been a profitable space for a few privileged women in the South who, thanks to their class, origin, color privileges, or thanks to their access to sources of income, have obtained prestige and improved personal status. The emergence of this new deterritorialized activist camp has meant a real disconnection between local/regional feminist leadership and their bases, and has also led to a process of specialization, professionalization and technocratization of feminism. This has led to further fragmentation and division of the struggles and movement. I am pointing to the consolidation of an elite feminism which, in spaces that are accessible to only a few and in alliance with feminists from the First World, determine movements' priorities. (2009, p. 14)

A prominent example of decolonial feminist praxis has been Chicana decolonial feminists' attention to the feminicides in Ciudad Juarez and elsewhere in the US/Mexico borderlands. Davalos (2008, p. 169) notes that "Unlike the disciplines from which they borrow, Chicana feminists insist on a scholarship that is accountable to social problems and that aims to root out injustice and expose artificial hierarchies and methods of exclusion." Through examining the coloniality of gender and the coloniality of power, we can come to understand how women's social positions and lived realities are shaped through (de)colonial processes that include an exploitative globalized capitalist economy, hierarchies of race and class, environmental destruction, etc., all of which are tied to the pervasive violence towards women and girls and the impunity their abusers enjoy.

Decolonial practices and resistance often take place in the form of a *testimonio* (personal testimony) (Davalos, 2008). Madsen warns, however, that "The risk of survivor testimony lies not so much in the telling but in the appropriation of survivor discourses by dominant gender paradigms and ideologies that "pre-script" such discourse" (2015, p. 266). She argues that one must resist harmful and conservative male narratives that serve to minimize and normalize violence (2015). This cooptation is particularly dangerous because *testimonios* often engage in what Davalos calls 'speaking secrets,' "silences around sexuality, homophobia, domestic violence, and internalized oppression" (2008, p. 154). What is *not* said in *testimonios* is as – if

not more – important than what was said. Davalos explains that speaking secrets includes critically examining what is being said and what is not being said: "Chicana feminism looks differently at silence, examining what is said, what is not said, and what is said by the silence" (2008, p. 155). Madsen argues that Chicana decolonial feminists must “attend to the brutal facts of violence against women and listen to these stories of suffering that we would prefer not to hear" (2015, p. 256).”

The coloniality of power and the coloniality of gender have potentially important contributions to gender violence theory and praxis which are generally predicated upon notions of power and control. Decolonial thinking pushes us to consider how we understand and interpret relationships of power – including those between researcher (and the institutions that support them) and research participants – and what this means for research, theory, and social work practice. Thinking decoloniality forces us to reconsider bureaucracy, incarceration, and other forms of state violence as the only solution to gender violence. It forces us to ask how we might collaboratively develop interventions that do not force survivors to choose between accepting participation in the violent hegemonic system and getting no help at all (VanVleet, 2002; Nayak & Suchland, 2006). It also makes us reconsider how can we address the violence that women experience without relying on and reproducing the racist and gendered stereotypes that the decolonial project aims to uncover and dismantle. These common but misguided beliefs deem certain groups of people (e.g., Indigenous women) at risk for violence from and by their own culture, and other groups of people (e.g., white women) at risk for violence from and by other groups of people (e.g., Black men) (Nayak & Suchland, 2006; Salem, 2014).

While offering many important critiques of the status quo, feminist decoloniality has not yet engaged with the everyday practicalities of how to support help-seeking victims or better

prepare potential help-givers. Anthropological theory and methods, alongside feminist decolonial perspectives, offer a richness to exploring questions important to social work praxis. These facilitate engaging the spectrum of socio-cultural and material nuances from micro, to mezzo, to macro, and examining how power is operationalized in these settings and interactions.

### *4.1.3 Help-Seeking For Intimate Partner Violence Among Latinas*

Because the literature on help-seeking for GBV in Latin America is small, I also draw on research with US-based Latinas and a few studies in other areas of the rural global south. A review of social work research on Latina women's external help-seeking behaviors (seeking help from sources external to oneself) for intimate partner violence finds a fairly uniform acceptance of a distinction between informal help-seeking and formal help-seeking. Informal help-seeking includes support from people who are not in professional positions of providing support, and include family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances, and co-workers. Informal help-givers often offer material resources, emotional support, a place to stay, childcare, etc. (Liang et al., 2005). Formal help-seeking includes asking for support from people and institutions in places of relative power who are (or at least should be) appropriately trained to support victims. These include IPV programs, social workers, human service providers, law enforcement, medical service providers, employers, etc. Formal help-givers often offer things like medical services including mental health services and psychological support, legal services and assistance with navigating bureaucracy, referrals to other services, promises of police protection, etc. (Liang et al., 2005). Much western research focuses heavily on individual characteristics (age, socioeconomic status, etc.), an approach consistent with a highly individualistic cultural setting. Studies based in Latin America (e.g., Sagot, 2005), however, employed a more structural analysis – critiquing the systems in place, corruption, discrimination, etc.

Help-seeking also assumes that one has a sense of being worthy of help, and that stigma and shame are strong barriers to any kind of external help-seeking. Salazar et al. (2012) found that help-seeking was often instigated by a cognitive shift to understanding the behavior happening inside of the relationship as violence. Sagot found that victims were most empowered to seek help by, “support from close persons; favorable economic or material conditions; good information, sometimes obtained from public campaigns; and the existence of appropriate services that respond to women’s needs and expectations" (2005, p. 1313), all of which are important to internal readiness (personal resilience and self-realization). Internal readiness and external help-seeking, like informal and formal help-seeking, are not discrete categories, rather they overlap and mutually influence each other in complex ways. Seeking informal help was a common first step for the survivors included in these studies, as many survivors sought help from friends and family before going to state or nonprofit agencies or only sought help from informal sources (West et al., 1998; Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006; Brabeck & Guzmán, 2008, 2009; Alcalde, 2010; Perrin et al., 2011; Sabina et al., 2012; Salazar et al., 2012; Frías, 2013; Kyriakakis, 2014; Postmus, 2015). Formal help-seeking often occurs in parallel to informal help-seeking or after informal strategies have failed (Alcalde, 2010).

Informal help-seeking, however, can also serve as a social barrier to formal help-seeking. Informal supports sometimes discourage both informal and formal help-seeking based on conservative ideas about marriage and ideas about IPV being “normal” (Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006; Brabeck & Guzmán, 2008, Alcalde, 2010; Kyriakakis, 2014; Silva-Martinez, 2015). Survivors who have poor relationships with their families in places where personal problems are not to be shared outside of family networks often feel that they cannot seek informal support (Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006; Salazar et al., 2012; Kyriakakis, 2014). Barriers to formal help-

seeking are most commonly associated with fear and shame and structural factors. Survivors may be fearful of increased violence should the perpetrator find them out. They may also fear being discriminated against or treated poorly by institutions like the police, the criminal justice system, healthcare services, etc. (Sagot, 2005; Alcalde, 2010; Silva-Martinez, 2015). Survivors may also lack basic resources like cash, transportation, and personal identification documents required to access formal services (Brabeck & Guzmán, 2008, Alcalde, 2010; Mookerjee et al., 2015). Other survivors may be unable to take time off work to seek services (Parson, 2010; Perrin et al., 2011). A lack of services that met the cultural expectations of Latinas – including expectations for privacy, or services that were perceived to be ineffectual were also barriers to formal help-seeking (Sagot, 2005; Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006; Flicker et al., 2011; Salazar et al., 2012; Frías, 2013; Kyriakakis, 2014; Silva-Martínez, 2015). In other cases, a lack of knowledge about available services and where to go for help limited victims' formal help-seeking (Moracco et al., 2005).

### 4.2 Methods

This paper focuses on analyzing the impacts of the grassroots feminist activist organization, *Ni Una Menos Lambayeque*, and how their activist work connects to other forms of help-seeking and help-giving in Lambayeque, Peru. The hashtag *#NiUnaMenos* (Not One Fewer [Woman Alive]) was created by Argentine feminists responding to a 2015 feminicide. The hashtag began trending on Spanish-language social media and fueled massive protests that spilled across Argentine borders to places like Peru, Chile, and Mexico, where local women began organizing grassroots protests and adopting the hashtag as their groups' name.

The data that I am reporting on in this paper is the analysis of NUML activists and their activities, but these research questions emerged from the broader decolonial feminist research on

intimate partner violence (IPV) help-seeking and help-giving relationships I was conducting. Through that broader research I came to understand the socio-cultural, structural, and material particularities of Lambayeque, and how these impact how *mujeres abusadas* and potential informal help-givers navigate helping relationships. I was able to see how these activist actions were interacting with and influencing more traditionally recognized forms of help-seeking and help-giving. Engaging decolonial frameworks helped me to recognize activism as "an other" paradigm of help. Table 5, below, summarizes both the broader data I collected that informed these research questions and the data collection with NUML activists which is the primary focus of this paper.

*Table 5: Data Collection with NUML Activists, Mujeres Abusadas, and Informal Helpers*

| |
|---|
| **General Participant Observation:** Throughout all phases of research, I participated in and observed activities of everyday life in Lambayeque. I lived with two different multi-generational *lambayecana* families; participated in daily activities like cooking and eating meals and going to the market; read local newspapers, watched tv, and listened to the radio; and spent time in a variety of public and private social spaces. Throughout my fieldwork, I took detailed field notes which I used to write memos and develop contextual descriptions of *lambayecana* life. While most of these interactions were about other aspects of daily life (e.g., day-to-day survival, raising children, local politics, social gossip about others, pop culture, etc.), situations involving IPV or conversations about IPV sometimes came up organically. |
| **Targeted Participant Observation - Helping Relationships:** Throughout all phases of research, I spent extensive time with *mujeres abusadas*, their families, friends, neighbors, and other potential helpers in their homes and in a variety of social settings doing quotidian activities. When presented with the opportunity, I accompanied some *mujeres abusadas* as they were seeking formal IPV support services (e.g., at the police station, at the local *Centro de Emergencia Mujer*, etc.). Throughout fieldwork, I had complex interactions and informal conversations with many potential informal helpers (including *mujeres abusadas* who, importantly, all described situations in which they were potential help-givers to others) in a variety of settings and situations. |
| **Targeted Participant Observation – NUML Activism:** In the third phase of research, I spent 14 months engaged in frequent participant observation with NUML activists. I attended and actively participated in planning meetings, community-based education activities, public events and actions, post-activity evaluations, etc. |

