Refuge briefing: domestic violence perpetrator programmes (1/2 papers)
July 2016

Refuge's view

Refuge does not believe that perpetrator programmes are an effective or appropriate way of reducing domestic violence.

This is because:

- There is still no compelling evidence that they are successful in ending all violence and abuse towards women. The most recent UK research on perpetrator programmes, Project Mirabal (see below), showed that even when physical violence is reduced, other forms of non-physical abuse often continue. This is concerning because:
  - Women tell us consistently that non-physical harm, such as psychological abuse, is harder to identify and recover from than other types of abuse
  - When Refuge conducted its own small survey on what women in its services would count as a successful perpetrator programme, 100% of the 30 women surveyed said only an end to all physical and verbal abuse, controlling behaviour, jealousy and possessiveness would count as success to them
  - Anything less than a total end to all forms of abuse puts women and children at further risk
  - It also sends a message to women that reductions in violence are ‘good enough’ and that they should tolerate ‘some’ domestic violence
  - This sends a message to perpetrators that some domestic violence is tolerable
  - As one woman told Refuge: “My ex-husband was put on a perpetrator programme as part of his community service after assaulting me. He appeared to change but used it to manipulate me and I ended up in a far worse situation.”

- Perpetrator programmes neglect to address the real cause of domestic violence:
  - There is considerable and long held support for the view, well described in academic literature and international instruments, that violence against women and girls is a global problem, rooted in and arising from, gender inequality

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1 At the world conference on human rights held in Vienna 1993, the General Assembly of the United Nations made a Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. At the core of this resolve is the firm belief that “violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women which have led to the domination
Rather than tackling this deeply-rooted gender inequality, perpetrator programmes simply support a handful of men with their individual issues, be that substance abuse, lack of employment or ‘anger problems’

- Perpetrator programmes exacerbate myths around domestic violence by attributing it to external circumstances:
  - Personal distress or social disadvantage do not cause violence against women - gender inequality does. Ignoring this root cause allows violence against women to continue and gives perpetrators the excuse they need to minimise their actions
  - Focus on individual perpetrators is misplaced – at the end of any programme, men resume their lives and relationships in an ‘unchanged society’, still rife with misogyny

- Frontline services for women experiencing domestic violence are being lost on a daily basis – one in three women are turned away from refuges due to lack of space\(^2\) and Refuge has experienced cuts to 80% of its services since 2011. How can the state justify diverting precious resources to supporting perpetrators when the women they abuse are unable to access the help they need?

- Domestic violence is a crime – and must be treated as such. A strong criminal justice system response is necessary. If the police and courts do not show men that domestic violence will have serious consequences for the perpetrator, it will not be reduced. Refuge recommends that the scant resources available for survivors of domestic violence are channeled towards training the police and making a positive impact in this arena, rather than investment in perpetrator programmes which do not stop women from experiencing violence and abuse

The current picture

Refuge is concerned that it has seen an increase in the number of local commissioners who insist that perpetrator programmes form part of any service offer.

Refuge is also concerned that there has been a shift in how the success of perpetrator programmes is measured. Rather than ‘success’ being a complete end to all abuse, there is now a widely held assumption that reductions in violence and positive shifts in attitudes are acceptable outcomes for perpetrator programmes.

It is vital that an end to all forms of abuse should be a required outcome for any perpetrator programme.

The Drive Project

Pilot programme to be trialled across three local authority areas will work with some of the most dangerous perpetrators on a one-to-one basis to reduce their abusive behaviour.

