

Literature Review: Overview of Research and Evaluation on Men's Behaviour Change Programs



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This paper has been prepared as the literature review for her PhD thesis as a work in progress.

Introduction

Men's violence against women is a serious social problem that manifests in a number of ways at both an individual and systemic level (Bagshaw and Chung, 2000; 2008; Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence, 2005; Victorian Government, 2007b). The individual use of intimate violence or the threat thereof seeks to maintain women's oppression at a personal level. In 2002 the Victorian Government announced changes to its response to violence against women. Under the State Government's Women's Safety Strategy (2002) a commitment was made to a whole-of-government response to family violence (Domestic Violence and Incest Resources Centre, 2004). This resulted in the roll out of an Integrated Family Violence Service System (IFVSS) embedded in research which argues that the safety of women and children is enhanced when men are held accountable by a consistent integrated response to men's violence (Gondolf, 2002b; McMaster and Wells, 2003; Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence, 2005). There has been a considerable increase in public awareness, research and policy development regarding violence against women (Department of Human Services, 2002; Domestic Violence and Incest Resources Centre, 2004; 2007; Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence, 2005; Victorian Government, 2005a, 2005b, 2007b). Despite this, the perceptions of family violence and the reality of the legal response to it remains that it is less criminal than violence outside the home between non intimate partners and/or strangers (Coates and Wade, 2004, 2007; Douglass, Bathrick, and Perry, 2008; Fields, 2008).

Men's Behaviour Change Programs

Groups for violent men must view partners, former partners, prospective partners and children as ultimately their most important consumers (Francis, 1996, p. 23).

Recent years have seen a considerable increase in the development of Men's Behaviour Change Programs (Gondolf and White, 2000; Jenkins, 1990; Keys Young, 1999; Scott, 2004). These programs aim to educate men in their responsibility for their violence and change their abusive behaviour towards women (Gondolf, 1997, 2004; Gondolf and White, 2000; Jenkins, 1990; Laming, 2005c; Silvergleid and Mankowski, 2006). Concurrent with the rise in these programs, has been a plethora of literature about the effectiveness of MBCPs, so much so, that this debate has taken on an imperative in and of itself (Gondolf, 1997). In the discussion on the efficacy of differing approaches and practices within the literature it is easy to lose sight of the central priority of MBCPs, namely the women and children who live with violence.

An overview of the fundamentals in this debate is outlined below. For a more detailed review of this literature see Scott's (2004) review of empirical findings of predictors of change. This review provides a discussion of the central issues in the discussion of MBCP, the major components of theories of change, change efficacy and change processes.

Efficacy and measures of success

There have been a number of significant research evaluations, both single site evaluations and meta analysis on the efficacy of MBCPs (Buttall and Carney, 2008; Cissner and Puffett, 2006; Costello, 2006; Gondolf, 2002b; Murray and Graybeal, 2007; Parmar and Sampson, 2007). These evaluations investigate the impact of attendance, full program completion versus partial completion, program length, counsellors qualities, mandatory attendance, female partner involvement, completion rates and percentages, as well as the efficacy of differing program approaches such as cognitive behavioural approach, ecological community based accountability (Douglass et al., 2008), Restorative Strengths Perspective (Wormer and Bednar, 2002), Constructivist Approach (Laming, 2005b) and Solution Focused Practice (Milner and Singleton, 2008).

In evaluating these programs, researchers argue the benefits of experimental/quasi experimental research designs with differing evaluation measure and procedures, with little agreement both within and across this research (Buttall and Carney, 2008; Francis, 1996; Gondolf, 1997, 2002b, 2004; Murray and Graybeal, 2007; Scott and King, 2007). There is dissention over cause and effect of attrition rates, the efficacy of different psychological treatment foci and the impact of differing personality traits and population profiles (Bowen and Gilchrist, 2004; Buttall and Carney, 2008; Costello, 2006; Dobash, Dobash, Cavanaugh, and Lewis, 1998; Gondolf, 2002b; Goodman and Epstein, 2005; Gregory and Erez, 2002; Laing, 2002; Murray and Graybeal, 2007; Parmar and Sampson, 2007; Scott and Wolfe, 2000; Silvergleid and Mankowski, 2006).