| Research Phases | Participants & Demographics | Methods, Research Activities, & Recruitment |
|---|---|---|
| 2010<br>(4 months) | ***n* =15 *mujeres abusadas***<br>Ages: 18-61 (1 in their teens, 3 in their 20s, 4 in their 30s, 4 in their 40s, 2 in their 50s, 1 in their 60s) | Life history interviews and participant observation.<br><br>Recruited: through personal contacts and personal introductions/snowball sampling. |
| | ***n* = 1 informal helper**<br>(1 man in his 30s; ex-husband and father of 2 interviewed *mujeres abusadas*) | Qualitative interview and participant observation with him and his family members while seeking formal services.<br><br>Recruited: through personal contacts. |
| 2015<br>(2 months) | ***n* =14 *mujeres abusadas***<br>Ages: 23-66 (3 in their 20s, 2 in their 30s, 5 in their 40s, 2 in their 50s, 2 in their 60s) | Continued participant observation.<br><br>Recruited: from prior research participation (one woman died prior to 2015). |
| | ***n* = 1 informal helper**<br>(1 man in his 40s) | Continued participant observation.<br><br>Recruited: from prior research participation. |
| 2017-19<br>(18 months) | ***n* = 16 *mujeres abusadas***:<br>9 new participants &<br>7 from prior phases<br><br>Ages: 23-58 (3 in their 20s, 3 in their 30s, 7 in their 40s, 3 in their 50s) | Life history interviews with new participants, follow-up interviews with continuing participants, life history calendars with all participants.<br><br>Recruited: from prior research participation, personal introductions/snowball sampling, and requests from *mujeres abusadas* who learned about my research from others and asked me to interview them. |
| | ***n* = 21 informal helpers**<br>20 new participants &<br>1 from prior phases<br>(5 men and 1 woman in their 20s, 2 men in their 30s, 7 men in their 40s, 4 men in their 50s, 2 men in their 60s, 1 man in his 70s) | Qualitative interviews with new participants, follow-up interviews with continuing participant, continued participant observation.<br><br>Recruited: from prior research participation, through personal contacts, and personal introductions/snowball sampling. |
| | ***n* = approx. 25 NUML activists and allies**<br>(Ages: 20s – 50s, ~22 women and 3 men) | Frequent participant observation and complex interactions for a period of 14 months (see above). I conducted regular short, informal interviews with activists before, during, and after these interactions. I also conducted a few longer semi-structured interviews with activists and allies, but these were challenging to schedule due to their busy lives.<br>I also was part of the very active NUML WhatsApp group chat (where much organizing happened) which included over 100 participants. |
| **Interview Participant Totals Across All Research Phases:**<br>***n* = 24 individual *mujeres abusadas***<br>***n* = 21 individual informal helpers (not including *mujeres abusadas who were also helpers*)**<br>***n* = approx. 25 NUML activists and allies** | | |

### *4.2.1 Data collection on Help-Seeking and Help-Giving in Lambayeque*

In my larger dissertation project, I was focused on understanding how *mujeres abusadas* navigated help-seeking for IPV. The research questions, design, methods, and analysis of this study were informed by anthropological methods and theory, feminist decolonial theory and practice, and social work informed social justice theory and practice. All data collection was done by me, in Spanish. During twenty-four months of fieldwork in Lambayeque, I collected and analyzed various types of data, including conducting life history interviews and co-creating life calendars with *mujeres abusadas*, (*n*=24) to understand the complexity of individuals' situations by contextualizing them within larger systems, while documenting the ways that larger systems affect individual choice, all while being attentive to diversity within groups (Freedman et al., 1988; Behar, 1994; Rubenstein, 2002; Yoshihama et al., 2005; Bernard, 2011; Yoshihama & Bybee, 2011; Hayes, 2018). I conducted semi-structured interviews with friends and family members of *mujeres abusadas* (*n*=21), and formal help-givers like service providers, policy makers, and activists (*n*=12).

My general participant-observation included living with a multi-generational *lambayecana* family and participating in the activities of everyday life. During these quotidian activities, I observed and participated in many casual conversations about help-seeking and help-giving, paying attention to both what was and what was not being said. I accompanied *mujeres abusadas* while they engaged in formal and informal help-seeking, participated in activist activities, and went about their daily lives (Pine, 2008; Alcalde, 2010; Roberts, 2012; Parsons, 2013). Through all stages and venues of participant observation I took extensive methodological, descriptive, and analytic field notes (Emerson et al., 1995; Bernard, 2011). I also collected and analyzed news articles to examine media narratives about gender violence and facilitate

conversations with *lambayecanos* about these issues (Emerson et al., 1995; Alcalde, 2009; Bernard, 2011).

While most of my research is focused on the town of Lambayeque, a densely populated small town of around 55,000 people, this paper is focused on activism based out of Chiclayo, a bustling city of over half a million people located just 7 miles south of Lambayeque. Both are located in the department of Lambayeque. The town of Lambayeque's limited institutional landscape is representative of Latin American small-town life, and Lambayeque has no NGOs that address GBV. There are, however, a few NGOs and grassroots collectives in Chiclayo that do. While in many ways Lambayeque and Chiclayo are worlds apart, they are deeply intertwined and residents frequently travel to Chiclayo to access private and centralized governmental services, to do shopping, and for work.

Both Lambayeque and Chiclayo have very high population density, and in addition to the many kinship and social connections that exist between residents, the very nature of living in such close proximity means that people have extensive knowledge of what is going on in other people's lives. In Lambayeque – and even in Chiclayo (though to a lesser extent), everyone seemingly knows everyone, and close social connections in kinship and social networks are necessary for individuals' economic and social survival. For most, money and material resources are always precarious, and most people live de mano a boca (from hand to mouth) – meaning that the money never spends time in one's pocket or a bank. Because money is so tight, there are strong expectations for reciprocity and mutual support between family members (e.g., siblings, parents, and children). These traditional forms of mutual aid, however, are now increasingly coming into conflict with the shift towards a more individualistic, capitalist society.

Though this research draws on fieldwork conducted in 2017-19, my deep embeddedness in the community goes back to 2004 through kinship and other social ties and through prior ethnographic research. While I physically stand out as a gringa, I am now a *gringa conocida* (a familiar gringa) and am no longer a conspicuous presence in town. My blended insider-outsider status, and my fluency in the local northern coastal Peruvian Spanish dialect, allowed me to move more easily through a variety of social and physical spaces, and also located me in a social space that helped people feel comfortable sharing their stories openly with me.

### *4.2.2 Data collection with Ni Una Menos Lambayeque Activists*

I came to be involved with NUML when one of my research participants in Lambayeque, Lucía, wanted to honor her disappeared sister by carrying a banner in a 2017 NUML march. Hearing Lucía talk about her experience of the march against the background of the help-seeking research I was engaged in helped me realize there were important connections between individuals' help-seeking/giving and this activism. I connected with NUML organizers through social media and began regularly attending their meetings and events.

*Ni Una Menos Lambayeque* (NUML) (here Lambayeque is referring to the department of Lambayeque, not the town) was the activist organization that I interfaced with the most. Based out of Chiclayo, NUML has members both from Chiclayo and surrounding *lambayecano* towns. The data used in this paper were gathered mostly through participant-observation in NUML's meetings and events and informal conversations with NUML organizers. NUML is an independent, self-funded grassroots organization that began in 2016 after spreading via social media from Argentina to Peru, and around Latin America. NUML organizes locally around issues of gender-based violence, broadly defined. Their analysis is radical, intersectional, and decolonial. While NUML activists engage in many diverse activities, these are driven by this

ideological orientation and analysis, and all connect to their broadest goal of social transformation.

NUML does not have a neatly defined membership, but the most active participants were a group of around 20-25 women in their 20s-50s from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Most of them, however, are formally educated and are currently university students or have earned a bachelor's degree, and several of them have earned graduate or professional degrees. Many of the activists are trained and work in fields adjacent to their gender violence activism: sociologists, psychologists, lawyers, etc. Many of the regular participants are also active in or connected to other groups like feminist student groups, professional women's groups, international activist groups like Amnesty International, women's labor organizing, leftist political groups, etc. Sometimes, other members of these adjacent groups, including a few men, would also attend NUML planning meetings and would often participate and collaborate in solidarity with NUML events and actions. The core group involved in NUML engages in a blend of what McAlevey (2016) would describe as mobilizing and organizing models, targeting both grassroots activists and organic leaders. McAlevey (2016, p. 12), describes grassroots activists as, "People already committed to the cause, who show up over and over. When they burn out, new, also previously committed activists are recruited. And so on. Social media are over relied on." NUML activists definitely rely on grassroots activists, but they are actively working towards an organizing model that emphasizes recruiting and developing organic leaders, and where "Moblilizing is seen as a tactic, not a strategy" (McAlevey, 2016, p. 11). When the focus is on organic leaders, as McAlevey (2016, p. 12) explains, "The base is expanded through developing the skills of organic leaders who are key influencers of the constituency, and who can

then, independent of staff, recruit new people never before involved. Individual, face-to-face interactions are key."

While the frequency and size of NUML meetings varied depending on the capacity of the organizers and what kinds of events were being planned, I was intermittently present for 14 months of strategic planning and community organizing meetings, self-financing campaigns, marches and protests, street theater, vigils, post-event evaluations, self-defense workshops, and planning for the Feminist Formation School. I was also a member of the NUML WhatsApp-based group chat, used for organizing, resource communication and coordination, and advocacy. I attended and participated in meetings and events while building relationships with individual activists and the group, engaging in what anthropologists call participant-observation. During meetings I took notes, asked questions, and offered suggestions when appropriate, but I was careful not to assume (or presume) any sort of leadership role. The collective determined the goals and the methods of all planning and execution of group activities. Throughout this time, I also conducted formal and informal ethnographic interviews with some activists, as well as with *mujeres abusadas*, about the work NUML activists were doing.

### *4.2.3 Data Analysis*

For this paper, I created a complex, multi-level case study (Yin, 2009) around NUML, including all data relevant to NUML's activism, to identify patterns and triangulate data (Denzen, 2011). I analyzed my interview and participant-observation data using grounded theory methods: open and selective coding, accompanied by procedural and theoretical memoing, to identify and investigate emerging themes that I then subjected to secondary and tertiary analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1999). These analytical methods allowed for a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of how GBV is lived, experienced, and

navigated by survivors in Lambayeque, including uncovering some unexpected effects of GBV activism on help-seeking and help-giving.

For the data analysis for this paper, I first drew on the case study data to write meticulous descriptions of all the NUML activities, what activists told me about their rationales and methods, and what I observed about how and why they acted. Next, I examined how different groups of people (e.g., activists, participants, observers) described the impacts of these. Then, informed by the help-seeking literatures and my knowledge of the particular barriers to help-seeking in Lambayeque, I coded the relevance of each of these activities for help-seeking and help-giving.