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\(^2\) Since 2010, this country has lost 17% of specialist refuges in England and third of all referrals to refuges are turned away, normally due to a lack of available space – Women’s Aid, Save our Services report \(https://www.womensaid.org.uk/sos/\)
Launched in February 2015 by Respect, SafeLives and Social Finance, working together with Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) and Local Authorities in Sussex, Essex and South Wales and the Lloyds Bank Foundation

- Expected that 900 offenders will be asked to take part in the Drive programme over the next three years
- Response from Sandra Horley CBE, chief executive of Refuge: http://www.refuge.org.uk/2016/02/17/refuge-responds-to-drive-perpetrator-programme/
  - Local authority and PCC support – at whose expense is this money being spent?
  - See above for Refuge’s view on why perpetrator programmes are ineffective

Project Mirabal

Project Mirabal is the most recent UK research (2015) on the outcomes achieved by perpetrator programmes, and its final report\(^3\) often cited as evidence that they are effective. Refuge does not believe Project Mirabal provides sufficient evidence that perpetrator programmes work. This is because:

**Methodology**

- The research sample size is small – just 36 men and 26 women completed the second interview – and there are high rates of attrition throughout the 15 months of the study. This means it is difficult to form generalisations from the findings, particularly as these are restricted to descriptive reporting only
- There is a lack of demographic information about the perpetrators – we do not know their assessed risk, criminal history, their substance misuse, mental health or employment status, or whether they were agency or self-referred. In short, we do not know if the sample contained only men who were selected for their capacity to change and/or whether more high risk, resistant men were excluded

**Outcomes**

- **Although there were some reductions in violence, unacceptable levels remained.** After 12 months of programme attendance:
  - 23% of perpetrators continued to punch or kick walls or furniture, slam doors, smash things or stamp
  - 7% slapped, pushed or threw something at their (ex)partners
  - 10% threatened to kill their (ex)partners or someone close to them

- **It is clear that levels of psychological abuse remained high.** After 12 months of programme attendance:
  - 41% of women said the perpetrator still did things that made them scared or intimidated

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https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/criva/ProjectMirabalfinalreport.pdf
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Only a three percent reduction (to 47%) in levels of financial abuse after 12 months

o  Positive outcomes for children were minimal:

  □  Percentage who reported their children as nervous and clingy (54% at baseline) remained unchanged after 12 months
  □  35% were still frightened of the perpetrator (54% at baseline)
  □  37% continued to worry about their mother’s safety (64% at baseline)

o  Majority of perpetrators still failed to accept responsibility for their abuse. At baseline 91% of women said that that the perpetrator justified or made excuses for his behavior – this had only fallen to 71% 12 months later. 61% of women said that the perpetrator blamed her for his abusive behavior, down from 84% at baseline

What is the alternative?

Refuge believes that addressing domestic violence requires the provision of high quality, specialist services for victims, a robust criminal justice response to perpetrators, with an equal focus on preventative efforts such as empowering women, combating sexism and creating enduring social change.

Unlike for perpetrator programmes, there is a wealth of evidence that specialist support from Refuge and similar organisations increases women’s safety. Through our range of specialist services, Refuge supports 3,800 women and children on any given day. Our bespoke case management system, IMPACT, means we also have 45,000 cases to draw upon for evidence of what works. In 2015-16, 96% of women exiting our services reported feeling safer and 92% said their quality of life had improved.

How can we prevent domestic violence in the future?

•  Police and prosecutors need to send a strong message to perpetrators: domestic violence is a crime and you will be arrested and charged

•  Rather than supporting a handful of men who have already broken the law and abused their partners, Refuge advocates a preventative approach based on empowering women, combating sexism and creating enduring social change

•  Resources and time should instead be focused on engaging boys and men in widespread social change, challenging their attitudes/behaviour towards women and girls from a young age

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For more information, please see the attached paper, ‘Refuge research paper: perpetrator programmes, October 2015’, or contact press@refuge.org.uk
Refuge research paper: domestic violence perpetrator programmes (2/2 papers)
October 2015

Refuge first raised concerns about the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes almost thirty years ago and today these concerns remain unchanged. This is because, despite decades of opportunity to make perpetrator programmes ‘work’, there is still no compelling evidence that they are successful in ending all violence and abuse towards the women whose partners attend - even when physical abuse is reduced, other forms of non-physical abuse often continue. Not only is an expectation of reduced violence inadequate as a programme outcome, women tell us consistently that non-physical harm, such as psychological abuse, is harder to identify and recover from than other types of abuse. We therefore believe it is vital, that an end to all forms abuse should be a required outcome for any perpetrator programme.

