

Domestic violence: Perpetrator programs in Western Australia



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Aims

- > Three year Australian Research Council project with the Department of Corrective Services (WA).
- > Three local non-government service providers.
- > Focus on policy, organisational, practice, and research issues in the delivery of legally mandated programs for men who have acted violently in their intimate relationships.

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Background

- > Worldwide, approximately 8.7 million women are victimized by a current or former intimate partner each year (Roberts & Roberts, 2005).
- > In the top five risk factors for women's health in Australia.
- > Estimated that domestic violence cost Australia \$8.1 billion in the financial year 2002-2003, excluding costs associated with domestic violence prevention (Access Economics Pty Ltd., 2004). Of this, \$3.5 billion is estimated as the cost of pain, suffering and premature death of victims.

Background

- > Nearly half of all incidents involve physical injury.
- > Nearly two thirds of all women who are murdered are killed by their husband or live-in partner). Of the 113 incidents of homicide involving female victims reported in 2005-2006, arguments related to domestic disputes accounted for 66 of these (Davis & Mouzos, 2007).
- > Children who witness domestic violence are adversely affected in a range of ways that impacts upon their development and it has been estimated that domestic violence is accompanied by child abuse in around 50% of all cases.

Program Context

The last decade has seen significant attempts to target men who perpetrate domestic violence – a) legal and criminal justice responses; b) development of interventions such as therapy and education (Gondolf, 2002).

The basis for this approach has been informed by overseas programs such as the Duluth Program developed in the United States.

Some concerns:

“the development of programs for men diverts much need funding from victims’ services. This is vigorously denied by those who allocate funding, but women’s services who support victims and their children remain sceptical, particularly when faced with the response that there is “no money” to develop victim support services” (Justo et al., 2009).

Context

Previous Australian research on male perpetrator intervention programs has been largely contained to policy, procedural and organisational analysis (e.g., WA safety audit).

- necessary to ensure that programs are implementing practices that are consistent with program values, principles, and goals.

> Few previous Australian attempts to examine **effectiveness** - changes in both male perpetrators and female victims.

(reports from related service providers and women and children who are affected by the violence, may provide more reliable data on program effectiveness than self-report or re-arrest rates).

Context

The base rates of re-offending across studies for men who attend programs have been shown to be **21% based on police reports, and 35% based on partner reports** (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004).

This means that around **one in three program participants will commit further acts of violence** (probably more).

- > Violence is commonly precipitated by disputes relating to matters such as sexual jealousy, sense of ownership over the woman, household duties and childcare, and the distribution of household resources such as money and time.

****Great potential for reducing risk by intervening in these areas****

Our interest

- > Services and program delivery models.
- > Changes in men.
- > Experiences of women.
- > Comparisons between programs and across locations (metro/rural; model of intervention).

Models of Services

Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (Chung et al., 2004) - core philosophies of best practice for domestic violence are not consistently evident in the structure and delivery of many intervention programs for perpetrators.

Many agencies state that they run a Duluth or Duluth-style program, but often what is operationalised is one aspect of that model, not the complete range of elements (Laing, 2002).

- > Most programs combine 'pro-feminist' and 'cognitive-behavioural' approaches. The combination of these terms reflects a "common view about the nature of the problem as generated within a context of gender relations, socialisation and learning, and an orientation to treatment that focuses on changing behaviour and ways of thinking".