The rise in research examining different demographics and typologies of men who use violence has been one response aimed at addressing identified limitations of MBCPs. These range from examining age, marital status, employment, income level, and education to psychological definitions of abusive typologies such as pro violent attitudes, narcissistic personality, borderline disorder, family only violence and generally violent and antisocial violence (Buttall and Carney, 2008; Gondolf, 1997; Holtzworth-Munroe and Meehan, 2004; Huss and Ralston, 2008; Saunders, 2004; Wallach and Sela, 2008; White and Gondolf, 2000).

Limitations and concerns

There are a number of important considerations when assessing the merit of the research into MBCPs. Many of the studies have no control group so results cannot be definitively attributed to this intervention (Silvergleid and Mankowski, 2006). There is little agreement regarding how batterer characteristics, typologies and demographics impact on program effectiveness (Buttall and Carney, 2008; Huss and Ralston, 2008). The studies are plagued by low response rates; many have short term follow up with high attrition rate which leaves a large group of men and their partners outside the scope of much of the current research on MBCPs (Gondolf, 1997; Laing, 2002).

There is disagreement over how success is defined (Laing, 2002). Cessation of violence is proffered as one measure (Cissner and Puffett, 2006), whilst others argue that success must incorporate broader definitions of behaviour change, and include more hidden and insidious mechanism of control and abuse than solely physical assault, whilst evaluation measures must be inclusive of successful outcomes as defined by the partners of program participants (Austin and Dankwort, 1999; Campbell, Rose, Kub and Nedd, 1998; Cavanaugh, 2003; Howard and Wright 2008; Keys Young, 1999). Many of these studies utilise the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1979), which has been criticized for the gender neutrality of its measurement criteria; for its propensity to standardize the severity of violence to a single measure; and to quantify violence without context or meaning for the victim (Austin and Dankwort, 1999; Dobash et al., 1998). The CTS relies on men and women to provide accurate data about their experiences and behaviour. This is problematic as there is considerable evidence that self reporting amongst men who use violence is not highly reliable (Dobash et al., 1998; Heckert and Gondolf, 2000; Laing, 2002; Silvergleid and Mankowski, 2006). Studies which correlate

men's self reporting with police reports and accounts by female partners underscore these inconsistencies (Costello, 2006; Dobash et al., 1998; White and Gondolf, 2000).

Limitations aside, a more important consideration arising from an analysis of this research is the increasing focus on psychological characteristics and batterer typologies which detracts from the fundamental responsibility to hold men accountable for their use of violence against their intimate female partners; violence that is a crime and a choice (Laming, 2005b). Rationalising violence against women based on psychological or demographic characteristics gives excuses to minimise responsibility by individual men for their behaviour. Moreover it obfuscates and distracts from fundamental societal responsibility for those social structures which reinforce and perpetuate men's violence against women (Pease, 2008).

Of further concern, the increasing focus on the efficacy of Men's Behaviour Change Programs, repositions the focus away from a gendered analysis of violence against women, imbedded in a fundamental feminist analysis of how patriarchy perpetuates violence against women (CASV, 1992; Coates and Wade, 2004, 2007; Douglass et al., 2008; Eastaer, 1994; Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991; Fields, 2008; Goodman and Epstein, 2005; Henning and Holdford, 2006; Stubbs and Tolmie, 1998; Thorpe and Irwin, 1996). Pease (2008) argues that this occurred in line with the Howard government's move from a gender based analysis to an "individualised and relational understanding of men's violence". This positions responsibility for ending violence with the individual with little focus on necessary concurrent structural change.

Goodman and Epstein (2005) argue the increasing focus on MBCPs and the evaluation of these programs has shifted the traditional woman centered response to family violence. They contend that,

. . . [t]his shift towards a largely perpetrator-centered, generic response stems in large part from the traditional emphasis of police and prosecutors on offender accountability over victim safety and security (Epstein Bell and Goodman 2003 in Goodman and Epstein 2005: 480).

Costello (2006) affirms that the foremost contribution that MBCPs can and should make is to provide advice and assistance to women.