Historically, the cessation of or reduction in violence and abuse were considered to be primary indicators that a perpetrator programme ‘worked’. More recently the utility of these programmes appears to have been influenced by a re-evaluation of what ‘counts as success’, with some suggesting we should shift our focus away from whether the perpetrator’s behaviour has changed and towards exploration of ‘factors that promote change in men who abuse’ and/or increase women’s and children’s safety.

At Refuge, we continue to believe that achieving safety for women and children and promoting recovery from experiences of abuse requires the provision of high-quality, specialist services for victims and a robust criminal justice response to perpetrators, with an equal focus on preventative efforts such as empowering women, combatting sexism and creating enduring social change.

We do not believe perpetrator programmes form part of the solution for most abused women, though we do believe it is vital to engage men and boys in widespread social change by challenging traditional perceptions of masculinity and attitudes/behaviour towards women and girls. A focus on changing the attitudes/behaviour of a few perpetrators, rather than all men and boys, does not make sense if our goal is to eradicate violence against women in general. To achieve this we must change all men and also raise the consciousness of women and girls so that they are aware of their equality, rights and entitlement to a life free from abuse of any kind. It is only when we achieve real equality between the sexes that we will end violence and abuse towards women and girls.

There is considerable and long held support for the view, well described in academic literature and international instruments, that violence against women and girls is a global problem, rooted in and arising

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5 At the world conference on human rights held in Vienna 1993, the General Assembly of the United Nations made a Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. At the core of this resolve is the firm belief that “violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women which have led to the domination and discrimination against women by men and which have prevented women’s full advancement. Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared to men” (p.6)
from, gender inequality. And so it is puzzling when we hear that the causes of violence against women are complex, that perpetrators frequently struggle with their own psychological difficulties or social disadvantage - that these problems may lie at the root of their abusive behaviour and a therapeutic or compassionate approach to intervention is appropriate to effect change6. Work with men on their own experiences of abuse is important, but we believe it is vital not to collude with men's victimhood or allow this work to become the priority when addressing their abuse towards women. It is not that the perpetrator's own personal difficulties do not matter or deserve a social and individual response, simply that fixing them will not end violence against women. Personal distress or social disadvantage does not cause gender based violence against women - gender inequality does: ignoring this cause allows violence against women to continue.

Unfortunately, the merging of a mental health perspective with the traditional psycho-educational feminist approach to perpetrator work, seems to have led to confusion about the main driver for male violence against women - which is gender inequality, male dominance or patriarchy and traditional ideas about masculinity. This merging has created a dangerous shift, with some programme advocates asserting facilitators must be "careful not to be too direct or challenging in naming violent or abusive behaviours" "that participants want a counsellor or friend, who is knowledgeable about family violence and non-judgemental (Campbell et al. 2010)"7. This is a far cry from the psycho-educational groups established by feminist pioneers such as Ellen Pence in the 1980s. Pence's groups did not allow men to hide behind excuses such as social disadvantage or childhood abuse; they held men accountable, named their violence, challenged their denial and, most importantly, challenged the sexist attitudes and inequality at the root of violence against women.

As mentioned above, the concept of perpetrator programme 'success'8 has been redefined to include the progress a perpetrator makes towards 'change': so rather than requiring a total cessation of abuse, evidence for cognitive insights and shifts towards a more equitable, non-abusive relationship are now regarded as indicators of success. On the face of it this seems reasonable and in most other circumstances it would be, but the consequences for women and children if all abuse does not cease, is often a continuation of psychological abuse, anxiety and fear. Defining the success of a perpetrator programme in this way also sends a message to women that reductions in violence or the continuation of non physical forms of abuse should be acceptable to them, and that they and their children do not deserve more, are not worth more - this is not 'success' by any standard.