Intervention Models

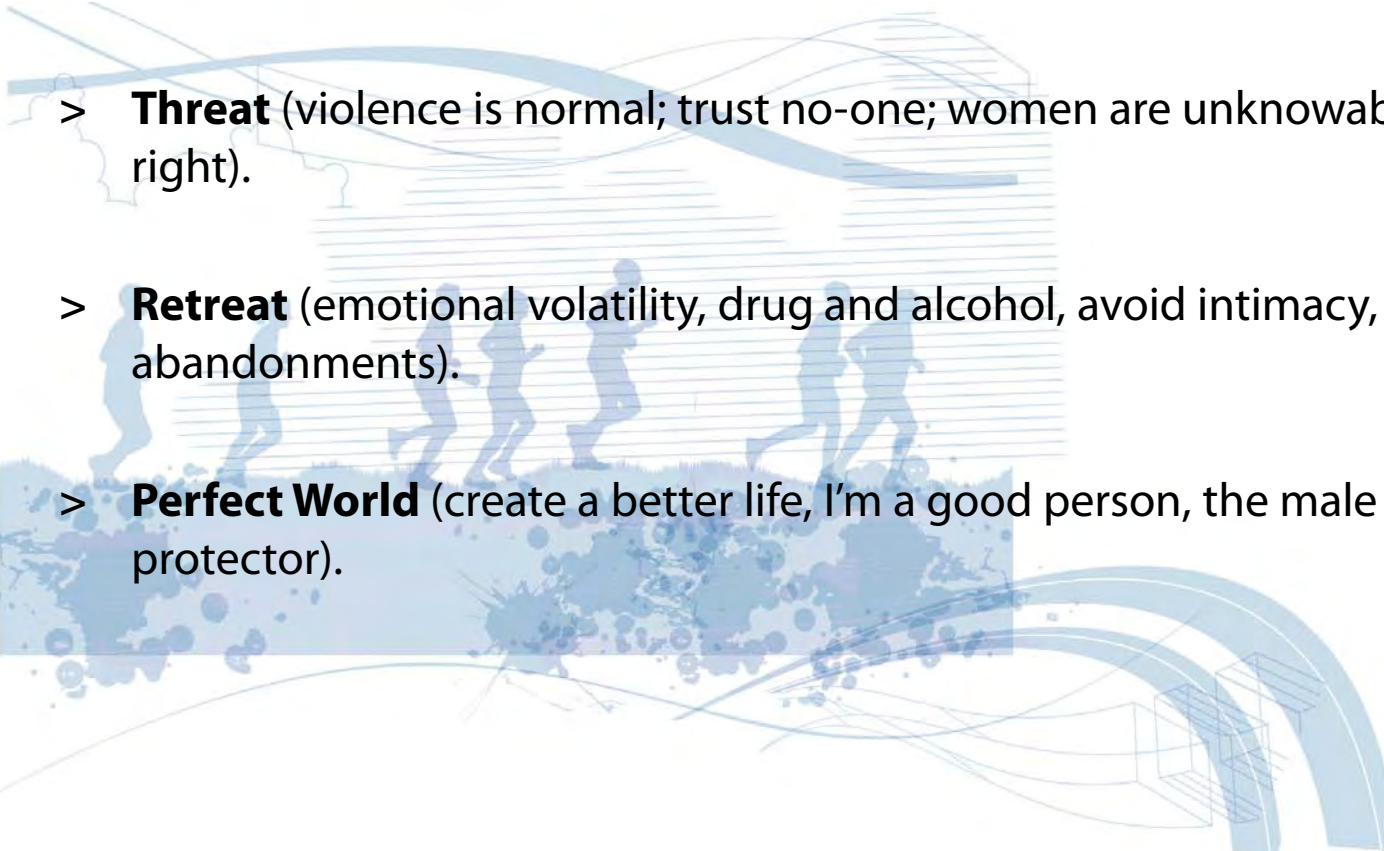
“The approach to intervention is one that focuses on **changing attitudes** towards women, and in particular intimate partners, and **developing new skills** by which conflict can be managed in ways that do not involve aggression” (Pence & Paymar, 1993).

Disputes about the value of some interventions:

- > Anger
- > Substance use
- > Childhood abuse
- > Reciprocal violence and couple counselling

? used to minimise responsibility for behaviour.

Implicit theories (Dempsey, 2008)

- 
- > **Threat** (violence is normal; trust no-one; women are unknowable; I am always right).
 - > **Retreat** (emotional volatility, drug and alcohol, avoid intimacy, avoid abandonments).
 - > **Perfect World** (create a better life, I'm a good person, the male as provider and protector).