The Victorian Context

In the Victorian context, programs use a mix of treatment approaches. There is a blend of educative and therapeutic focus predominantly from a profeminist approach (Francis, 1996). There is a broad definitional base for violence which encompass more than physical violence (Keys Young, 1999), and though programs have partner contact components, improvements to the efficacy and recognition of the importance of contact with women is needed (Costello, 2006; Howard and Wright 2008). Research into the partner contact component of MBCPs highlights a number of ways in which programs can effectively prioritise and respond to women and children's safety. Further research into accountability within these programs in Victoria will build on this important research (Austin and Dankwort, 1999).

Mandated versus Non mandated programs

Of significance in the Victorian context is the predominately non mandated basis of MBCPs which differs to the experience of other states. The research on the impact and/or efficacy of mandated versus non mandated programs is limited and subject to debate (Domestic Violence and Incest Resources Centre, 2004; Francis, 1996; Gondolf, 1990; Keys Young, 1999; Laming, 2005a; Office of Women's Policy, 2000). Proponents of voluntary programs argue that compulsion to attend a program creates an environment of resentment that does not enable either the man, or the group to take responsibility for their choices (Francis, 1996; Keys Young, 1999). Voluntary engagement is seen as an important step in the man accepting responsibility for his violence and is therefore, more likely to lead to more successful outcomes

and less attrition (Domestic Violence and Incest Resources Centre, 2004; Keys Young, 1999). Gondolf's multi-site evaluation suggests that engagement is not higher amongst voluntary men, but that voluntary participants are actually more likely to drop out than their mandated equivalents. He argues that whilst dropout rates are high amongst both program approaches, that mandated programs have options within criminal sanctions to address this. He also argues that at the 15 month follow up, voluntary participants were more likely to have re-assaulted their partners (Gondolf, 1990); (See also Hart et al cited in DVIRC 2004 pg 19). However Keys Young (1999) cite research which suggests there is no difference in attendance and drop out rates amongst mandated and non mandated men.

An alternative to the "either/ or" position within this debate is the notion that all men are to differing degrees compelled to attend a program. Whether this is because of; a court order; informal consequences such as pressure from friends; or whether he is "wife mandated" because his marriage is at risk; few men, if any, attend MBCP willingly or of their own volition (Domestic Violence and Incest Resources Centre, 2004; Keys Young, 1999; Laming, 2005a). Laming, in discussing the Victorian SHED project, (a program where 40 % of participants were mandated through CORE) states it is difficult to recall even one man out of 500 who came for assessment voluntarily (Laming, 2005a, pg133).

A number of evaluations argue that there is a place for both program approaches. Voluntary programs reach men (and their partners and children) who may not have previously encountered the legal system. If the safety of women and children is the primary goal of MBCP, then voluntary programs are an important pathway for this group. Similarly, mandatory attendance with legal sanction for failure to comply sends a message that violence against women is a criminal offence (Keys Young, 1999; Laming, 2005b; Domestic Violence and Incest Resources Centre, 2004).

The research on retention and completion of participants in mandated versus non mandated programs is inconclusive. Both approaches are found to have high attrition rates (Domestic Violence and Incest Resources Centre, 2004). In the Australian experience, as investigated by Keys Young (Keys Young, 1999) there were high attrition rates in voluntary programs which was the predominate model at that time. They also found however, that drop out rates declined as programs became more integrated within the wider system – regardless of a mandated or non mandated focus (Keys Young, 1999). This sits within what we have learnt about how the system impacts on the success of the individual program (Gondolf, 2002b); (Domestic Violence and Incest Resources Centre, 2004; 2007; Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence, 2005). This perhaps is the more important conclusion to draw from this body of research.

Men's Voices

Some of the tensions in the debate on quantitative studies into batterer programs can be illuminated by more qualitative analysis. However, these studies are relatively few (Austin and Dankwort, 1999; Buchbinder and Eisikovits, 2004; Gondolf and White, 2000; Morgan and O'Neill, 2001; Silvergleid and Mankowski, 2006). In their analysis of men's pre and post behaviour change program interviews, Morgan and O'Neill (2001), identify a significant change in the ways participants expressed understanding of their violence. Using discourse analysis, comments made by participants in pre course interviews were attributed to participant perceptions of inner turmoil and distress. Prior to participation in the MBCPs they articulated their violence as a reaction to 'inner tension'. Violence was an uncontrollable reaction to overwhelming forces, including pathological constructions such as the abnormal behaviour of others, and the disinhibiting effects of alcohol.

