Response to Allan Barsky's Letter to the Editor in regards to our article "Abused Mothers' Safety Concerns and Court Mediators' Custody Recommendations"

Echo Rivera · April Zeoli · Cris Sullivan

Published online: 11 April 2014
© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2014

We read Barsky's Letter to the Editor thoroughly, and would like to respond with information that will provide clarity to his questions. Barsky's concerns relate to his statement: "...it is not clear that the researchers were actually studying a mediation process." First, we specified in the article title that the family court official under study was a court mediator. Second, we defined this specific role in the Setting subsection within the Method section, as that is where such information is relevant. Specifically, we stated:

Mandated child custody negotiation occurs through a court staff official whose role is *similar to that of a mediator*, and the same assumptions of mediation apply (e.g., equal negotiating power). The main differences are that (a) the mediation session is mandated and run by family court, and (b) the court mediator makes a custody and visitation recommendation regardless of whether the divorcing couple comes to an agreement. Therefore, the terms "mediator" and "court mediator" are used interchangeably. (p. 324–325, emphasis added).

In other words, we clearly stated in the Method section that we studied a process similar, but not identical, to mediation. Furthermore, we identified the key differences between the process under study and that of mediation. Due to page limit constraints and a desire to write concisely, we used the term mediator for much of the article. Notably, we did not use the term mediator to refer to the court officials under study until *after* we had stated the above.

Barsky also states the following in his letter: "To call a process mediation when it is 'like mediation, but not mediation' may mislead researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and other readers about the nature of mediation." We believe that readers will be capable of correctly interpreting what "*similar* to that of a mediator" means. In fact, Barsky's recognition that these court mediators were not traditional mediators, something he identified simply by reading the article, is compelling evidence that we sufficiently communicated a difference between the two processes. The topic of family court and custody recommendations is complex, and this complexity is only exacerbated when intimate partner abuse is present. We appreciate the interest in our research and look forward to future research in this area.

E. Rivera (✉) · C. Sullivan
Psychology Department, Michigan State University, East Lansing,
MI, USA
e-mail: riveraec@msu.edu

A. Zeoli
School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University, East Lansing,
MI, USA