



Lessons from the Domestic Violence Intervention Project

The Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP) combines a Violence Prevention Project (VPP) working with men and a Women's Support Service (WSS) working with partners of men on VPP and women who self refer. The overall philosophy is to increase women's safety and reduce men's violence. This two-year evaluation of the Domestic Violence Intervention Project found:

- f** The pro-active approach whereby WSS made initial contact and maintained contact over time pulled women into support services at an earlier point and enabled them to make changes which enhanced their safety. Women did not resent a pro-active response, indeed many welcomed it.
- f** Women benefited from the combination of forms of support, with support groups being the most effective in combating shame, self-blame and the destruction of self-belief which can strongly inhibit women's attempts to end violence.
- f** Many service users noted that WSS's uncompromising messages about the nature of domestic violence had helped them to recognise their need for support.
- f** WSS was effective in reaching women from ethnic minorities and women with professional qualifications, two groups which currently under-use other forms of provision.
- f** The fact that VPP accepted men who 'voluntarily' referred themselves was important for women, who could demand attendance as a condition for the relationship continuing.
- f** Over two-thirds of the 351 men referred to the programme failed to complete it. Losses were most significant in the early stages.
- f** There was a substantial impact on attitudes and behaviour for most men who did complete the programme. From men's own accounts, in some cases confirmed by their partners, there would appear to be some real change in their understanding of domestic violence.
- f** The researchers conclude that programmes for violent men when combined with pro-active responses to women have a part in co-ordinated responses to domestic violence. However, work with men should not be undertaken without an attached support service for women, and there should be routes onto programmes for voluntarily referred men.

Background

There is currently no national policy on domestic violence in the UK. At the most basic level preventing violence against women in the home involves two components: increasing safety for the woman and her children in the short term and ending the man's violence in the longer term. The Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP) undertakes both kinds of work.

In Britain there has been a growth in work with violent men within both the voluntary sector and the Probation Service. Much of this work draws on a model, developed in Minnesota, encompassing women and children's safety and working with men to take responsibility for their behaviour. Some independent groups work with men who have voluntarily referred themselves to the project, others provide services only for men found guilty of a domestic violence related offence who have received a court order to attend as part of their sentence. The Probation Service can recommend various sanctions to magistrates, these include a probation order of between six and thirty-six months, which may include a condition to attend a specified programme.

The overall philosophy of DVIP begins from an understanding that men use violence to achieve and maintain power over their partner. It has two basic aims: to empower women and increase their safety; and to stop men's violence and abuse. In providing two linked services - a Violence Prevention Programme (VPP) which works with violent men and a Women's Support Service (WSS) - DVIP is a unique approach in Britain. This two-year evaluation (October 1994 to September 1996) studied DVIP as a whole, WSS and VPP.

Pro-active support for women

The Women's Support Service provides: telephone advice; one-to-one counselling; group work; advocacy; and ongoing telephone support. Individuals choose the particular combination of support they need.

Over two years, with a small resource base (two part-time workers and volunteers) WSS was in contact with 796 women. One-third were partners of men on the VPP programme, the majority made contact independently. WSS was effective in reaching women from ethnic minorities and women with professional qualifications, two groups which currently under-use other forms of provision.

The pro-activity of WSS has several elements:

- the project makes initial contact with women whose partners are on VPP;
- for all women WSS is persistent in continuing contact (this can involve making numerous telephone calls to make/renew contact, following women up at regular intervals, and having priorities for follow-up);

- work with women uses goal-oriented and directive crisis intervention, including a strategy called 'safety planning'. This tool aims to enable women to move from reacting to events as they happen to anticipating and planning ahead.

The advantages of pro-active work are:

- someone else takes responsibility for naming the experience as violence;
- women can be invited into a support network at a much earlier point than they might otherwise choose.

Women using WSS were overwhelmingly positive about the support they had received. The things they valued most were basic messages:

- that this is violence;
- that violence is unacceptable;
- that violence is not the woman's fault.

Many women noted the importance of uncompromising messages in enabling them to both see their situation differently and to take action. Women also benefited from the combination of forms of support, with support groups being the most effective in combating shame, self-blame and the destruction of self-belief which strongly inhibit women's attempts to end violence.

Challenging work with men

The Violence Prevention Programme offers structured group sessions designed to assist men in understanding why they use abusive behaviour, how they can change and work towards constructing respectful relationships with women. Whilst a significant proportion of men were referred to VPP by the Probation Service, the majority referred to the programme voluntarily - many of this group had been given some form of ultimatum by their partner.

The programme comprises a 12-week, first-stage group focused on physical violence and a 24-week, second stage addressing other forms of abuse and controlling behaviours. Movement between the stages is neither fixed nor automatic but depends on the man's involvement with the programme, his motivation and behaviour. An optional fortnightly, third stage is available for men who want to reinforce any changes they have made.

Two basic conditions are set out for men being accepted onto the programme: some willingness on their part to question denying their own responsibility and blaming their partner; and at least some awareness that they alone are responsible for the violence.

Drop-out rate

VPP has a marked drop-out rate, especially between assessment and initial attendance. Over two-thirds of the 351 men referred to the programme failed to complete it: 12 per cent were not accepted onto it in

the first place. Under half (43 per cent) of the men who were accepted actually completed the programme.

There is a significant loss in the early weeks of the first stage group. Most of these are 'voluntarily referred' men whose primary motivation in attending the programme may have been to prevent their partner leaving. If they are successful, or if the woman leaves anyway, they may see no further reason to continue.

High drop-out rates are reported features of men's programmes in the UK and USA, with an average loss of at least 50 per cent. Finding ways to decrease drop-out is a major challenge for all programmes working with violent men.