In post program interviews, participants acknowledged that their violence was a choice. There was an intention to their behaviour, namely, -"to win, to hurt, to get even". They articulated that the violence achieved a purpose. This was interpreted by the researchers as a level of increased accountability, and emotional articulateness amongst most of the participants (Morgan and O'Neill, 2001).

...it would appear that the men understand their violence from this post course position, as a choice to reduce their 'emotional distress' (Morgan and O'Neill 2001: 287).

In spite of this there was also an ongoing perception that whilst the violence was a choice, it was still perceived as a response to overwhelming inner tension. Even as post interview participants saw themselves as a 'strategic goal orientated actor' it was from an 'emotionally vulnerable' position, subject to 'irrational needs from within' (Morgan and O'Neill 2001). This ongoing prevalence of what the authors term 'pathological accounts' for violence raises concern. Whilst participants have new pathways for seeking help, the authors acknowledge that the men's ongoing perception of uncontrollable inner urges continues to provide excuses and enables minimising of responsibility.

Denial, Minimisation and Blame

There is considerable evidence that men, when confronted about their violence, deny, minimise and blame others. Studies which explore the correlation between this tendency and its impact on men's accountability are limited and conflicting (Cavanaugh, 2003; Cavanaugh, Dobash, Dobash and Lewis, 2001; Henning and Holdford, 2006; Scott and Straus, 2007; Silvergleid and Mankowski, 2006). In a study of 62 male and 77 female students, Scott and Strauss (2007) explored the importance of denial, minimisation and blame in relation to intimate partner violence and recidivism. They argue that minimization of the seriousness and extent of violence is associated with experiences of prior abuse with a strong correlation between men's denial of their violence and subsequent limited behaviour change.

However, Henning and Holdford (2007:114) cite other research with conflicting results on the acceptance of responsibility and its correlation to recidivism. Their study of 2,824 men convicted of intimate partner abuse, found little correlation between recidivism and denial/minimization. This differs with Silvergleid and Mankowski's (2006) qualitative study of the perceptions of MBCP participants and facilitators. These men clearly identified the importance of taking responsibility and overcoming the propensity to minimise and deny 'to engage in new ways of thinking and acting' (2006:140). They credited the group process within the MBCP as central to achieving behaviour change and emphasized the importance of facilitator personality within that formal mechanism. They also identified informal consequences such as the loss of their wife as a catalyst for change (Silvergleid and Mankowski 2006:145).

Of note however is that participants in Silvergleid and Mankowski (2006) study were recommended based on facilitator's perceptions of their willingness and ability to discuss their experience. Facilitators judged a significant change in their behaviour. These factors have implications for bias. The interviews were limited to the effects of the MBCP and sought only the perceptions of men and facilitators without corroboration from female partners. With only nine successful program completers interviewed, this cannot be seen as representative of the broader population. Participants in Scott and Wolfe's study (2000) were identified by their female partners, the program facilitators and self-identified as having made significant behavior change. Whilst this provides for greater validity in subject selection, there are limitations. Nevertheless the research provides some rich data on what men identified as effective consequences for creating change. What is lacking is the role that children play in men's willingness to attempt behaviour change is an important factor. Men's understanding their role as fathers and the influence of this in motivation to change needs further study.

Women's Voices

Women and children are the ultimate consumers of services which seek to impact on men's violent behaviour (Francis, 1996; Howard et al., 2008; Laming, 2005c; Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence, 2005). Studies which explore women's experiences of the impact of formal and informal interventions on the escalation and/or cessation of intimate

partner violence make an important contribution to our understanding of women's needs (Austin and Dankwort, 1999; Gondolf, 2004; Guzik, 2008). We can only truly know how effective MBCPs are if we have adequate partner feedback (Costello, 2006; Domestic Violence and Incest Resources Centre, 2004; Howard et al., 2008).

In seeking to hear women's voices, Campbell, Rose and Kub (1998), interviewed 96 women over 3 years. They argue that women's experiences of violence are multi dimensional; that leaving or staying does not always correlate with the cessation of violence; that many women make active decisions about what changes should occur and when; and they do this much earlier than do their male partners. Using both qualitative and quantitative data, Campbell et al., (1998) present women who have a variety of survival strategies that reflect the complexity inherent in relationships where violence is present. They, like Cavanaugh (2003), argue that women use a myriad of resourceful responses and agree with Eisikovits & Buchbinder (1999) that there is a paucity of research into women's responses to battering, that reflects the complexity of the social and familial context in which violence occurs. In fact there is little examination of abusive relationships in which violence has ceased (Campbell et al., 1998).