Engaging Men

- > High attrition rates amongst court mandated domestic violence offender programs have been reported in a majority of evaluation studies, in some cases **up to 75%** (Buttell & Carney, 2008; Gondolf, 2008). Likely to lead to increased risk – McMurran et al., 2007).
- > Attendance is legally coerced. Focus on “accountability” rather than “therapy”.
- > Low levels of treatment readiness (O’Leary et al., 2009):
 - Disregard or denial of responsibility for any acts of violence or abuse (provocation, alcohol, injustice).
 - Little or no understanding of the mandated process of referral to the program.
 - Coming to a program is an encumbrance.
 - Ambivalence about whether or not the program will help.

Responsibility

... you can say that most of the time it's 90% her, other times I would say that you know it could be 70%, but... I am never the instigator.'

'Under duress [willingness to attend the program] to be perfectly frank, um I'm unfortunately in the situation where I don't think I'm suitable for the course. I'm not innocent in relation to the few areas where I've crossed the line but what I am completely shocked at is the system where the other party is not brought to account because when she rings up the police because it's just a figment of her imagination that everything is going to get better because she's going to ring the police.'

'I've been having problems with my wife and the only way she could get me out was to take out a DVO (Domestic Violence Order). I didn't do anything but she said she was scared of me and that was enough for the police. Then, don't know what I was supposed to have done, they (Police) charged me for breaching the order and that..., they didn't ask me nothing about it, they just believed her.'

Little Understanding, Encumbrance, Ambivalence:

'Just a bit confused I suppose, no one told me what its all about, I've waited about 6 months and then I find out it is 24 weeks I have to come or something, but I am curious as well yeah more than anything else yeah. Yeah I haven't got that I shouldn't be here attitude... Just don't know what to expect.'

'I've just shut Pandora's box and I don't really want to have to open it for people that I don't know about.'

'But it's only 2 hours a night, so hopefully it will fly by.'

Do programs work?

- > Lack of consistent empirical support for the effectiveness of programs in reducing further incidents of domestic violence, **regardless of treatment modality.**
- > Babcock, Green, and Robie (2004) – effect sizes associated with different types of approach to domestic violence intervention were typically small ($d=0.35$ for Duluth programs; $d=0.29$ for cognitive-behavioural programs):
“a woman is 5% less likely to be re-assaulted by a man who was arrested, sanctioned, and went to a batterers’ program than by a man who was simply arrested and sanctioned”.
- > Feder and Wilson (2005) on program outcomes with mandated clients concluded that **“the mean effect for victim reported outcomes was zero”.**

Changes in men?

> Participants

Agency	Frequency	%
A	13	8.6
B	45	29.6
C	9	5.9
D	85	55.9
Total	152	100.0

> Post-program: total 9



Measure	Pre-Program			Post-Program		
	<i>n</i>	\bar{X}	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	\bar{X}	<i>SD</i>
ABI total score	128	47.4	11.90	7	38.0	13.22
Physical Abuse subscale	137	13.4	3.70	8	11.8	2.49
Psychological Abuse subscale	131	34.0	9.42	8	27.3	10.39
LDQ total score (0-3 scale)	139	4.6	5.62	9	2.1	2.71
CORE total score	147	14.1	7.66	8	10.4	4.92
Wellbeing subscale	147	15.0	9.23	9	11.7	6.96
Problems/Symptoms subscale	147	15.2	9.22	9	11.1	8.16
Social Functioning subscale	147	12.7	7.25	8	8.5	6.60
Marlowe-Crowne total score	137	45.7	7.91	9	46.7	6.65
Trait Anger total score	144	20.5	7.27	9	14.6	4.93
Trait Anger Temperament subscale	148	8.3	3.25	9	6.1	2.62
Trait Anger Reaction subscale	145	8.1	3.11	9	5.7	1.73
IBWB total score	143	63.4	10.93	8	68.1	10.43
Wife Beating Is Justified subscale	145	46.4	7.83	8	49.0	8.21
Help Should Be Given subscale	145	7.1	5.11	8	4.9	2.95
Violence Treatment Readiness total score	136	71.5	7.99	8	71.4	6.65

Upon entry to programs, men have:

- > High levels of anger and mental health problems, low levels of well-being and social functioning.
- > Beliefs that are broadly supportive of domestic violence.
- > Not ready to engage with program material.