### 4.3 Results

NUML activists engage in an array of community organizing activities including strategic planning and community organizing meetings, self-financing campaigns, marches and protests, street theater, vigils, post-event process and outcomes evaluations, self-defense workshops, mutual-aid support and community resource navigation, and community education initiatives. While not attempting to offer comprehensive supportive services to *mujeres abusadas* in the way an institutionalized GBV program might seek to do, NUML activists' activities offer a wide range of supports to both help-seekers and help-givers. During data analysis, as I categorized activities and identified how they are related to help-seeking and help-giving, four functional categories emerged. Importantly, these four categories should not be treated as discrete, rather they overlap and inform each other in complex and dynamic ways:

1. Activist analysis, community education, and social-change work illuminate the local socio-cultural and material conditions that help-seekers and help-givers must navigate, and they

identify how existing supportive options need to be tailored appropriately to better meet *mujeres abusadas'* needs.

NUML activists' feminist decolonial theoretical frameworks facilitate identifying the particularities of *lambayecana* reality which they work to publicly denaturalize and counter through decolonial feminist praxis. Denaturalization makes obvious that something is the result of cultural processes, rather than a natural inevitability, and shows that it can be challenged and/or changed rather than tacitly accepted.

2. Activism reduces barriers to help-seeking and help-giving.

Through consciousness-raising and denaturalizing GBV by reframing it as violence that should be challenged rather than tacitly accepted, NUML organizers facilitate the early stages of empowerment for *mujeres abusadas* – both for those who directly participate and for those who witness NUML activists' public actions. Empowerment helps one to internally recognize that there is a problem, that it is not right, that it should not be happening, and that the victim has worth and a right to not be victimized. Building *mujeres abusadas'* self-worth is key to internal readiness which reduces shame-related barriers to help-seeking. Building the knowledge, confidence, and self-worth of potential informal help-givers helps them learn to challenge norms and processes, along with the idea that nothing can be done to help. NUML organizers make it easier for potential help-givers to provide help by denaturalizing violence and giving helpers frameworks of analysis and praxis.

3. Activist work facilitates informal and formal help-seeking and informal and formal help-giving.

NUML activists educate *mujeres abusadas* about their rights and about where and how to seek help. Through their informal referral system, they connect *mujeres abusadas* to informal

and formal community resources. Their education and consciousness raising with potential community-based informal help-givers aims to enhance help-givers capacity to offer support. Open critiques of public supportive services like the police and the prosecutor's office pressure these formal institutions into providing better services to *mujeres abusadas*.

4. NUML activists' augments help-seeking and help-giving by creating new forms of support and new social spaces for these to occur.

By creating alternative networks of support, resource navigation, and mutual-aid, NUML activists engage a dual-power strategic approach of critiquing and working to dismantle current hegemonic systems of power while simultaneously working to create new, alternative systems of support and community-based power.

It was through my own ethnographic and feminist decolonial approaches to research of the NUML activists' feminist decolonial theory and praxis that these dynamics became clear. Through describing NUML's principal activist activities, I will highlight below some of the ways in which each of these contributes to meeting some or all of the four functions described above.

### *4.3.1 Strategic Planning and Community Organizing*

As a grassroots organization, NUML members hold open meetings for platform development and collective determination. They publicly advertise times and locations of meetings on social media and invite individuals and organizations to participate. Through attendees' active participation, NUML members collectively decide what the vision, mission, focus, and strategy of upcoming organizing will be. They engage in strategic and accessible community-based analyses that encourage all participants to be active contributors, sharing their personal experiences and concerns. These meetings also involve collective study and peer education, which helps the group develop analytic frameworks that they then use to identify and

diagnose social problems. They engage in power mapping, identifying potential allies and potential obstacles to their organizing goals. In these ways, NUML activists identify the problems they will address through education, protest actions, mutual aid, and resource navigation.

This type of collaborative planning and organizing, which is centered around the lived experiences of participants, highlights the socio-cultural and material conditions that create these social problems and the gaps in and barriers to support. Their dual-power analysis acknowledges that they must help people survive the current reality while fighting to create a new, different reality through radical social change. Participants in these community organizing activities experience consciousness-raising around GBV which helps to denaturalize this violence, allowing participants to see it as something to be challenged rather than expected and tolerated. It is through this organizing that participants also build trust, *sororidad* (sisterhood, female camaraderie), *solidaridad* (solidarity), and expand networks of allies to facilitate their other activist efforts.

### *4.3.2 Messaging/Promotion*

NUML activists' messaging – both in language and in imagery – is carefully considered. Posters (see Figure 11) announcing events are designed to be inclusive and representative of Peruvian women – including lower- and working-class women like the street sweeper raising her broom and indigenous women from different regions of Peru. In both posters NUML organizers represent indigenous Andean and Amazonian women, as well as women from the coast, including Afro-Peruvian women, Asian-Peruvian women, and *mestizas*. The poster on the left announced the 2019 International Women's Day march, which was styled as a funeral march. The poster on the right announced the 2020 International Women's Day march, which called for

a dignified life and equality for women. Both posters exclaim, boldly, *¡Nos Están Matando!* – They Are Killing Us!

*Figure 11: NUML Posters from the 2019 Funeral March (L) and 2020 Protest March (R)*



These images are powerful in that they use colors associated with International Women's Day (purple) and the neon colors used to promote popular *chicha* and *cumbia* music concerts directed at lower- and working-class Peruvians. They signal inclusiveness across race, ethnicity, and class, and also signal that GBV is a problem that affects all Peruvian women. The representation in the posters invites and encourages women of all socio-economic classes, races, and ethnicities to see themselves as part of the struggle against GBV and to participate in the marches. They identify feminicide as an unacceptable social problem, while also demanding social changes that would offer all women equality and dignity. The imagery draws clear intersectional connections between race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, employment, and

gender, which foreshadows the content of chants, signage, and street theater performed during these marches.

### *4.3.3 Self-Financing of Campaigns*

NUML organizers take great pride in self-financing all of their activities. While they will accept material support for certain things (e.g., accepting a donation from Amnesty International to cover the cost of renting loudspeakers for a march, borrowing megaphones from other organizations, etc.), all other funding comes through their own fundraising efforts – like making and selling t-shirts, bags, stickers, etc. NUML activists design the slogans and logos for the merchandise, which also function as community-based advertising. Seeing women around town wearing shirts with the NUML logo, for example, helps to normalize women speaking out publicly against GBV and to denaturalize the violence itself. These items are conversation starters out in the community, and they also serve to visually identify potential allies and sources of information for *mujeres abusadas*.

NUML activists are careful to keep the cost of these items low, as to make the items as accessible as possible, while still bringing in revenue. This financial independence is ethically and logistically important to NUML members, as it signifies their self-determination, independence, and freedom from outside influence (e.g., they do not accept donations from political parties, businesses, etc.). The money they earn through their self-financing campaigns is used to fund the materials needed for their events, including rental fees, permits, and meeting supplies like big paper and markers, snacks, etc.

### *4.3.4 Marches*

NUML organizers are very attentive to the ordering of participants in marches and the prioritizing of victims of gender violence. In the 2019 Funeral March, *La Muerte* (the grim reaper) led the procession. Following *La Muerte* were women carrying cardboard caskets with the names of *lambayecana* women who were victims of feminicide – killed by their intimate partners – in the style of a traditional *lambayecana* funeral march. Next followed the NUML banner, followed by women who carried photographs and names of even more *lambayecana* women who were killed by intimate partners, along with the family members and friends of victims of feminicide and other forms of gender-based violence. Next were feminist and other activist organizations, followed by school and university groups. Any political parties or for-profit businesses that want to participate (though not many do) are relegated to the end of the march. This is an intentional move to visibly represent and reinforce NUML organizers' priorities and who has control over the march's narrative and agenda.

For NUML organizers, the marches are a refusal of women to be disappeared or invisibilized – an intentional physical and disruptive presence in daily life. NUML organizers are careful to strike a balance between their own political goals of disruption and the comfort levels of potential march participants. For instance, although many in NUML's core group of organizers would prefer to march without soliciting a march permit from the city, they always secure permits because they understand that many *lambayecana* women would be hesitant or unwilling to participate in a march without a permit. Even participating in a permitted march is considered socially aggressive by some and makes some women and men uncomfortable. Several of the *mujeres abusadas* with whom I work told me that they would not feel comfortable participating at all if NUML did not have a permit.

A permit affords the group some semblance of "protection" during the march, as the city directs the police to stop traffic and participants will not be arrested for blocking traffic or disrupting normal activity in the streets. For many of the NUML organizers, however, this police presence is actually a problem, as they recognize the many ways in which the police do harm and serve as a major obstacle for *mujeres abusadas* seeking help. During the marches, the police provide minimal traffic control at best, and march participants often take it upon themselves to protect the march from aggressive and angry observers (mostly men) stuck in traffic due to the march. Additionally, NUML organizers recognize the strategic conflict of using some semblance of police protection for a march that is openly critical of the police. During one NUML meeting, two police officers (one man, one woman) from Chiclayo's Family Commissary came to recruit participants for a new victims' advocacy program they were starting. One NUML organizer confronted them, asking why the police do not openly support the NUM movement. The male officer responded, flatly, that they do not support NUM because of how openly critical NUM is of the Peruvian National Police.

NUML organizers have also been contending with a sort of backlash that followed their first march in August 2016. That first march, I was told by organizers and participants, was significantly larger than any other march they have had since. In November 2017, when I attended the second march with a few of my research participants, a major topic of conversation was that there were only around half as many people as there had been the previous year. While I never spoke directly with anyone who experienced this, I was told by multiple people that many women who had attended the previous year's march had been *castigadas* (punished) for having participated, and that there had been a post-march spike in intimate partner violence in the

region. This was believed to have scared many women away from participating in future marches.

NUML's marches draw on familiar cultural practices and symbols – like funeral marches – to draw attention to GBV as a pervasive social ill in ways that are culturally legible. The disruptive presence of the march, along with the visible representation of murdered local women, the messaging on signs, and the chants (see the section on *Arengas* – Chants, below) used during the march, denaturalize GBV and make demands for social change. While *mujeres abusadas* are expected to stay silent about the violence they experience, participants in the marches refuse to be silent or invisibilized. Women passersby who encounter the marchers often raise their fists in solidarity and shout encouraging words to the protesters. While some male bystanders are supportive, other men hurl insults, catcalls, and explicit threats of violence, like rape and murder, at marchers. In these instances, march participants offer each other supportive words, often linking arms in solidarity. Rather than discouraging participants, these verbal attacks are publicly visible reminders of the types of violence that NUML is organizing against, highlighting the need for continued organizing and action.

In March 2019, I asked several of the *mujeres abusadas* with whom I had been working in the nearby town of Lambayeque if they planned to attend the *Marcha Fúnebre* (funeral march). They all said that they wanted to, but they were unsure if they were going to be able to due to a variety of barriers. These barriers included the cost of traveling to Chiclayo and back (at the time a total cost of around US $1 per person), finding childcare, and coming up with a believable cover story to tell their husbands where they would be. I also reminded them that there was a chance that their picture could appear in a local newspaper or on social media – and

that, perhaps even more likely, someone they or their husband knows could see them on their way to or from Chiclayo or during the march.