Driven by the desire to allow abused women to determine their own criteria for the success of a perpetrator programme, Refuge carried out a small pilot survey with its clients in July 2015; this included both women living in the community and refuge residents. One hundred percent of the 30 women who completed the survey said that only an end to all physical and verbal abuse, controlling behaviour, jealousy and possessiveness would meet their criteria for programme 'success'; 96.6% of these women included an end to all financial abuse in this list.

Nevertheless, Refuge has seen an increase in the number of local commissioners who insist that perpetrator programmes form part of any service offer. The assumption that reductions in violence and positive shifts in attitudes towards abuse are acceptable outcomes for such programmes, is widely held. Few commissioners appear to have explored the academic literature in detail, so are not aware that the most recent UK research9,

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Refuge research paper: domestic violence perpetrator programmes 2/2

Project Mirabal – which is currently cited in support of perpetrator programmes – is based on a small sample of men10 about which we know little11, who after 12 months of programme attendance:

- Continued to punch or kick walls or furniture, slam doors, smash things or stamp - 23%
- Slapped, pushed or threw something at their (ex)partners - 7%
- Threatened to kill their (ex)partners - 10%

And that:

• 65% of women said they would still be afraid of the perpetrator’s reaction if they had got a new partner
• 41% of women said the perpetrator still did things that made them scared or intimidated
• 48% said the perpetrator still insulted them or made them feel bad about themselves
• 28% continued to be harassed
• 27% said the perpetrator continued to belittle or humiliate them in front of others
• 48% said that the perpetrator still insisted on knowing where she is or what she is doing
• 75% said they would still have to be very careful if the perpetrator was in a bad mood
• 47% of women (a fall from 50% at baseline) reported that he still ‘tries to use money/finances to control me.’

Improving women and children’s safety is one of the key outcomes for perpetrators programmes, yet after 12 months of their partner attending a programme, only 51% of women who participated in the Mirabal research said they felt very safe. For the 49% who did not feel very safe, 6% said they did not feel not safe at all, 13% felt a little unsafe and 30% felt somewhat safe. The percentage of children (whose fathers were in the programme) and reported as nervous and clingy at baseline, remained unchanged after 12 months at 54%. Thirty five percent were still frightened of the perpetrator (54% at baseline) with 37% continuing to worry about their mothers safety (64% at baseline). Almost half the women (49%) were frightened to leave their children with the perpetrator at baseline. This figured remained unchanged after 12 months of intervention. There was minimal change for children on the remaining measures.12

Perhaps most concerning was the finding that the majority of perpetrators failed to accept responsibility for their abuse. At baseline 91% of women said that that the perpetrator justified or made excuses for his behaviour. This had only fallen to 71% 12 months later. Eighty four percent of women at baseline said that the perpetrator blamed her for his abusive behavior; this had only fallen to 61% 12 months later.

The same research claims that change was observed for some men (and women) in their understanding of ‘gender’ and its role in their relationship13. However, the finding that many men and women had not considered

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10 The research sample size is small, particularly for interviews (only 36 men and 26 women completed the second interview), with high rates of attrition throughout the 15 months of the study; this creates difficulties in forming generalisations from the findings, particularly as these are restricted to descriptive reporting only
11 One of the key issues in determining whether perpetrator programmes ‘work’ is to determine ‘what kind of intervention’ works for ‘what kind of perpetrator’ - a ‘one size fits all’ approach is rarely of use to anyone, regardless of the intervention. Thus one of the weaknesses of Project Mirabal is its lack of demographic information about the perpetrators. We are not told who the male research participants are, their assessed risk, criminal history, their substance misuse, mental health or employment status, whether they were agency or self-referred, their age, ethnicity etc. In short, we do not know if the sample contained only men who were selected for their capacity to change and or whether more high risk, resistant men were excluded, though reference to attempted murder and life threatening injuries are mentioned with regard to interviews with perpetrators. We do know that in general referral from criminal justice system agencies is very low but we do not know why
12 Kelly, L and Westmarland N (2015) ibid “The survey had eight indicators to assess change on this measure - for children, safer, healthier childhoods in which they feel heard and cared about. All but two showed improvements and change was minimal for several. The indicator where children were faring worse was ‘do any of your children have problems making and maintaining friendships(increased from 22% at baseline to 26% 12 months on). Greater improvements were seen in the decrease in children worrying about their mother’s safety and being frightened of the perpetrator.” p.30
13 Ibid. “Contemporary gender theory is far more sophisticated, exploring how we embody and ‘do’ gender in our everyday activities and social relations. This type of gender theory sits underneath Evan Stark’s (2007)concept of coercive control, and Eva Lundgren (2004) argues that men are creating a particular masculinity through their use of violence whilst attempting to enforce their view of what a woman
Refuge research paper: domestic violence perpetrator programmes 2/2