Upon exit from the program, men are:

- ? Less likely to endorse attitudes that support violence.
- ? Have improved their level of mental health.
- ? Report fewer signs of angry experience and expression
- ? Shown greater reductions in psychological abuse than physical abuse (more awareness that help should be given to victims, but still belief that DV is justified).
- ? Report greater improvements in psychological abuse than physical abuse.

But: **We only have data on 9 out of 143 men** - ? Self-selecting; ? Attrition rates from programs; ? Partner perspectives on change; ? Social desirability.

Post program evaluations (Day et al., 2009).

Queensland:

1. Program attendance as part of punishment

- > There were a variety of views on how important the mandated aspect of the program had been. For some, the court order was instrumental in addressing behaviour:

"Would I have done it without a court order? Probably not... ..I wouldn't have said no to doing something probably together with my partner but having gone down the path of being issued with a DVO (Domestic Violence Order) and then breaching the DVO and being put in this course"



*"Well it just opened my eyes to see that you know what I mean. Like it is a big problem that and it's not just, like I was saying, it's not just physical. There is verbal is a form of domestic violence you know what I mean. And I just couldn't get my head around that. I refused to, f*ing, when I first come here it's just oh you know, it's only a f*ing argument you know, the neighbours should keep their f*ing big ears out of it you know what I mean, they just should f*ing mind their own business. But obviously they shouldn't really because if I look at it now if that was me I would ring the police if I heard that".*

> **2. Problem awareness**

Most participants appeared to leave the program with a greater awareness of the nature of their problems, and an increased commitment to developing non-violent relationships:

*"But when I first I sort of couldn't get my head around to begin with that, well it was only a f*ing argument big deal you know, I couldn't even get my head around that. But since then well an argument is the stepping stone you know what I mean, and last thing I wanted to have with (partner's name) in this relationship is to graduate to full on violence if you know what I mean. And I'm just sort of you know glad that I've been made aware that it is. And when I look back on my last relationship that's what happened, we started arguing and it got worse and louder and eventually push come to shove".*

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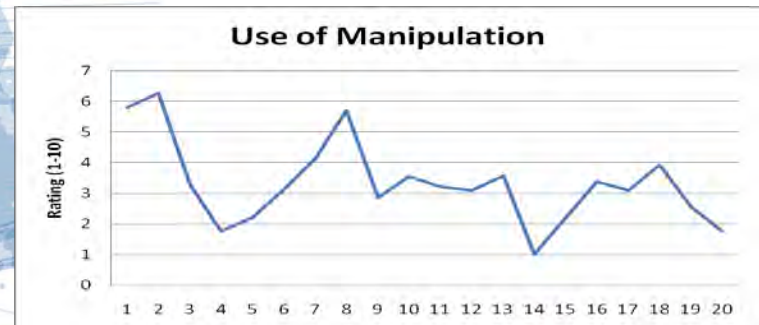
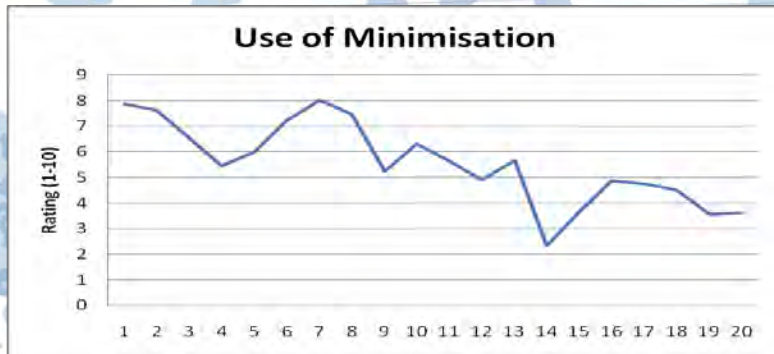
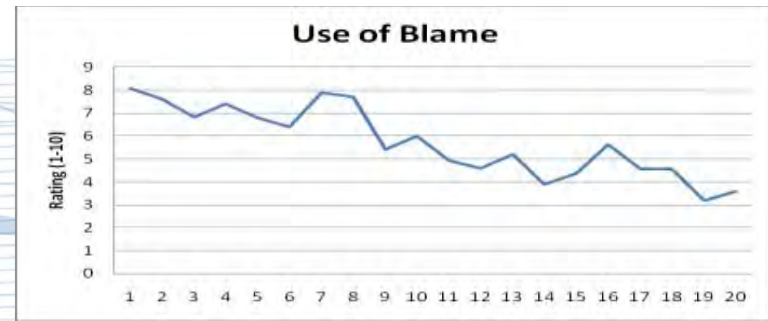
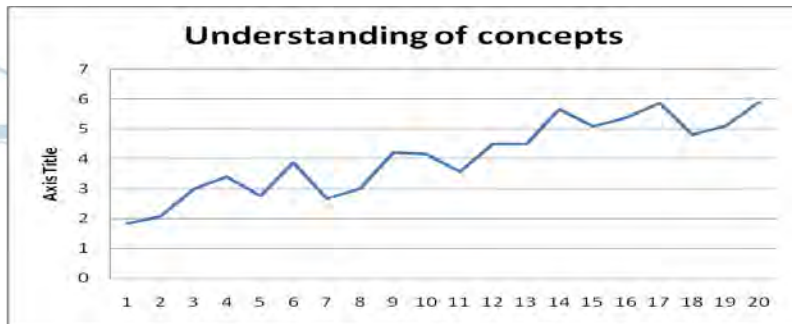
What helped?