Because several women were repeatedly lamenting not being able to go, I asked them if I covered their transportation costs if they would go, and they all enthusiastically said yes. I ordered a dozen NUML t-shirts (at around $4 each) as part of NUML's fundraising effort and offered them to the women who expressed a desire to go to the march. They each made up stories about where they were going (several of them simply said that I had invited them to go with me to Chiclayo for the afternoon) and found childcare. Because these women all knew each other and had already talked amongst themselves about going, we all met at one woman's house and went as a group. Interestingly, many of them seemed hesitant or nervous prior to the march, but their demeanors changed as they marched and chanted with the crowd. During and after the march, several of the women said things to me like, *había escuchado de la marchas, pero no me imaginaba que iba a ser así* (I had heard that there were marches, but I didn't imagine that it was going to be like this). They talked excitedly about how seeing so many brave women in one place made them feel stronger.

To my knowledge none of these *mujeres abusadas* that attended the march with me were *castigadas* (punished) for having participated, but we did also leave before the full event was over because several women needed to be back home in time to prepare and serve *lonche* (a light evening meal) to their families. I wondered if they would wear their NUML t-shirts home, or if they would change back into what they were wearing before. Many of them did wear their shirts home, and the shirts became regular staples in their wardrobes. Several of the women told me that other mothers at school pick-up would complement the shirts and ask where they had gotten them, and that they felt proud and powerful to wear them.

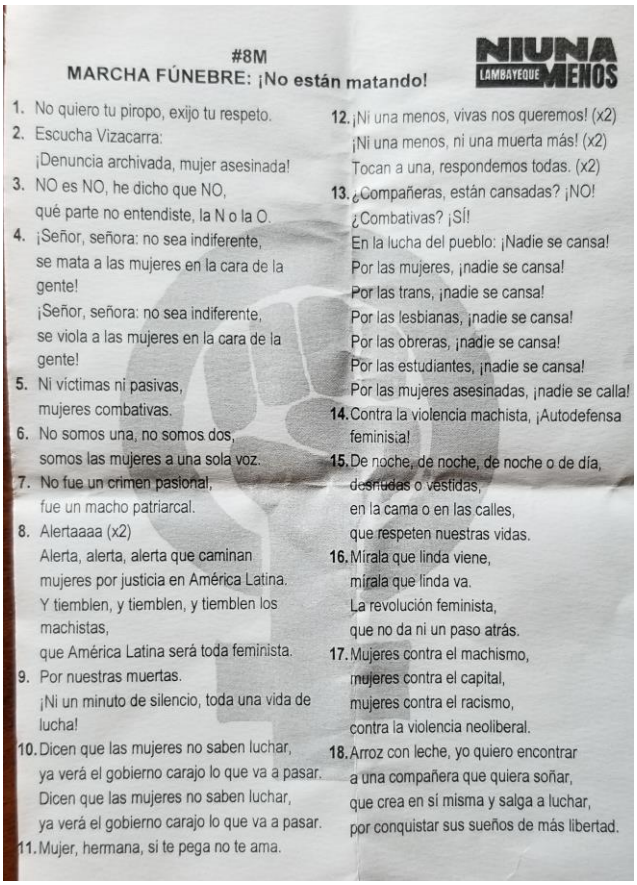
### *4.3.5 Arengas – Chants*

At the start of each march or protest, NUML organizers pass out sheets with *arengas* – harangues or chants – that will be used during the event (see Figure 12). *Arengas* are a powerful example of how NUML activists broadly conceptualize gender violence and their refusal of reductionist understandings of gender violence as simple interpersonal conflict or so-called crimes of passion.

In this half-page sheet of *arengas* from the 2019 Funeral March, NUML organizers mention street harassment violence, feminicide, lack of consent, public indifference about violence against women, machismo and patriarchal structures, intimate partner violence, violence directed at LGBQTIA+ individuals and communities, class-based discrimination, capitalism, racism, and neoliberalism as sources of violence that they are fighting and organizing against.

Because of the physical length of the marches, often stretching for five or more city blocks, coordinating *arengas* creates a sense of order and unity within the march. Even more important to the organizers is the *arengas'* role as a tool of intersectional and decolonial political education and empowerment for both the march participants and those watching the march pass by. Participants can take the paper with the *arengas* home, and several *mujeres abusadas* told me that they took them home so they could read them and remember both the messages of the *arengas* and how powerful they felt during the march.

*Figure 12: Arengas Handout from the 2019 NUML Funeral March (with English translations)*



#8M
MARCHA FÚNEBRE: ¡No están matando!

NIUNA MENOS LAMBAYEQUE

1. No quiero tu piropo, exijo tu respeto.
2. Escucha Vizacarra:
¡Denuncia archivada, mujer asesinada!
3. NO es NO, he dicho que NO,
qué parte no entendiste, la N o la O.
4. ¡Señor, señora: no sea indiferente,
se mata a las mujeres en la cara de la gente!
¡Señor, señora: no sea indiferente,
se viola a las mujeres en la cara de la gente!
5. Ni víctimas ni pasivas,
mujeres combativas.
6. No somos una, no somos dos,
somos las mujeres a una sola voz.
7. No fue un crimen pasional,
fue un macho patriarcal.
8. Alertaaaa (x2)
Alerta, alerta, alerta que caminan
mujeres por justicia en América Latina.
Y tiemblen, y tiemblen, y tiemblen los machistas,
que América Latina será toda feminista.
9. Por nuestras muertas.
¡Ni un minuto de silencio, toda una vida de lucha!
10. Dicen que las mujeres no saben luchar,
ya verá el gobierno carajo lo que va a pasar.
Dicen que las mujeres no saben luchar,
ya verá el gobierno carajo lo que va a pasar.
11. Mujer, hermana, si te pega no te ama.
12. ¡Ni una menos, vivas nos queremos! (x2)
¡Ni una menos, ni una muerta más! (x2)
Tocan a una, respondemos todas. (x2)
13. ¿Compañeras, están cansadas? ¡NO!
¿Combativas? ¡SÍ!
En la lucha del pueblo: ¡Nadie se cansa!
Por las mujeres, ¡nadie se cansa!
Por las trans, ¡nadie se cansa!
Por las lesbianas, ¡nadie se cansa!
Por las obreras, ¡nadie se cansa!
Por las estudiantes, ¡nadie se cansa!
Por las mujeres asesinadas, ¡nadie se calla!
14. Contra la violencia machista, ¡Autodefensa feminista!
15. De noche, de noche, de noche o de día,
desnudas o vestidas,
en la cama o en las calles,
que respeten nuestras vidas.
16. Mírala que linda viene,
mírala que linda va.
La revolución feminista,
que no da ni un paso atrás.
17. Mujeres contra el machismo,
mujeres contra el capital,
mujeres contra el racismo,
contra la violencia neoliberal.
18. Arroz con leche, yo quiero encontrar
a una compañera que quiera soñar,
que crea en sí misma y salga a luchar,
por conquistar sus sueños de más libertad.

| **#8M Funeral March: They are killing us!** |
|---|
| 1. I don't want your catcalls, I demand your respect. |
| 2. Listen Vizcarra:<br>Archived police report, murdered woman! |
| 3. NO is NO, I have said NO,<br>what part didn't you understand, the N or the O |
| 4. Sir, Ma'am: don't be indifferent<br>They're killing women right in people's faces!<br>Sir, Ma'am: don't be indifferent<br>They're raping women right in people's faces! |
| 5. Not victims, nor passive,<br>Combative women |
| 6. We are not just one, we are not just two<br>We are all women with just one voice |
| 7. It wasn't a crime of passion,<br>it was a patriarchal macho |
| 8. Alert (x2)<br>Alert, alert, alert they are walking<br>Women for justice in Latin America<br>And the *machistas* tremble, tremble, tremble<br>Because all of Latin America will become feminist |
| 9. For our dead [loved ones]<br>Not one minute of silence, a whole life of struggle! |
| 10. They say that women don't know how to fight,<br>The government will fucking see what's going to happen<br>They say that women don't know how to fight,<br>The government will fucking see what's going to happen |
| 11. Woman, sister, if he hits you he doesn't love you |
| 12. Not one fewer, we want us alive (x2)<br>Not one fewer, not one more dead woman (x2)<br>They touch one, we all respond (x2) |
| 13. Comrades, are you tired? NO!<br>Combative? YES!<br>In the struggles of the masses, no one gets tired!<br>For women, no one gets tired!<br>For trans women, no one gets tired!<br>For lesbians, no one gets tired!<br>For workers, no one gets tired!<br>For students, no one gets tired!<br>For murdered women, no one gets tired! |
| 14. Against *machista* violence, feminist self-defense! |
| 15. At night, at night, at night or in the day,<br>Naked or dressed,<br>In bed or in the streets<br>They must respect our lives |
| 16. Look at her how beautiful she is coming,<br>Look at her how beautiful she is going.<br>The Feminist revolution,<br>Doesn't take a single step back. |
| 17. Women against *machismo*,<br>Women against capital<br>Women against racism<br>Against neoliberal violence. |
| 18. Rice pudding, I want to find<br>A compañera that knows how to dream<br>That believes in herself and who goes out to fight<br>To conquer her dreams of more freedom |

These *arengas* explicitly mention Peruvian politicians (e.g., then Peruvian President Vizcarra), reference current events and local problems, and demonstrate a dedication to cross-issue, intersectional solidarity. The last *arenga* on the sheet from the 2019 Funeral March is a rewrite of the children's song/game "*Arroz con Leche*," which is ubiquitous in the Spanish-speaking world. In the traditional game, children dance in a circle and choose who they will or will not "marry." NUML organizers adopted a rewriting of Arroz con Leche (see Table 6) that went viral on social media (Simón, 2018), which rejects the heteronormative and patriarchal goal of finding a husband/wife to marry, and instead focuses on finding *compañeras* (comrades, a word here that evokes friendship and companionship in struggle) who share similar goals. The NUML activists build on the cultural familiarity of the song, while the changed lyrics highlight feminist values and goals.

