

The Barriers Model

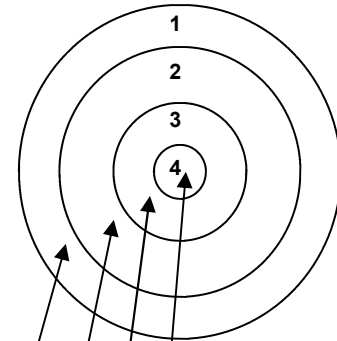
A Summary of Societal and Contextual Factors Influencing Escape Success of Battered Women

“Battered women often report that there are numerous barriers impeding their efforts to free their lives of violence¹.”

Instead of assuming that the victim is the most powerful barrier to her escape, **The Barriers Model emphasizes the layers of impact that society and context have on the victim.** This model and the adjoining article break down these complexities.

There are four primary barriers:

1. **Environmental and Community Barriers**
2. **Socialization, Family and Role Expectation Barriers**
3. **Barriers Related to the Psychological Consequences of Trauma**
4. **Childhood Abuse and Neglect Barriers**



Layer 1: Environmental and Community Barriers

Barriers to Escape	Examples
Batterer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75% of homicide occurs during separation • Engages in acts to block escape. Tears up court notices, sabotages her if she leaves by turning off utilities, calls her boss, turns her in to children's services, or locks house / changes locks.
No information or mis-information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victim does not know there is a shelter • Thinks children's services will take children • Does not know legal rights
Money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive to set up a new house, legal fees, medical fees, possibly his bills • Problems in getting or collecting child support
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Especially rural areas or neighborhoods off bus routes for appointments or just to get to the shelter

Barriers to Escape	Examples
Criminal Justice Response	<p><i>Police</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they arrest for DV and violation of protection orders? • Do they engage in dual arrest; do they separate and mediate; fail to take offense reports; tell her there's nothing they can do; advise her to buy a gun? <p><i>Prosecutors</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they prosecute only if she can drive the case? • Do they prosecute her if she cannot testify? <p><i>Probation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they fail to assess for danger, fail to recommend consequences, fail to revoke probation for new offenses? <p><i>Judges</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they fail to impose consequences?
Mental Health Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they over medicate symptoms without helping get her safe? • Do they diagnose her / anthropologize her? • Do they engage in marriage counseling? • Do they treat her for co-dependency? • Do they use standardized tests in custody evaluations (ex. MMPI)?
Legal Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can she find an affordable attorney? If so, does attorney: • Advise her to stay in the house to protect property rights? • Advise her not to get a temporary protection order (TPO)? • Advise her to drop criminal case for property in divorce case? • Advise her to drop CPO so that he can keep his gun?
Clergy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put victim safety or family first? • Prioritize children with the father even if he's abusive?
Medical Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they ask questions about domestic violence and complete full medical screening or only treat the injuries (cite AMA study—majority of doctors reported being uncomfortable with DV questions)
Cultural Accessibility	<p><i>Do providers of service:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have sensitivity / cultural competency with gay/lesbian/bi/trans (GLBT) clients • Make translators available or do they use her children? • Understand unique needs of immigrants, elderly abuse victims or treat all victims as having the same needs? • Understand the intersection that racism means for protective orders and that police-based strategies do not work for all clients?

Barriers to Escape	Examples
Physical Accessibility	<p><i>Are shelters:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wheelchair accessible? • Using TTY's for shelters and services? • Full or use a waiting list? • Able to handle her mental health or chronic disease issues or does she get screened out?
Permanent Affordable Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it available or will she be exposed to new and equal danger in high crime neighborhoods where she can afford to rent?
Job Loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers may terminate her because of the danger he poses in her workplace or because he calls all the time • Terminated because of absenteeism she cannot explain without disclosing abuse

Layer 2: Socialization, Family & Role Expectation Barriers	
Barriers to Escape	Examples
Female Socialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May believe a good woman puts her man / children first • May believe every woman needs a man / partner
Romanticized Jealousy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May believe jealousy / obsession is a sign of female desirability (girls learn early, even through cologne marketing—see Calvin Klein)
Attitudes and Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May believe single parenthood hurts children • May believe some amount of abuse is unavoidable in relationships
Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not know who she is if she is not fulfilling the roles she has in this family
Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May believe divorce is morally wrong, even for her safety • May believe God will liberate if the relationship is meant to be; she will only be given difficulties that she can handle
Family of Origin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be breaking rule of family of origin if she leaves (i.e. if you make your bed hard you lay in it; you do not leave bad situations, you manipulate / suffer through, etc.)

Layer 3: Barriers Related to the Psychological Consequences of Trauma*

*These result from trauma and become additional issues to manage in the escape process.

Barriers to Escape	Examples
Exhaustion and Sleep Deprivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From being kept up all night by the abuser • From anticipating abuser's next move, focusing all energy on avoiding another assault, "walking on eggshells" • From having constant physical injuries
Terror and Defense Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denial, minimization (useful, necessary) • Dissociation / numbing
Depression and Suicidal Thoughts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 out of 4 suicide attempts by women are preceded by abuse. For African-American women, the rate is 1 out of 2.
Anxiety and Stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can feel overwhelming and make other feelings more intense
Chemical Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be long-standing problem or for self medicating to control feelings of terror, depression, anxiety, etc.
Self-Blame and Self Doubt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May internalize messages from abuser, family, or others blaming her for abuse
Feels Crazy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May occur as a result of crazy-making tactics of the abuser • May occur as a result of systems not responding to real threats from abuser
Eroded Self-Esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May internalize messages from abuser, family or others that she does not deserve anything better
PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May take a lot of energy managing symptoms of nightmares, intrusive recollections, startle response, seeing him everywhere
Stress or Injury Related Illnesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be found in her or her children
Isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few may know about the abuse. • She may be isolated from resources

Barriers to Escape	Examples
Compliance Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessary to survive in the moment • May become typical response
Stockholm-type Responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe trauma victims may lose their own version of what has occurred or what they think is possible for themselves
Brainwashing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May believe he is unstoppable (whether true or not) • May internalize messages from abuse made more powerful by combination by sleep deprivation, terror and acts of kindness
Memory Impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From being in crisis frequently • From head injury

Layer 4: Childhood Abuse and Neglect Barriers	
Barriers to Escape	Examples
Old Abuse Effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have old PTSD reactivated by the current trauma • May believe that abuse is part of life, unavoidable • This abuse may be less violent than prior abuse in her family • May diminish her ability to perceive danger
Neglect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May create internalized feelings that she does not deserve anything better
Dissociative Reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be an on-going coping strategy from years of abuse
No Radar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant earlier abuse may have prevented development of radar system to spot dangerous people / situations
Trading for Kindness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victims of severe childhood abuse may be willing to trade a lot for rare instances of intimacy and kindness they do get from the abuser

¹This model was published as a full article in the Journal of Psychotherapy. Volume 34/Winter, 1997, Number 4, Pages 485-497. Authors: Nancy Grigsby and Brenda Hartman. For reprints, call the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 404.209.0280.