- > Consistently identified two things – **social support** from other men in the program, and the development of **communication skills in their intimate relationships**.

"When I first come here I was a blubbering mess and didn't want to be here so although there was a lot of getting things off my chest and knowing I'm not the only one out there going through the same thing so it's been good".

"Well you know I suppose it's the group atmosphere you know because you think before you walk into the place you see your situation in isolation and you don't know what other people are going through. So therefore you know you don't know you're just I suppose you're in your own little cocoon then you hear the stories of other people who have you know their own stories to tell and I suppose you realise you share similar problems with other people um or your situation in life is similar to other people. You have the same frustrations and you know dare I say it you've all got something in common"

Facilitator ratings of change



The Difference is Deakin

Survey of CCOs (Pfitzner, 2009)

- > Postal survey of 320 CCOs in WA & SA
- > 69 returned (22%).

Asked them to estimate % of:

- > male clients who had committed dv (10-95%)
- > had been exposed to dv as a child (10-100%)
- > women who experienced dv in any given year (10-95%).

CCOs see themselves as:

- > **Skilled** and **comfortable** in working with DV (80% rated themselves as 'very')
- > **Competent** (two thirds rated 'very')
- > **Well trained** (over half rated their level of training they had undertaken as moderate – extensive).

CCO Beliefs

- > Two-thirds believed that it is appropriate to obtain the contact details of the victims, whilst a small number (10%) believed it to be inappropriate.
- > Almost half believed it was important to contact victims when writing pre-sentence reports.
- > The majority (61.2%) rated the effectiveness of programs as relatively poor (2.5-3.5 on a 5 point scale).

Reasons given included: mandated to attend, treatment resistance/entrenched thinking, and low motivation

CCO suggestions

- > increase in community education,
- > more programs and resources,
- > individual treatment to increase motivation
- > culturally relevant programs,
- > substance use and dv programs
- > Improved relationships between program workers and CCO's (involve CCO's in program delivery).

Women's Study

Aim:

Develop and document a theory of those personal, familial, social and system responses and circumstances that promote or jeopardise women's and children's safety and wellbeing in urban and regional areas from the perspectives of women partners, of men referred to domestic violence intervention programs, and of human services and corrections staff and management.