*Table 6: Translation of Original and Modified Versions of Arroz con Leche*

| **Arroz Con Leche (original):** | **English Translation:** |
|---|---|
| Arroz con leche, me quiero casar<br>Con una señorita, que sepa bailar.<br>Que sepa coser, que sepa planchar<br>Que sepa abrir la puerta, para ir a jugar. | Rice Pudding, I want to get married<br>To a lady, who knows how to dance.<br>Who knows how to sew, who knows how to iron,<br>Who knows how to open the door, to go out to play. |
| **Arroz Con Leche (rewritten):** | **English Translation:** |
| Arroz con leche, yo quiero encontrar<br>a una compañera que quiera soñar,<br>Que crea en si misma y salga a luchar,<br>Por conquistar sus sueños de más libertad. | Rice pudding, I want to find<br>A *compañera* that knows how to dream<br>That believes in herself and who goes out to fight<br>To conquer her dreams of more freedom |

### *4.3.6 Street Theater*

At the end of the 2019 funeral march, as they do as part of many events, NUML organizers invited other activist groups to present street theater. An allied activist group, *Red Interquorum Lambayeque*, performed a piece where the threat of death followed different women around as they went about their day-to-day lives – going to work, to school, to the

bodega, etc. After the event, NUML organizers posted pictures of the theater performance to Facebook (see section on Social Media Usage, below) along with the caption, “Women are also killed by discrimination, poverty, informality, etc.” (Ni una menos -Lambayeque, 2020). Like the *arengas*, this street theater is intended to be a form of intersectional political education for the audience and includes a deep decolonial critique of the state and the state’s lack of meaningful response to and prevention of gender violence and other social problems like poverty and racism.

### *4.3.7 Vigils and Protests*

Families and friends of victims of feminicide use marches, vigils, and protests as a way to keep the memory of murdered women alive and to draw public attention to the legal cases against abusive and murderous intimate partners. Family members carry banners and signs featuring the pictures and names of women who were murdered. In my initial encounter with NUML, one of my research participants, Lucía, her daughter, her granddaughter, her aunt, a friend, and I carried a banner with Lucía’s sister’s picture and name alongside the picture and name of the husband who killed and disappeared her body. The banner also included information about how he has been convicted of murder but is currently on the run. We were photographed during the march and featured in a local newspaper carrying the banner. Lucía hoped that the publicity in the newspaper might help finally lead to his capture (it did not). For victims’ loved ones, participating in these marches is emotionally valuable to them as they feel they are honoring the memory of the victim by not allowing their story and their life to be forgotten. Victims’ loved ones also pressure and shame the state for their inaction while calling on the public to share information that could help bring justice.

### *4.3.8 Feminist Formation School*

NUML activists have twice offered their Feminist Formation School. This is a free, ten-session feminist political education course that is designed for feminist consciousness raising and social change. The ten sessions include: History and Trajectories, Feminism in Peru, General Terms, Femininity and Masculinity, Romantic Love, Gender Violence, Sexual and Reproductive Rights, A Gender Lens, Public Spaces, and a closing session. It is taught in a manner that is accessible to women with varying degrees of formal education and builds on local context and participants' lived experiences. NUML organizers hope that these courses will have a snowball effect on participants who then go back into their communities and share what they have learned with others. NUML organizers hope that women who participate in these popular education classes will be better equipped to support, educate, and empower women in their close social networks.

### *4.3.9 Self-Defense Workshops*

NUML activists have organized self-defense workshops for group members to teach and learn practical self-defense in the types of settings where women most frequently encounter violence: in the street and in the home. This is one example of how NUML activists focus on community self-defense, publicly recognizing that police most often cannot and will not protect them from GBV.

### *4.3.10 Social Media Usage*

NUML activists run a WhatsApp messaging group. This group chat composed of NUML organizers and supporters serves to facilitate rapid communication between NUML members, much of which is centered around mutual aid, resource mobilization, and advocacy. Group

members will ask questions about available services or resources for a particular situation. Often NUML activists seek support finding and leveraging personal contacts at government institutions which are crucial to getting help through Peru's inadequate and often corrupt formal systems. This messaging group also works as an unofficial rapid crisis response network. When women and girls go missing, activists will notify the network to immediately disseminate photos and information throughout the network and on social media. NUML activists also intervene in cases where police involvement could actually put victims of violence in even more danger. For example, in the case of an undocumented Venezuelan woman with limited social support networks who was living in Chiclayo and experiencing IPV, NUML activists found a safe place for her and her daughter to stay, and secured them food, clothing, etc.

NUML organizers share many pictures of their events – including planning meetings – on their public social media. These social media posts are meant to empower, educate, and recruit future participants to NUML activities. While not everyone can attend NUML events, many people have access to and are active on Facebook.[9] These posts allow people to partially experience NUML's activities remotely and after the fact. Often pictures of events are shared with analytical captions, conveying the significance and takeaways of the event – like the analysis of the street theater mentioned above. NUML's social media presence is analytical, educational, empowering, and resource focused.

#### *4.3.11 Post-Event Evaluation Meetings*

After events, those who were involved in the planning meet again to conduct post-event evaluations. These meetings empower participants to share their experiences of the event's

[9] Because Peru does not have net neutrality, and many Peruvian cell phone plans include unlimited Facebook and WhatsApp use while metering other data usage, these are two of the most commonly used social media applications in Peru.

planning and of the event itself. These process- and outcomes-focused evaluations help to shape future organizing planning and goals and ensure that the events align with NUML activists' decolonial feminist values and radical mission.

## 4.4 Discussion and Conclusions

### *4.4.1 Drawing Connections*

While commonly studied forms of formal and informal help-giving are extremely important to the welfare and the literal survival of victims of gender violence, in Lambayeque both formal and informal help structures are severely lacking for reasons I explore in depth in my larger dissertation research (see chapters 2 and 3 in this dissertation). By exploring activist work as "an other" decolonial paradigm of help-giving – one that both operates outside of and fights within hegemonic power structures that shape and constrain options for *mujeres abusadas*, this research was able to uncover important relationships between activism and more traditionally examined forms of help-giving and help-seeking. Recognizing how activism is "an other" paradigm of help, further emphasizes the importance of not treating intervention work as separate from social change work. It also highlights the importance of not treating informal and formal help-seeking and help-giving as discrete categories. These multiple aspects of helping around GBV are deeply intertwined in complex ways that have important implications in the lived realities of *mujeres abusadas* and potential help-givers.

Activism operates in a liminal social landscape, which allows activists to create "an other" paradigm that allows them to engage dual power tactics that work both with and against other local forms of help-giving. As illustrated in the many examples of NUML's activist undertakings described above, NUML activists' theoretical frameworks and praxis cover these

four functions in multiple, interconnected, and strategic ways that – based on their social analysis – NUML activists have carefully tailored to the *lambayecano* context.

NUML activists engage in community study and peer education to develop analytic frameworks to describe the social problems they observe around both the causes of GBV and the failed responses to GBV. This denaturalization expands beyond their core-group meetings to marches, vigils, protests, and through social media where they engage in very public social analysis and condemnations. Catchy chants during marches offer pithy and memorable social critiques. The Feminist Formation School offers a deeper exposure to these frameworks.

While openly critical of mainstream attitudes and social pressures about GBV that try to silence victims, and the inadequate existing government services for *mujeres abusadas*, NUML organizing reduces barriers to informal and formal help-seeking and help-giving. Through consciousness raising and the denaturalization of GBV, NUML activists' messaging contributes directly and indirectly to the empowerment of *mujeres abusadas*. Women see, be it in person or via social media, that they are not alone and that there are people who care about ending GBV. Empowerment is key to internal readiness to seek help. Those in *mujeres abusadas*' potential informal helping networks are also likely to be impacted by these messages and thus become more ready to help and offer support.

Through NUML activists' resource networking, *mujeres abusadas* learn about where and how they can seek help and become aware of their rights to do so. NUML organizers' informal referral system mimics the same dependency on personal social connections that NUML activists criticize in *lambayecana* society but leverages these connections to secure improved support for *mujeres abusadas*. NUML activists aim to improve formal help-giving by critiquing and demanding major social and structural changes through actions and social media posts, while

striving to improve informal help-giving by enhancing the capacity of potential informal help-givers through feminist decolonial education, consciousness raising, and radicalization.

Finally, NUML activists create new forms of support and new spaces in which to enact support through community organizing and community building. Whether in person or on WhatsApp, NUML organizers have built a community of dedicated activists who collectively build and fund a microcosm of the kinds of solidarity, sociality, and self-determination they strive for. Embracing mutual-aid strategies and community self-defense, NUML activists work to meet the immediate needs of *mujeres abusadas* while struggling to build power to create social change that would reduce or eliminate GBV altogether. NUML activists are also successfully building a network of people who are actively and publicly self-identifying as empathetic and informed advocates for *mujeres abusadas*. Appropriately, at a January 2022 protest in Chiclayo, a prominent sign read, "*La POLICIA NO me protégé, mis AMIGAS SI… #NUM"* (The POLICE DO NOT protect me, my GIRLFRIENDS DO… #NUM.) (Ni una menos -Lambayeque, 2022). In these ways, NUML organizers have begun to find ways, through feminist decolonial praxis, to address the problems of how to address gender violence without reproducing other forms of violence and discrimination, and how to develop interventions that do not require survivors of violence to participate in violent hegemonic systems in order to receive the help they need.

### *4.4.2 Comments on Methodology and Limitations*

My broader dissertation research aimed to develop a deep and highly contextualized analysis of help-seeking and help-giving behaviors in the town of Lambayeque, Peru. The goals of this kind of ethnographic work go deep rather than wide, and do not include determining generalizable findings. Rather, the value in this study is its specificity to this particular context.

However, this research offers a model and a framework to examine the possible relationships between activism and help-seeking in other places. Some of the limitations of this study include:

- As ethnographers often work alone, I did not have a research team with whom to collect, discuss (aside from my advisors), or analyze data. It is possible that another researcher would have gathered data differently or noticed patterns that I did not. Working independently also reduces the possibilities of some kinds of data triangulation during data analysis.
- Because this was not my planned research focus, the research questions I attempt to answer here emerged during my other data collection. Had the research been planned around these questions from the outset, I likely would have designed the research somewhat differently, including engaging more with other activist organizations in Chiclayo.
- Because of other research obligations, I was not able to personally attend all of NUML's activities, and I learned about some of them through their documentation on social media and through informal conversations with NUML organizers.

### *4.4.3 Implications for Future Research, Policy, and Practice*

Because activism was not my planned research focus, there remain many questions to be asked about activism around GBV and help-seeking. Some of these include: Are there noticeable shifts in help-seeking or help-giving behaviors in the aftermath of one of NUML's big events? How have activist goals and tactics shifted in response to an ever-changing reality, impacted significantly over the past three and a half years by the Covid-19 pandemic and significant political turmoil in the Peruvian government? How has NUML's activism changed since a few of their most active members recently took jobs with government-run *Centros de Emergencia*

*Mujer* (women's emergency centers) in other Peruvian cities? How can this approach to help-seeking research be used to make comparisons between different communities and regions in Peru or Latin America in order to better tailor responses to GBV which occurs at high rates throughout the country and region?

