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**Through The Looking Glass:  
Nurses' Responses to Women Experiencing Partner Abuse**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Arts  
in Nursing at  
Massey University

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## Abstract

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Battered women are referred to as a 'health problem in disguise', yet they generally go unrecognised or are ignored by health professionals, including nurses. The aim of this study was to describe nurses' responses to women presenting to emergency departments and general practices with injuries suggestive of partner abuse. A qualitative research design, using semi-structured interviews to gather data from six participants was undertaken. Grounded theory guided the analysis of data, revealing that nurses did not identify or respond effectively to battered women. A core category *The Looking Glass*, describes the differing perspectives nurses have when responding to battered women. The themes *Not Seeing*, *Seeing But Not Seeing*, and *Seeing But Acting Ineffectively* describe the differing responses of nurses to women experiencing partner abuse. The needs of nurses to respond effectively are outlined in a further theme *Seeing For Effective Action*. Educational Preparation is necessary to develop knowledge and skills related to partner abuse, while Workplace Assistance provides guidance to respond through the use of protocols, and support for personal and professional development. Improving the effectiveness of nurses in order to meet the needs of battered women is essential in reducing not only the personal costs to the women themselves, but in reducing the health care costs. Implications and recommendations for the education, practice, and further research are made.

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