Data:

In-depth Interviews and Pre and Post questionnaires

AGENCY	IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS	PRE-PROGRAM QU	POST-PROGRAM QU
A	4	1	0
B	7	10	4
C	6	8	7
D	2	1	0
TOTAL	19	20	11

Women's Pre Program Experiences of Intervention with their partner

- > **Positive changes:** A number of women noticed early signs of behaviour change and communication. For example:
 - > *"He is more able to communicate, listening more. Can say what I feel rather than say nothing or what I think he won't like. He is more aware of this own thinking. [Due to] The course has helped him be more aware, that its not okay [the violence and abuse] and there will be consequences. (H., metropolitan)"*
- > **Negative changes:** A number of women also noticed negative changes in relation to the intervention. For example:
 - > *"He doesn't think the program is good [Due to] the other men not committed to change and the facilitator not challenging the men." (A., regional)*
 - > *"He is still drinking and arguing [due to] no alcoholic intervention in the program" (Janet, metropolitan)*

Women's Post Program Experiences of Intervention with their partner

A number of women experienced continued change. Others experienced temporary change. One woman summed this up:

Positive Experience:

"He was really good for months."

Negative Experience:

"He is being abusive again and it feels like things are going back to the start. The program is not a punishment – if he went to jail I would have had time to get my life together. The program is not a punishment, the man is given all this love and care and no one cares about the woman." (T., metropolitan)

Women's Experiences of System Intervention

> Two major themes:

- Tension between victims wanting the violence to end while simultaneously wanting the relationship to continue.
- The invisibility of victims as a result of this tension along with the shift in focus from victim to offender at the onset of system intervention.
(This involves a lack of referrals to victim services, no program information, no or limited opportunity for consultation or feedback for victims. Family support was present for most victims)

Quotes from Victims

> Theme 1

- *"They're trying to take him away and they were nearly going to beat him up, that's why I went out there, because I love the guy even though he did that to me." [And] "I said, I don't want to press any charges just take him away, just for the weekend or whatever, and they said, 'We're sorry madam, we can see what's he's done and we have no option but there will be charges pressed'" (T., metropolitan)*

> Theme 2

- *"He never mentions anything about what he spoke about or anything, he won't divulge any of that to me [And] If they're just going in to that program now, and they don't know anything about the victim, how can they possibly sit there and work with him, because they don't know him, do they?" (N., metropolitan)*
- *"No one ever asked me how I was going." (S., regional)*

Some observations

- > Well-developed service delivery frameworks exist in WA (and elsewhere).
- > No consistent evidence to support the delivery of DV perpetrator programs, either in WA or internationally.
- > Probably helpful (definitely for some), but not sufficient for change.
- > Difficulties in recruiting staff (\$), maintaining service for victims.

Offender Referral

> Are the right people being referred?

Community corrections officer views and practices (ongoing case management)? Success of the WA specialist court?

> Agency intakes

- > Assessment by group facilitator or assessment specialist?
- > Low levels of readiness - selection mechanism?
- > Alternative to group programs? One size fits all.
- > Batch or rolling intakes to groups?
- > Delays in commencement/Order expiry dates = Attrition

> Monitoring

- > Typically reporting throughput (not output or outcomes)

Outsourcing and Quality Assurance

- > Variation in service delivery at the agency level
 - > “Blended” program logic.
 - > Extent of system integration is patchy – especially in relation to contact with partners of men referred to programs.
- > Implementation gaps
 - > The role of program facilitators.
 - > Rural service provision.
- > Quality assurance processes in staff development and supervision processes.

Safety issues: Future options

Empowerment of women and rights/safety of children

- > Are these competing or incompatible mission statements for DV services?
- > Are non-abusing mothers held responsible for children's safety?
- > Partnerships between DV and child protection?
 - > Communication (vs confidentiality?)
 - > Common Aims
 - > Trust
 - > Power imbalances

Questions or comments?

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Domestic Violence - Working with Men: Research, practice experiences and integrated responses

By [Andrew Day](#), [Patrick O'Leary](#), [Donna Chung](#) and [Donna Justo](#)

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