It is my hope that social workers will see the value in conducting deeply embedded ethnographic work that aims to understand social ills through the localized frameworks of those who experience and are already fighting against them. Through combining practical questions of significant interest to social work researchers and practitioners with anthropological and decolonial feminist methods, this research uncovered an important aspect of help-seeking and help-giving that the literature has yet to deeply explore. Effective practice and policy require thorough understandings of the problems being addressed, as misunderstood or overlooked realities can lead to interventions and policies that are ineffective or even harmful.

The findings in my larger dissertation research make a strong argument that Peruvian government policy should shift away from its status quo centralized, police- and bureaucracy-based responses. Augmenting services that *mujeres abusadas* are unable or unwilling to use is ineffective, wasteful, and actually discourages help-seeking. More locally appropriate responses would better serve *mujeres abusadas* and the wider community. In Lambayeque, these include an increased focus on community-level prevention and intervention, building the capacity of informal helpers, bettering the material conditions of women, and shifting cultural narratives about gender and violence.

These findings concur with compelling findings in the help-seeking literature (e.g., Liang et. al., 2005; Banyard et. al., 2010; Edwards & Dardis, 2020; Mauer et. al., 2022; McKenzie et. al., 2022) that argue that IPV education and prevention efforts should focus on educating

potential informal help-givers in hopes that a) initial reactions of family and friends to the disclosure of IPV will be more helpful than harmful, b) informal supports will feel knowledgeable and empowered to help and will be more skilled at recognizing signs of IPV, and c) that informal helpers can facilitate connections with formal support services (e.g. Moracco et al., 2005; Sabina et al., 2012; Salazar et al., 2012; Mookerjee et al., 2015). Kyriakakis agrees, suggesting that formal service providers seriously examine how to incorporate family/friends into "safety planning, trauma recovery, socialization, childcare procurement, educational and job-seeking plans" (2014, p. 1111). Kyriakakis also notes that due to the important and influential role of the family, formal services need to take into account informal support and to try not to inadvertently destroy these networks when providing support and guidance (e.g., moving away breaks up important social support networks).

Through their own on-the-ground analysis, NUML activists are already implementing many of these strategies to create “an other” paradigm of help that fosters better support for *mujeres abusadas* and enhanced capacity for help-givers, while also working to create social change, including the prevention of GBV. This and my broader research on *mujeres abusadas*’ navigation of help-seeking should be useful to NUML activists – and activists elsewhere – as they continue to consciously and strategically build frameworks, strategies, and resources that increase the likelihood and efficacy of *mujeres abusadas*’ help-seeking around GBV.

# Chapter 5 Discussion, Implications, and Conclusions

## 5.1 Discussion and Implications for Social Work Research and Practice

The three standalone papers presented in this dissertation deeply examine snapshots of a massive and complex social problem – intimate partner violence – that is regularly both misunderstood and intensely stigmatized. These papers highlight social and systemic problems, that due to stigma are often treated, instead, as individualized problems. As I said in the introduction, these stories are not about individual failings, and as such, they cannot be solved by individualized solutions. Each of these papers attempts to poke holes in common misconceptions about help-seeking and help-giving for intimate partner violence. This research also demonstrates the critical need for Social Work researchers and practitioners, as well as policy makers, to engage with micro-, mezzo-, and macro-factors that shape IPV in a localized context when designing research, practice, and policy. The mezzo-, here, includes all of the complex socio-cultural processes and practices that link and reinforce social structures, institutions, and cultural norms with everyday practices. Social workers must come to understand the IPV itself and the many responses to IPV as complex social problems and not simply problems between individuals (though they are that, too). While social work literature often strives for generalizability, these papers highlight the value, importance, and necessity of specificity. Neat, predetermined categories cannot be relied on to adequately capture the complexity of these social problems across varied social contexts and realities.

The first paper, "*¿Qué dirá la gente?*: How the Fear of What People May Say Shapes Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence and Constrains Options for Help-Seeking in Lambayeque, Peru" clearly demonstrates why intimate partner violence cannot be understood without understanding the socio-cultural context in which it is happening. In an effort to de-stigmatize certain populations when talking about IPV, researchers and activists often note that intimate partner violence is a global problem that happens across place, socio-economic class, and race and ethnicity. While this is largely true, this universalizing effort inadvertently obfuscates the many important nuanced ways in which IPV operates and is responded to in varying contexts.

Due to the particular sets of circumstances (including material conditions and social embeddedness) in which many women in Lambayeque find themselves, *el qué dirán* (the what people may say) is a social force that takes on a unique power that precipitates and encourages intimate partner violence while discouraging help-seeking and help-giving. This paper spotlights the importance of everyday interactions in shaping these social relationships and the social problem of IPV. While much social work research on IPV focuses either on structural factors or interpersonal dynamics, it is often the everyday social norms including gender ideologies and cultural values coupled with material and structural constraints that create a web that effectively traps people in violent relationships. Social work research does not have easy ways to capture and measure the often-ephemeral mezzo-level interactions and ideologies that shape and limit how individuals think, how relationships form and evolve, or how family culture or community social norms coalesce, but this research offers some possibilities.

In paper two, "*¿Los Terceros Salen Sobrando?* Are Third Parties Superfluous?: How the Sociocultural and the Structural Shape Help-Giving Relationships for Intimate Partner Violence

in Lambayeque, Peru" this research examines help-seeking and help-giving relationships to further complicate common assumptions about informal help-giving for IPV and offer a contextualized thick description. This paper highlights how social workers, like *mujeres abusadas*, cannot simply assume that informal helpers can or will help. What determines who helps or not and why is extremely complex and multifaceted, and making assumptions or value-judgements about who "wants" to help is ultimately reductionist and unhelpful. Oftentimes potential informal help-givers want to help but to do so would be too dangerous due to physical or social violence, or they are not sure how to help, or they are constrained by material circumstances that prevent them from helping. Very often people want to help but for a variety of reasons aren't empowered to do so.

This paper also troubles the often-reified categories of "facilitators" and "barriers" as they exist in the Social Work literature. In reality, barriers and facilitators are very complex – not rigid – categories. This paper gives examples of how an intersectional power analysis is critical to understanding both intimate partner violence itself as well as the relationships between *mujeres abusadas*, *abusivos*, and potential informal and formal helpers. Informal help is critical to women experiencing IPV, generally, both because of the value of informal help and because it can be such an important facilitator of formal help-seeking. Informal help is particularly critical to *mujeres abusadas* because Lambayeque's dysfunctional formal help-seeking systems and services are so inaccessible, ineffective, and often harmful. The importance of informal help-seeking and -giving, however, is further complicated by the fact that embeddedness in kinship and social networks often make it harder to leave a violent relationship due to the many complex relationships of reciprocity and dependency.

Much early activism in the US' domestic violence movement focused early change efforts on changing societal attitudes and getting people information about IPV. Often this education targeted potential help-givers and encouraged them to intervene rather than looking the other way. Communities would be well served if social work researchers and practitioners focused more on strengthening and empowering communities and building capacity among potential informal help-givers. This bottom-up social-change model of organizing, based in the principles of feminist decoloniality, is the organizing principle of *Ni Una Menos Lambayeque*, the activist group which is the focus of the third paper, ""An Other" Paradigm of Help: The Impact of *Ni Una Menos Lambayeque's* Activist Work on Help-Seeking and Help-Giving for Gender Based Violence in Lambayeque, Peru."

The Peruvian government's efforts at addressing intimate partner violence and other forms of gender-based violence have been to expand status quo services, especially the establishment of many more government-run *Centros de Emergencia Mujer* (Women's Emergency Centers – CEMs). Simply expanding existing but inadequate and ineffective services does not adequately meet the real needs or desires of *mujeres abusadas* or of potential help-givers. Nor does it bring about any meaningful societal change to contribute towards violence prevention. The Peruvian state's reliance on an advocacy model stands in stark contrast, for instance, to *Ni Una Menos Lambayeque's* Organizing Model (McAlevey, 2016). In her modeling of options for creating change, McAlevey (2016) begins by noting the differences in theories of power. In the advocacy model – like that currently employed by the Peruvian government – there is no effort to organize either grassroots activists or organic leaders, and instead the elite make policy and court decisions that do not result in any change to societal power relations. Meanwhile, in an organizing model – toward which *Ni Una Menos Lambayeque* strives – the

group, composed of the masses, prioritizes a power analysis and organizes an inclusive collective of organic leaders to transform power structures (McAlevey, 2016). By virtue of their organizing model, NUML activists recognize that their power come from the numbers of people involved and try to involve and recruit large numbers of people and to expand their base through organic leaders who already have influence in their communities.

This third paper locates activism as an "other" type of help-giving that exists beyond the imagined binary of informal and formal. This paper examines how NUML activists work to raise consciousness, collectively build tools that people can use in their communities, and build power through developing relationships and mutual-support systems. This type of organizing, however, is far from easy. It takes a tremendous amount of time and effort from many people. Additionally, because IPV and gender-based violence are both individual and social, social justice activists like NUML would face problems with efficacy and power building were they to only look at GBV as a societal problem without also focusing on the immediate problems of *mujeres abusadas*. It is very challenging to employ a dual-power approach, simultaneously paying attention to and protecting the *mujeres abusadas* living with these problems while also trying to impact the larger system – especially when these two things are not always compatible. One successful tactic NUML has employed is to focus on the intersectionality of the micro-, mezzo-, and macro-experiences of Gender Based Violence in the local *lambayecano* context. By doing extensive local power analyses, NUML activists have been able to create support systems that are similar to the normal kinship and social networks in Lambayeque, while also directly challenging the status quo by cutting across the micro, mezzo, and macro, to begin shaping and promoting social change. This approach builds on the strengths of local social systems and the

power of organic community leaders to create support systems that are culturally legible to the women using them while also directly challenging the status quo power structures.

These three papers all deeply engage the mezzo – the bridge between the individual and the structural – and highlight how an imagined divide between the micro and the macro oversimplifies the complexity of peoples' intwined lived experiences and simply does not represent reality. The first paper shows how *mujeres abusadas* – like most everyone – are trapped within a complex social and structural system and how resources to escape these are frequently unavailable. The second paper shows how, though they are desperately desired and needed, informal help-giving systems are filled with obstacles and constraints that reduce their effectiveness. Finally, the third paper demonstrates why the activism of NUML is so critical and exemplifies the power of activism around IPV or GBV being informed by and attentive to everything that is necessary in the micro-, mezzo-, and macro-realms. A local power analysis and a deep understanding of how socio-cultural and structural systems are culturally shaped are key.