What works

Within VPP the combination of court-mandated and 'voluntarily referred' men was productive and facilitated enhanced motivation in some court-mandated men.

The most effective tool used by VPP was 're-enactments', where men have to act out an incident and go through it again in slow motion. The point of the exercise - to reveal that decisions are made a various points - was communicated to most group members.

However, 'time outs' (the man is supposed to take an hour away from the situation if he is about to be violent, informing his partner that this is what he is doing) were used in abusive and controlling ways by a number of men. 'Time outs' are an extremely common component of work with violent men; this finding suggests that alternatives to them and/or mechanisms for ensuring that they are not used as new forms of control should be urgently explored.

The content of the VPP programme was fairly effective in communicating its key messages and in offering men alternatives to violence. From men's own accounts, in some cases confirmed by information from their partners, there would appear to be some real change in their understanding of domestic violence.

Ending violence and ending relationships safely

The data from VPP, and some of the men's partners, suggests that where men can be held in the group, and especially if they complete both the first and second stage elements, physical violence decreases dramatically, and some men change in more fundamental ways.

A critical question is whether men changing should be the only criteria of 'success' for men's programmes. This study suggests that participation, especially where the project has a dedicated women's service, creates a window of opportunity for relationships to end safely. Men's programmes may make this possible because of the immediate reduction of violence, and through explicitly encouraging men to either leave themselves, or to not intervene or

intimidate women when they decide to leave. The importance of this contribution to women's safety should not be underestimated, since leaving is the most dangerous time for women and children.

Voluntary or mandated entry

This study revealed that VPP's willingness to accept men who 'voluntarily' refer themselves was important to women in their struggles to end violence. A significant proportion of women demanded some combination of attendance, completion of the programme and change in behaviour as conditions for the relationship continuing. Moreover, where pro-active support for women is available, men's attendance can increase women's options and room for manoeuvre.

Conclusion

Towards the end of this study a new policy from the Inner London Probation Service (ILPS) signalled a shift from funding specialist agencies to work with violent men to running groups 'in-house'. Whilst the model ILPS proposes shares much with that currently used by VPP there will be no linked support for women and no provision for men who have voluntarily referred. It is unclear whether specialist agencies will be able to survive without partnership funding from the Probation Service, or other statutory agencies. Interviews with probation officers highlighted both their limited awareness of local policy and lack of knowledge of domestic violence.

The researchers conclude that specialist projects have a number of advantages. They can:

- have women and children's safety as a central philosophy;
- provide reasonably sized groups with a rolling entry/exit so that no man has to wait long to attend;
- provide an integrated model of staged groups including a follow-up group;
- provide one-to-one work for men in particular circumstances;
- create access for a combination of court mandated and voluntary participants;
- encourage the development of specialism and expertise.

The single focus and higher level of work in specialist projects means that work can be regularly reviewed and where necessary adapted.

The debates surrounding work with violent men, in Britain and internationally, mean that gender issues, sexual politics, cannot be avoided: at the heart of programmes for violent men is a gender tension.

This at times was reflected in, and played out through, the structures of DVIP. Towards the end of the evaluation a co-ordinator for the whole project was appointed in an attempt to bring cohesion to the organisation. Management of projects working in this field needs to be both strong and open enough to work creatively with 'gender agendas'.

WSS has demonstrated that pro-active approaches have a place in support for women suffering domestic violence. Few women resented an outsider making the first move and most welcomed support; they saw it as enabling them to make changes sooner and/or more definitely than they would have done otherwise. The potential of pro-active work is that through earlier intervention some women and children will suffer less violence and as a consequence be less affected over the longer term. Pro-active approaches are a form of provision that is both protective and preventative.

There are no simple solutions to domestic violence, or models of response which are effective for all abused women or all abusive men. This study suggests that there are significant dangers in undertaking challenging work with men without the addition of parallel support services for women. However, there does seem to be a place for work with men in the co-ordinated, multi-layered responses to domestic violence. When combined with pro-active work with women it actually increases the local resources available to women. But programmes for violent men are neither an answer, nor an alternative to other forms of sanction, and should not be used as a form of diversion.

About the study

The term 'domestic violence' is an inaccurate naming of the issue. However, it is so widely recognised within the national and international communities that the study continues to use it, rather than the more accurate 'violence against women by known men'.

The evaluation data included: analysis of WSS and VPP files; a series of questionnaires to men on VPP and their partners and a sub-sample who were also interviewed; sessional evaluation forms from the group work with men. Representatives of the following groups were interviewed: users of WSS; workers and volunteers at WSS and VPP, and the DVIP management committee; and probation officers.

How to get further information

For more information about the research, contact the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, University of North London, Ladbroke House, 62-66 Highbury Grove, London N5 2AD, Tel: 0171 753 5037.

A full report, *Supporting Women and Challenging Men: Lessons from the Domestic Violence Intervention Project* by Sheila Burton, Linda Regan and Liz Kelly, is published by The Policy Press in association with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. It is available from Biblios Publishers' Distribution Services Ltd, Star Road, Partridge Green, West Sussex, RH13 8LD, Tel: 01403 710851, Fax: 01403 711143 (ISBN 1 86134 068 0, price £11.95 plus £2 p&p).

The following *Findings* look at related issues:

- Local authority responses to women and children escaping domestic violence, Apr 96 (*SP85*)
- Domestic violence and child contact arrangements, Jun 96 (*SP100*)
- Inter-agency initiatives as a response to domestic violence, Jun 96 (*SP101*)
- Family court welfare and voluntary sector mediation in relation to domestic violence, Jun 97 (*SP117*)
- Social support and marital well-being in an Asian community, Sep 97 (*SP128*)

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