Cavanaugh discusses the importance of understanding the ways women interpret and interact with the violence they experience. They are not passive victims. To define them as such is to deny the interactive nature of their lives. We need to understand how women see the violence, how women live with it and how women respond to it. This is important to ensure service delivery meets her needs, as she sees them, not as defined by 'others' who may unwittingly further oppress women by imposing a construct of violence and choice that is not reflective of the complexities of the lives these women live (Austin & Dankwort, 1999; Cavanaugh, 2003; Howard et al., 2008).

Cavanaugh (2003) challenges the reductionist notion of responses to women that are predicated on leaving or staying. She, like others (Austin & Dankwort, 1999; Ben-Ari, Winstok, & Eisikovits, 2003; Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2008), challenges the notion that women leave or stay in an abusive relationship and suggest that in some situations the abuse ceases. It is their construction of choice as to whether they stay or leave (Ben-Ari et al., 2003). Moreover it is often women's ultimatum which compels the partner to attend a MBCP (Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006). In some cases, it is women's determination to end the abuse which is central to the cessation of male violence. These women are active decision makers (Castelino & Compton, 2002).

Cavanaugh (2003) further argues that violence occurs within relationships that are also characterized by "commitment and love" (pg 231). Effective responses to violence against women, must understand the diversity of these interactive social connections. Working with both parties within the same relationships is important to further unravel the congruence and contradiction in their narratives.

Contrasting Research Participants from Shelters and MBCPs

Men's Behaviour Change Programs in Victoria have their roots in the community health and family support sector (Keys Young, 1999). They began as stand alone non mandated programs (Costello, 2006). Their integration into the 'mainstream' family violence services delivery system has not been without controversy (Costello, 2006; Goodman & Epstein, 2005; Laing, 2002; McMaster & Wells, 2003; Paymar & Barnes). Whilst the development of NTV standards provide more regulation to the operation of these programs, they still predominantly operate outside the criminal justice system (Howard et al., 2008; Keys Young, 1999), largely driven by the voluntary sector (Costello, 2006). In the last decade, MBCPs have become a central plank in the service system's response to men's violence against women (Gondolf, 2002b; Gregory & Erez, 2002; Pease, 2008). Understanding women's experiences of these programs is central to evaluating if the programs hold men accountable (Costello, 2006; Howard et al., 2008).

Much of the research about women's experiences has been with women who are in shelters with relatively little research with partners of participants in MBCPs (Gondolf, 1998, 2002b).

This is a difficult group to capture because of their transient lifestyle and the safety issues involved (Howard et al., 2008; Laing, 2002, 2003). Despite these difficulties there are some significant studies which have explored the experiences of women partners of MBCP participants (Austin & Dankwort, 1999; Costello, 2006; Francis, 1996; Gondolf, 1998, 2002b; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Gondolf & White, 2000; Goodman & Epstein, 2005; Gregory & Erez, 2002; Howard et al., 2008).

From these studies we know that partners of men in behaviour change programs are less likely to have had contact with support services than women in shelters (Francis, 1996; Howard et al., 2008; Laing, 2003). They are likely to have experienced severe, multiple episodes of abuse prior to their partner's referral to the program (Gregory & Erez, 2002). A significant number have had little or no previous police involvement (Francis, 1996). They make active decision about when and how their relationships will change, though ending the relationship does not necessarily mean an end to the violence (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988). These women are the foremost experts on how services can best address their needs (Austin & Dankwort, 1999; Campbell et al., 1998; Costello, 2006; Francis & Hester, 2004; Gondolf, 2002a, 2004; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Goodman & Epstein, 2005; Gregory & Erez, 2002; Howard et al., 2008).

Gondolf in particular has studied and written extensively on men's violence against women. The literature on men's violence is replete with reference to the work he has undertaken, both individually and in collaboration with others (Cavanaugh, 2003; Edward, 2000; Gondolf, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2002a, 2004; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Gondolf & White, 2000; Gregory & Erez, 2002).