## 5.2 Comments on Methodology and Limitations

### *5.2.1 What About Men?*

One important limitation of this research is that I did not directly explore intimate partner violence from the perspective of *abusivos* (abusers). There were a few reasons for this. Most importantly, explicitly conducting fieldwork with *abusivos* could have increased safety risks for others, primarily their partners and children. All the *mujeres abusadas* with whom I worked in this research met with me either in secret or under some set of false pretenses that they invented to hide their participation in my research from their abusive partners, their children, and potentially nosey family members and neighbors. Secondly, the research itself would have been very challenging due to my own positionalities in relation to those of the *abusivos*. It would have

been unlikely that *abusivos* would willingly talk with me openly and honestly about violence, and navigating work with local research associates would have other challenges – including privacy and potential social consequences for everyone involved. Finally, the research I did conduct was emotionally very challenging for me, and I do not think I, personally, would want to take on the additional emotionally challenging aspects of doing research directly with *abusivos* (Gilgun, 2008).

As part of my fieldwork, I did do a small amount of participant observation with a "Masculinities" group run by a community-based non-governmental organization in José Leonardo Ortiz, a heavily populated district that is adjacent to the city of Chiclayo. In addition to working with *mujeres abusadas*, the Masculinities program invites men from around the department of Lambayeque to participate in a 10-session program called *Involucrando hombres para la prevención de la violencia de género* (Involving Men for the Prevention of Gender Violence). I learned about the program through an invitation to a photo contest celebrating "other" masculinities. This was held in conjunction with the graduation ceremony of a Masculinities group cohort. After the event I spoke with the organizers and asked if I could attend the upcoming course beginning the following month, which I was invited to do. The men who attended the course were mostly younger men in their late teens and 20s, though there was one man I estimated to be in his early 50s. Because men self-select into the program, the men who attend already have a somewhat raised consciousness – or at the very least an interest in exploring masculinities as a negotiable social construct.

The first session began with significant framing from the facilitators (four women and three men, all of whom are professionals). Most of this framing was focused on how common gender-based violence is in the Department of Lambayeque, and how all of the facilitators had

some personal connection to violence (e.g., parents who either used or experienced violence). One facilitator – a man in his late 30s who is a psychologist – spent around 20 minutes trying to prepare the participants for the pushback they may receive from other men in their lives around participating in the Masculinities program. He described how his own father, upon learning he was facilitating the Masculinities group, asked him, "*¿eres or no eres [gay]?*" (are you or aren't you [gay]?). He noted that this was a "*cuestionamiento fuerte"* (a strong questioning) –in the aggressive directness of it, in the assumption that anything that questioned normative masculinity must be "non-masculine" (i.e., gay), and also in the sense that a potential "yes" answer was so "strong" that his father could not bring himself to say it out loud. The psychologist continued, warning the participants, "People are going to attack you, question you, say you aren't men. Here, no one stops being a man. […] We have to normalize being a man and creating a world of peace. If *machismo* is naturalized, something else can also be naturalized."

Like *Ni Una Menos Lambayeque's* Feminist Formation School (unsurprisingly, several NUML activists were involved in facilitating the masculinities group), the Masculinities group is structured to raise consciousness and build capacity among participants who then go back to their communities and organically teach others. Unfortunately, I could not continue my participant observation with the Masculinities group because my presence was too disruptive. In the second session it became very clear to both me and the facilitators that several of the participants were more concerned with talking to me and impressing me than they were with engaging the curriculum. The program director pulled me aside after the second session and awkwardly told me that she was very sorry, but she did not think I could continue to come to their meetings. She seemed relieved when I responded that I shared her concerns, that I had been feeling uncomfortable with my presence being so disruptive, and that I had also planned to talk to her

about it. I did, however, stay in contact with one of the Masculinities participants who lived in Lambayeque – a college student studying psychology – who I later interviewed. He later told me that of the thirty men who began the Masculinities program in his cohort, only ten or twelve finished, and that he imagined that the rest had dropped out due to social pressures. While it was not the focus of this research project, I want to emphasize the importance of doing Masculinities work and violence prevention work with men. This is an area that has much opportunity for growth in Peru (and elsewhere) and could have a tremendous impact. I heard rumors that there was a program akin to a Batterers Intervention Program in Lima, but no one ever seemed to know when or where it took place, or who was running it.

### *5.2.2 Interdisciplinarity and Decolonial Praxis*

With a background in Latin American Studies (an interdisciplinary field, itself), I chose an interdisciplinary doctoral program in Social Work and Anthropology because I understood and valued anthropology's approach to research and theory building but also wanted to be able to engage the applied, community organizing for social justice side of social work. That decision afforded me many opportunities both as a student taking coursework and in my research, but it also created numerous challenges. As a scholar and through my research, I have often felt unintelligible to both professors and students located in either field. While learning different field-specific paradigms, norms, and ways of speaking, I also had to learn to translate across disciplines in ways that were both intelligible and valued by my interlocutors. Sometimes I succeeded, other times I did not. This continued when engaging with academics outside of Michigan's joint doctoral program. Grant writing for this research was challenging, both in terms of discipline and subject matter. Field-specific grants did not understand (or did not appreciate) the value of what I was proposing, and many reviewers commented using the very colloquial and

stigmatized misunderstandings about intimate partner violence that my work aimed to counter. Anthropologists researching IPV have observed that securing funding is difficult because of the sensitive and stigmatized nature of the topic that continues to make many people uncomfortable talking about it openly (e.g., McClusky, 2001). For these reasons, and because my research is not at the cutting edge of what is currently trendy in either Anthropology or Social Work, I required an extra year of grant writing time, as compared to my colleagues, to finally figure out how to successfully present my project to secure fieldwork funding. Interdisciplinarity continues, for me, as both a strength and a constant challenge. But I am hopeful that the interdisciplinarity of this dissertation and my embodied interdisciplinarity in the community organizing work that I am a part of is a net positive for myself and others.

Social work research and practice are sometimes lacking in a deep, meaningful understanding of context. Social work interventions that fail to consider or mis-diagnose the root causes of problems – like many of the Peruvian government's interventions – are doomed to fail to adequately address them and may create even more harm than help. For this reason, social work research would benefit greatly from increased anthropological methods and approaches to understanding IPV and many other complex social problems. Social workers would do well to remember Merry's (2009, p. 185) reminder that an anthropological approach to gender violence "shows clearly that efforts to change gender violence must understand the practice in terms of audiences that support it, the institutions that treat it lightly, and the structures of inequality that benefit from the kinds of control and power that it provides." With this increased depth of understanding across micro-, mezzo-, and macro-systems and processes, social workers can begin to better navigate socio-cultural barriers, dismantle institutional barriers, and work with affected communities to build power and capacity to create the types of social change that they

feel would best serve them. Rich ethnographic data can provide researchers, practitioners, and policymakers with the kinds of detailed information and context that is needed to develop good research questions and methods, good interventions and prevention work, and good policy.

Finally, a decolonial approach that de-centers the anthropologist and the social worker (and the academy in general), is critical to truly radical social justice and community change work around IPV and in general. IPV in Peru is well suited for the practical application of decolonial feminist theory. Intimate partner violence crosses so many levels and systems of power and types of social structures (e.g., capitalism, race, gender, ethnicity, etc.) all of which must be understood though a localized analysis of colonial and decolonial histories and neocolonial and neoliberal realities. A decolonial feminist analysis pairs well with the methods and theoretical approaches of anthropology, but it pushes beyond theory to praxis. Decolonial feminism has an intentionality of outcomes that is not always present in anthropology, or in social work. Decolonial feminists are actively working to deconstruct (de)colonial systems and prioritize creating deliberate social change rooted in a social justice-driven theory and praxis. Decolonial feminists are militantly working to create a different world.

### 5.3 Reflections and Recommendations

Throughout my research, I regularly asked people about how they thought the problems of intimate partner violence and gender-based violence more broadly could or should be addressed. The answers always fell in one of two extremes: 1) calls for vigilante justice and/or extreme state violence, and 2) calls for radical social and structural changes that would address structural power systems like racism, sexism, classism, capitalism, etc.

The calls for vigilantism are not surprising considering Peru's important history of community-based *rondas campesinas* (peasant self-defense organizations) that emerged during

the Shining Path conflict and are now codified in Peruvian Law as they reimagine themselves and their role in defining and enforcing public safety (Fumerton, 2002). In the absence of a functional or respectable criminal-legal system, many Peruvians are desperate for a sense of safety and justice. In the absence of these, many people are unable to imagine non-violent alternatives and instead make calls for extreme vigilante violence (e.g., severe beatings or even killings) as punishment – and, in their minds – a deterrent for others.

The Peruvian state's current reliance on an extremely violent and corrupt criminal-legal system does not help *mujeres abusadas*, and unsurprisingly none of my participants asked for and expansion of the police or increased police involvement. In the minds of many *lambayecanos*, the Peruvian National Police are a lost cause. While several people talked about the need to address police corruption, they did not seem confident that it was actually possible to reform the police. Nearly everyone in Lambayeque has a story about how police corruption or ineptitude negatively impacted them or someone they know. For *mujeres abusadas*, these stories are all the more extreme. Policing in Peru, like in the USA, disproportionately impacts poor people and people with darker skin tones. None of the *mujeres abusadas* with whom I worked had a positive interaction with or outcome from going to the police. While not the focus of the chapters in this dissertation, my collected data is filled with stories of police asking for bribes, refusing to take reports or disappearing the paperwork before it could be filed, blaming *mujeres abusadas* for the abuse, minimizing the extent of their injuries, refusing to respond to calls, calling *abusivos* to tell them that their partners were at the police station and suggesting they come retrieve them, and so on.

When a friend's daughter and niece snuck out of their grandmother's home to see their boyfriends late at night in a dangerous area of Lambayeque, the police mostly refused to help us

look for the girls due to allegedly not having enough gas for their vehicle. When we finally located the girls after a terrifying few hours, we had to return to the police station to withdraw the missing persons reports. The niece asked me to accompany her as she privately gave testimony to the police officer, alleging sexual abuse by her stepfather and physical and emotional abuse by her mother – a pattern the extended family was aware of but felt powerless to address. My friend had previously told me about the situation, asking for advice, so I, too, was aware. Upon taking the report, the officer asked the girl to leave and then asked the mother and stepfather to come in. He also told me to leave, but I refused. He grew increasingly angry with me, but I did not back down, telling him that if he liked that he could have his men try to drag me out. He responded by completely ignoring me, only addressing the parents. He then read the girl's testimony to them and asked them if it was true. They said no. He asked them if they would like him to tear up the report. They said yes. He then proceeded to tear the report into tiny pieces in front of us, despite my verbal protests. He then told them they were free to take their daughter home. As he and the stepfather shook hands, I saw the stepfather pass him some money, though I could not tell how much. Both girls were referred to the prosecutor's office the next day, where they were to receive referrals for sexual assault examinations at the local hospital. The cousin's parents, however, refused to take her. When my friend took her daughter, they were informed that the office was closed (despite it being a weekday) and were not told when they could return.