'how gender shaped their lives' or believed 'gender inequality was considered a thing of the past' is unsurprising. We know that many individuals believe, erroneously, that women and men are equal. The idea that men abuse women because they hold traditional views about what it means to be male and thus feel entitled to do so, is an important area to target for change. However, a focus on change at the level of individual perpetrators seems misplaced, if at the end of an expensive year long programme, these men resume their lives and relationships in an 'unchanged society'.

Thankfully, there appears to be a growing awareness that in order to eradicate violence against women we need to change the societies in which it occurs. Katz makes the case well when he writes: "In recent years the increased popularity of the social-ecological model in the gender violence prevention field (Heise 1998) and a long-term shift away from the idea of fixing "broken" individuals and toward a more comprehensive public health approach, are evidence that a consensus is growing that preventing men's violence means thinking less individualistically and more systematically." Katz recognises that violence perpetrated by individuals is informed by 'social norms, cultural practices, and ideologies, that are themselves rooted in larger systems of gender equality. Individual change and accountability are necessary. But lasting change is impossible unless the inequitable systems themselves are transformed - social and systemic change that requires substantially more than the best violence prevention programs and public service campaigns can provide'.

And it is not just men who need to change, there is also an urgent need to empower women, economically and "socially and individually, and to raise their consciousness to enable critical thought on women's own role in male gender socialisation and the maintenance of gender power hierarchies so they demand more equitable relationships". We need to ensure women and girls know that it is not acceptable to abuse them less often or less severely; that respect and inequality is theirs by right and the first place they should expect to find this is within an intimate relationship.

It seems we have reached a critical point in the way we choose to respond to violence against women and girls - we can either continue to ignore the fact that gender inequality is the cause and define, record and respond to 'domestic violence' in a gender neutral fashion that renders the extent of women's abuse invisible or we can accept the difficult truth that sexism and gender inequality continues to affect all women everywhere, regardless of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, disability or any other factor and it is the cause of the abuse they suffer from men. It is time to 'stop tinkering around the edges' of the problem and take determined action to end violence against women once and for all.

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Contact press@refuge.org.uk for more information on this issue

should be. Both suggest that tensions about how men and women should be in a heterosexual relationship and as parents sit at the heart of much violence and abuse. The data in our measures of success and the reflections of women and men support this perspective." p.34

14 Horley, S (1990)


16 Jewkes, R., Flood, M., Lang, J. (2014) Violence against women and girls 3: From work with men and boys to changes of social norms and reduction of inequities in gender relations: a conceptual shift in prevention of violence against women and girls

17 Johnson, H., Fisher, B.S., Jaquier, V (2014) Critical issues on violence against women: International perspectives and promising strategies. "Violence against women is a global problem and although it may take subtly different forms, the root causes are remarkably similar at individual and societal levels. We also know that despite the wealth of knowledge that has been amassed and the inspiring action at all levels to prevent this violence and provide redress to its victims, it continues unabated. The pervasiveness, assumed inevitability and refusal of State actors to seriously commit to the structural changes needed to eradicate the root cause -gender inequality- speak to its function as a mechanism of male power and social control over women. It is clear that tinkering around the margins with policies that neatly fit into existing power structures and fail to seriously challenge dominant assumptions is no longer good enough for lasting change to occur".