The female partners in Gondolf's studies of MBCP participants tended to have lower education levels and were from lower economic status groups than women drawn directly from women's services. Despite many having suffered severe assaults and injury, only about a quarter were engaged with counselling services and less than ten per cent had experience with women's support services (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Gondolf, 1998; 2002b). Gondolf identified different help seeking behaviours between these women and women in shelters. Whilst the partners of MBCP participants have informal strategies to cope with past violence, they also relied heavily on the criminal justice system to manage the violence. More than half of the women in one study had previously been involved with the criminal justice system as a consequence of her partner's violence (Gondolf, 1998, p. 668). Female partners were overly optimistic about the effect of batterer treatment, despite advice to the contrary from program facilitators. Many women have their own informal strategies for coping with the violence, such as threatening to leave and in cases of severe abuse, retaliating with violence (Gondolf, 2002b).

The women's reliance on the criminal justice system is an important factor when we consider the significant body of research that highlights the different and conflicting responses of the criminal justice system to men's violence against women (Coates & Wade, 2004, 2007; Easteal, 1998; Fields, 2008; Francis, 1996; Knudsen & Miller, 1991; Stubbs & Tolmie, 1998; Swain, 1995). Their limited involvement with women's support services reveals the hidden aspects of these women's lives and the importance of involving women in research to understand their experiences of how men are held accountable for their violence across the service system (Austin & Dankwort, 1999; Howard et al., 2008).

Evaluating Success

It is important to use a diversity of measures when evaluating outcomes for women (Costello, 2006; Howard et al., 2008; Keys Young, 1999). Cavanaugh (2003) argues that there is more to relationships between men who are violent and women who are abused, than the violence. Evidence of commitment and love may also be present. They can also defined as committed and loving (pg 231). Effective responses to violence against women, must understand the diversity of these complex interactive social connections. Measures of success for MBCP and indeed across the family violence service system must be grounded in the perceptions and experiences of the women (Howard et al., 2008).

In evaluating MBCPs, a number of authors argue that most women experienced some measure of positive change in their lives because of their male partners attending the program (Austin & Dankwort, 1999; Campbell et al., 1998; Costello, 2006; Howard et al., 2008). Austin and Dankworth's (1999) study of women partners of men in MBCPs suggests that the narrow definition of success based on measures of reassault, ignores the reality that for many women, success can be defined by changes in their own lives. This can include an increase in their feelings of self worth and personal well being. These are different measure of success to those defined by program facilitators and /or researchers intent on measuring outcome as a decrease in his physical violence (Austin & Dankwort, 1999).

However, Gregory & Erez (2002), in depth interviews with 33 women partners of men attending MBCPs revealed more conflicting perceptions of success. Whilst hopeful about any criminal justice response, women were also fearful of repercussions from their partner. Women have their own opinions about how to improve the program (Howard et al., 2008). They understand how the intervention may have also impacted on others involved in their lives. Women identify how easily new learnt new manipulative techniques, and whilst the physical violence may have decreased, there was little change in the incidents of verbal abuse. In fact there is some evidence that the verbal abuse may actually get worse (Keys Young, 1999). These results highlight the need to understand women's experiences, whilst at the same time challenging us to accept women's decision to remain in a violent relationship when this may not sit comfortably with our own personal philosophy and political perspective (Cavanaugh, 2003).

Looking across the insights from these studies, lends itself to further research into women's perceptions of what works for them in responding to men who use violence (Howard et al., 2008). This is especially the case when we consider that there are few service options for women, within a prevailing stay or leave approach to practice, that support an alternative to leaving, that may be a possibility for some women, namely, to stay and eliminate the violence (Yoshioka and Choi 2005 in Wuest and Merit Gray 2008, Cavanaugh 2003, Ben – Ari et al., 2003).

Multiple voices - His and Hers

If we consider research which argues that denial, minimization and blame are strategies used by men to justify their behaviour and evade any sense of responsibility or accountability for their violence (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1997; Gondolf, 2002b; Heckert & Gondolf, 2000), then it is important to balance men's accounts with the perceptions of women and workers to determine if women's experiences of the men's behaviour, concurs with the conclusions of research which explores men views on their behaviour (Austin & Dankwort, 1999; Gondolf & White, 2000; Heckert & Gondolf, 2000; Szinovacz, 1983). We need to ask, is the change expressed by the men a result of real attitude and resultant behaviour change, or is it, as contended by some, the result of men learning the language of MBCPs to articulate responsibility for, and understanding of their violence, in a way that minimises the possibility of further criminal sanction (Gondolf, 1997; Heckert & Gondolf, 2000; Keys Young, 1999; Scott, 2004; Wormer & Bednar, 2002)?