*Mujeres abusadas*, though they want to stop being abused, generally do not want their partners – especially if they are married or have children together – to be incarcerated. When men go to jail or prison it creates huge money and time burdens on their women relatives. *Mujeres abusadas* rightly note that putting men in jail for failure to pay child support does

nothing to help, because then the men lose their jobs and really cannot pay. Additionally, incarcerated people in Peru must purchase their meals and any personal care items in prison. For this reason, women relatives of incarcerated men are burdened with either taking food to the incarcerated men, or somehow coming up with money, which is already always insufficient, to give them for their needs.

I accompanied one *mujer abusada*, Luz, to the prison in Picsi to visit her son who had been accused of being involved in a robbery. Though only around 13 miles from Lambayeque, the journey took us nearly two hours because of multiple bus changes and some distances we had to walk between buses. We arrived in time for her son's hearing by a panel of three judges: a man who was asleep to the point of snoring, a man who was on his phone, and a woman who was driven by a personal vendetta. In his sentencing, the judge described how she had been robbed in the *pueblo joven* (shanty town) Luz and her son are from, and that she knows for a fact that they are all *choros* (thieves). She did not ask him any questions or offer him the opportunity to speak. The private lawyer Luz had hired barely intervened. As we made our trip back to Lambayeque, Luz wondered out loud what she was going to do. How could she earn enough money to support herself, her youngest children still at home, and her incarcerated son and his wife and children. She lamented that there is never enough money to survive, and told me that if she had more money, she would have been able to hire a better lawyer who would have worked harder to help her son, avoiding his long prison sentence.

The *Centros de Emergencia Mujer* (CEMs – Women's Emergency Centers, as they currently are structured, are also punitive and do not meet the actual needs or wants of many *mujeres abusadas*. It is yet to be seen what the impact of the co-location of CEMs within police stations will be, but many *mujeres abusadas* in Lambayeque are skeptical that it will make any

meaningful difference in how they are treated. The CEMs, while often staffed with mostly well-intentioned service providers, are focused primarily on case finding but have inadequate follow-up supportive services. Even when services are low-barrier, *mujeres abusadas* living in extreme poverty are still excluded. During my fieldwork in 2010, Dolores described to me how not being able to afford copies of her children's birth certificates kept her from filing for child support, a process that is touted as a free service by the CEMs:

> I went once to MIMDES [now the CEM] here in Lambayeque, I told them. They said, "Ma'am, get the original copy of the birth certificates of your four children." The original certificates are eight *soles*. Supposedly I am [asking for child support because I am] separated, I don't have one *sol* to even give them food to eat, where am I going to get eight *soles* each for four original birth certificates? I just stood there looking at the woman, and then I turned around and walked out. And I came here to my house. I thought, I guess I'll go buy some rice and fish for my children to give them something to eat. It was eight *soles* for each birth certificate. How was I going to file a report? I just came back home. (Whitmer, 2010, p. 201)

The CEMs are designed to facilitate *mujeres abusadas'* access to formal legal systems that are, themselves, deeply broken and dysfunctional, and are simply not set up to offer the types of support *mujeres abusadas* told me they most want and need.

For reasons exemplified above, many *lambayecanos* suggested radical social and structural changes as the path needed to address the problems of intimate partner violence and other gender-based violence, and I agree with these assessments. *Mujeres abusadas* and other *lambayecanos* emphasized a number of social and structural changes necessary to respond to and prevent violence.

### *5.3.1 Increased Educational Opportunities for Girls and Women, Including Access to Higher Education*

*Lambayecanos* frequently encourage young people to take their education seriously because, "*la educación es lo único que nadie te lo pueda quitar"* (education is the one thing no

one can ever take away from you). Education increases opportunities for everyone, and educated women may be less dependent on their husbands for economic and material support. Studies looking at educational attainment and experience of IPV in Peru vary in their findings. For instance, Perales et al. (2009) and Flake (2005) found that educational attainment lowers a woman's chances of being abused by an intimate partner, but Perales et al. found that this reduction only occurred after having more than twelve years of education, which is one year longer than Peru's 11 years of primary and secondary education. Gonzales de Olarte and Favilano Llosa (1999) did not find statistical significance when looking at educational levels of women as a determinant of violence.

While increased education may afford women more work opportunities and less financial dependence on men, status quo education and work opportunities alone are not enough to eliminate violence. Perhaps counterintuitively, Flake (2005) and Perales et al. (2009) both found that employed women in Peru were more likely to be abused by their partners than women who did not work outside the home. Flake and Perales et al. attributed this to women's increased social status and potential for economic independence, and Perales et al. emphasized that these may trigger *machista* men's desires to reestablish dominance over women.

### *5.3.2 A Family Living Wage for All Workers*

Because Peruvian society is currently structured in a way that essentially requires someone to be home doing all of the reproductive labor tasks, workers must earn a wage adequate to maintain a family. Everyday existence in Lambayeque requires having someone available to wait in long lines for medical or bureaucratic services, to care for children who attend school for half-days, to be home and ready to use and gather water during the three times a day that the city turns on the rationed water (due to poor infrastructure), and to perform all of

the other reproductive labor like shopping at the market, preparing meals, cleaning, doing laundry (often by hand), etc. Because money is always scarce, arguments and disagreements over how money is being spent are common and often precipitates or escalates violence between partners and between people who believe they have a rightful claim to the money (e.g., mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law).

### *5.3.3 Affordable Housing*

Housing in Lambayeque is extremely expensive relative to the local economy and household earning power, and available housing is scarce. Few houses are ever up for sale, and when they are, very average homes in desirable parts of Lambayeque sell for hundreds of thousands of US dollars. Renting apartments or single rooms is common, but relatively very expensive. A modest room or apartment often costs between 600 – 1500 *soles* a month, when Peru's minimum wage was 580 *soles* when I conducted fieldwork in 2010, was raised from 850 to 930 *soles* during my fieldwork in 2018 and was raised again in May of 2022 to 1,025 *soles* (Gestión, 2022). Because of these high housing costs, extended families are forced to live together in tight quarters that creates conflict and puts pressures on relationships. Additionally, the high-cost barriers, and logistical barriers of finding available and safe housing are significant deterrents to *mujeres abusadas* who want to leave a violent relationship. Some *mujeres abusadas* found independence through participating in an *invasión* (an invasion – informally settling on unoccupied land and staking claim to it), but this path is challenging and involves a lot of risk to one's personal safety (Whitmer, 2010). Having accessible options for safe and affordable housing in Lambayeque would positively contribute to *mujeres abusadas'* help-seeking and to violence prevention.

### *5.3.5 Affordable and Safe Child Care that Provides Meals*

*Mujeres abusadas* with children regularly told me that a lack of childcare options was a barrier to leaving a violent relationship. If women leave and men refuse to pay child support, or the child support they pay is too low to sustain them (which is the norm), women are often entirely responsible for figuring out how to make ends meet. If women leave a relationship, sometimes in-laws will refuse to help with childcare as a way of punishing the woman for leaving their son. Women cannot leave small children unattended so that they can work outside the home, though they sometimes do out of necessity. Or, if they work informally – as a street vendor, for instance – they may bring their small children along with them. Even when children become school-aged, they only attend school for half a day (either in the morning or the afternoon so that the school buildings can accommodate two rounds, or sometimes three, of students), and women are responsible for preparing lunch – the main meal of the day – for her children and others in the home. When women work outside the home, they often get up in the wee hours of the morning to leave lunch already prepared.

### *5.3.6 Community-based Promotoras-style Programs*

Many of the *mujeres abusadas* and informal help-givers with whom I worked expressed a desire for an alternative to the CEM/Legal Systems model. Several people proposed the idea of having a community-based *promotoras* (community health promoters) program, but one that actually employed people from the community. They explained that by hiring and training local women who are already organic leaders from the *barrio* (neighborhood), not only would they create jobs which would afford some women with an income and some increased financial independence, they would be building supports for *mujeres abusadas* that could actually start to address their needs and desires for support. Unlike CEMs that rely on the labor of professionally

trained service providers who are often from Chiclayo or other places, these would be women who are already familiar with and embedded in the hyper-local politics of neighborhoods and the types of kinship and social networks described in the earlier chapters of this dissertation. Local *promotoras* would be well positioned to provide some mezzo-level supports that can impact both micro- and macro-systems at play in instances of intimate partner violence.

### *5.3.7 Community Change Efforts & Violence Prevention Programs*

Many young people in Lambayeque are disillusioned with their reality and their future prospects. I vividly remember a conversation I had with Luz's youngest son when he told me that he was dropping out of school in his third year of high school to start driving a *mototaxi*. I tried to tell him how important one's education is, and he stopped me and told me that for some people yes – but that in the *pueblo joven* (shanty town) of Lambayeque where he lives, it does not matter. We stood in the doorway to feel the breeze while avoiding the hot midday sun and he gestured down the street to a group of young men in their teens and twenties sitting on the dusty sidewalk and drinking beer. He named each one of them and told me whether or not they had graduated high school – about half had. He then very matter-of-factly told me that all of them drive *mototaxis* now, because there are not any other choices for people like him. Why make his mother work to pay for schooling, which he saw as pointless, when he could be working and earning money to help his mother instead? I tried to push back, tried to remind him how important it was to his mom that he finish school. He demurred, "*es que Ud. no entiende, vive en otro mundo"* (you don't understand, you live in another world). We stood there in silence, together, until Luz rounded the corner, and a huge smile crossed her face as she saw us there.

Luz's son did not finish high school, and he did drive a *mototaxi* for a while, which he never really enjoyed. During my fieldwork, I would think often about that conversation with

him, about his feelings of hopelessness that were rooted in a reasonable analysis of his material reality, and about his observation about people (him and me, but also others) existing in different worlds. Doing the research for this dissertation often left me feeling hopeless on behalf of the *mujeres abusadas*, their children, and the broader community – including *abusivos*. Part of the reason I began doing more extensive fieldwork with *Ni Una Menos Lambayeque*, the activist group that operates out of Chiclayo, was that their work was one of the few things during fieldwork that gave me some tangible feelings of hope. Life in Lambayeque, if you are poor, is a never-ending saga of crisis management. The NUML activists understood this and developed a dual-systems approach to their praxis that worked to meet people's immediate needs while also working for long-term social change.

As described in chapter three, *mujeres abusadas* regularly told me that they think there needs to be an age-appropriate violence-prevention curriculum implemented in the schools, and that schools should also be a place where parents are educated about developing healthy and supportive relationships. Expanding the types of work NUML is doing through their Feminist Formation School and the work the Masculinities group is doing to re-envision what it means to be a man into schools and communities could bring about positive social change through consciousness raising and capacity building and help to prevent intimate partner violence.

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