Gondolf and White's (2000) study of 594 men and 616 female partners in their multi-site evaluation of men's behaviour change programs argues that men and women report different needs, different perceptions of the programs effectiveness; and different priorities for program changes. Heckert and Gondolf's (2000) couple study investigated the reliability of self reports of men and their partners and compared their results to police records. The authors argue that both men and women underreport the level and severity of violence when compared to police reports, but that this occurs for different reasons and to differing degrees. For men minimisation and denial of their behaviour is about abdicating responsibility, whilst for women the motivation is about keeping the relationship together and custody concerns about the children. The women take disproportionate responsibility for the success of the relationship and have different service delivery needs and wants to their male partners. They also have different service needs at different times (Howard et al., 2008).

Dobash, et., al (1998) compares the accounts of male violence as provided by men and women, including 95 couples. They argue that understanding men's violence can only be understood in the context of the coercive and controlling environment, in which it is situated; that these reflect distinct and separate realities and interpretations (Dobash et al., 1998, p. 406). Men and women give different descriptions of the severity and frequency of violence and attach differing meaning and interpretation to the violence. An appreciation of the centrality of the gendered nature of the environment in which the violence occurs is fundamental to understanding and responding effectively (Gondolf, 2007; Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence, 2005).

Costello (2006) presents therapy as secondary to accountability within MBCPs. She challenges men's groups to uphold men's accountability at the individual level, by prioritizing much greater contact with female partners; through partnerships with women's agencies to enable greater input from women's partners into program content; through organisational accountability by stronger monitoring of program and agencies which deliver MBCPs in line with 'No To Violence' (NTV) standards. These studies give important information about the difference in men's and women's perceptions of violence and accountability, but largely explore this in relation to MBCPs and to experience of the violence. The place of formal and informal consequences that seek to hold men accountable for their violence are not central. One of the limitations of quantitative studies into MBCPs is the inability to provide definitive correlations between behaviour change and program effect. It is not possible to control for other consequences which may impact on the cessation or escalation of violence (Francis & Hester, 2004), but it is crucial to explore what they may be.

The System Matters

Batterer program outcome is...likely to be improved with swift and certain court referral, periodic court review or specialized probation surveillance, and ongoing risk management (Gondolf, 2002b pg 199).

The importance of responding to Intimate Partner Violence from more than the individual level is discussed by a number of authors (Domestic Violence and Incest Resources Centre, 2004; Gondolf, 2002b; Gregg, 2007; 2007; Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence, 2005). Gondolf argues that regardless of approach and treatment typology, swifter more consistent approaches by courts and family violence services does contribute to more successful outcomes. DVIRC (2004) agree and further argue that an integrated system has the capacity to provide a variety of responses to address the complex and divergent needs of both perpetrators and partners/children. It enables programs with differing ideologies and diverse service delivery focus to come together with the common goal of protecting women and children. However whilst Office of the Status of Women (2003) support the development of integrated systems they caution that a successful integrated response needs to be premised on

A shared definition (of violence), principles of intervention and a common goal for numerous agencies to work together (Office of the Status of Women, 2003 pg 37)

Under this tenet, an integrated system is built on a formal structure with established and agreed upon policies, procedures (eg MUO's) that reflect a shared understanding of the experiences and needs of victim and perpetrators of violence.

This precondition reinforces the Western Australian Safety and Accountability Audit which broadens the notion of offender accountability and positions it across four levels of service delivery. They ask does service delivery practice ensure offender accountability and victim safety through, 'Institutional to Victim accountability'; 'Offender to Victim accountability'; 'Practitioner to Practitioner accountability'; 'Agency to Agency accountability' (Pence, Mitchell, & Aoina, 2007)? Effective integration and accountability, does not stop with the perpetrator,

but must be the responsibility of all stakeholders within the integrated family violence service system to ensure optimum outcomes in the safety of women and children living with family violence

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