Research Brief
Perpetrator Interventions

Introduction

The term 'perpetrator intervention(s)' refers to community and criminal justice attempts to halt and prevent the future use of domestic and family violence (FV) *via direct interventions with perpetrators*. A perpetrator intervention may denote any single or combined use of a suite of strategies that are all motivated by the principal goal of protecting women and children from violence.

Perpetrator interventions (PIs) fall into one of two main categories: intervention orders (IOs) and perpetrator intervention programs (PIPs). An IO is an action taken by the police and courts (sometimes at the request of the victim) that requires a perpetrator to comply with a number of conditions including the cessation of violence alongside other conditions related to the protection of the victim(s). PIPs may include individual programs of response such as court-ordered counselling but often include Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs): these are training courses (typically delivered over 12 - 20 weeks) that a perpetrator attends either because he is mandated by the court or on a voluntary basis. Often even voluntary attendance is 'socially mandated' by family law specialists, child protection or family members. PIs are rehabilitative rather than punitive and aim to stop FV and shift a perpetrator's attitudes in order to support long term change.

Additional kinds of PIs may be used either preceding the commencement of a PIP or as a supplement to it. These interventions can include motivational counselling to facilitate change through a PIP, as well as services addressing substance abuse or addiction issues, homelessness, limited economic resources, mental health issues and parenting techniques.

History of PIs

Emerging in the U.S. in the late 1970s and in Australia in the early 1980s, treatments for FV perpetrators are a relatively recent phenomenon (Edleson 2008: 4; Lazarus & McCarthy 1990). Service-led approaches to the problem of FV have traditionally focused on the needs of women and children. Growing recognition of the need for offender rehabilitation and therapeutic jurisprudence shifted remedial efforts from the victim to the perpetrator (Brooks et al. 2014: 30). These developments were controversial: there was a fear that funding for women and children was being redirected to programs for men (Brooks et al. 2014) and a concern that 'individualised initiatives' focused on men depoliticised FV by understanding 'violence as an exceptional occurrence' rather than a product of the 'socially-entrenched attitudes and practices of a patriarchal society' (Lazarus & McCarthy 1990: 31; Brooks et al. 2014).

The 'Duluth' PIP model developed in 1981 in Minnesota, U.S.A. is the most widely known intervention model related to group programs. Otherwise known as the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP), Duluth is a coordinated community response designed to protect victims and hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour (MacKay et al. 2015). Duluth is feminist in its approach, using a gendered explanation of FV (Day et al. 2009). Duluth educates men about patriarchy and male privilege and aims to bring about a 'cognitive restructuring of men's attitudes and beliefs about women and violence'

(MacKay et al. 2015; Gondolf 2007). The Duluth model was influential during the development of PIPs in Australia, and it has been reported that 'many' of the integrated programs run in Australia have been modelled on it (Day et al. 2009: 205).

MacKay et al. (2015) categorise PI, including group program, approaches as follows:

Psychoeducational: FV caused by attitudes supporting gender inequity and patriarchal ideology; programs address social constructions of gender and power inequalities;

Psychotherapeutic: FV caused by personal dysfunction: programs are psychiatric and psychological in approach;

Combined approaches: Refers to the combination of psychoeducational and CBT, although according to MacKay et al. (2015) most programs do combine the above two approaches;

Matched interventions: FV is understood as having multiple causes, requiring tailored individual responses. Interventions are linked to specific risks, needs and attitudes;

Programs for Indigenous men: Program design reflects differing causes of FV in Indigenous communities, using lenses of colonialism, family dysfunction and kinship relationships;

Programs for men from CALD backgrounds: Programs sensitive to differing causes of FV perpetrated by men from CALD communities and cognisant of the ways in which diversity may impact on men's 'participation';

Risk, Needs, and Responsivity (RNR) – emerging: originally used within the broader correctional context, the RNR model matches program intensity, type of intervention and delivery mode to the specific risk profile, 'rehabilitative need' and learning capacity of the perpetrator;

"Second Responder" programs - emerging: An extension of the post-violent-incident follow-up services currently offered to women and children, to perpetrators.

Recent research by Campbell et al. (2020) has contributed to building the evidence base around legal system interventions to adolescent violence in the home (AVITH). 'The PIPA Project' examined legal and service interventions across three jurisdictions – Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania – to increase understanding of AVITH and contribute to the development of a systemic response (Campbell et al. 2020).

Research and Evidence

Evidence around the effectiveness of PIs remains mixed (CIJ, 2015; Morrison et al., 2018; Royal Commission into Family Violence: Final Report (RCFV), 2016; Salter, 2012; Urbis, 2013). Evaluations are often plagued by variation in methodological and analytical approaches, interpretation of data and differing definitions of what success may look like (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015; RCFV, 2016, Salter, 2012, Westmarland, Kelly & Chalder-Mills, 2010). To add to the complexity, perpetrators do not form a homogenous group (Boxall et al., 2015). Their personality, demographic, behavioural characteristics and the way they use violence are impacted by a range of personal, social and community factors (Boxall et al., 2015, Heward-Belle, 2016). Recent systematic evaluations have argued that a coordinated community response that incorporates treatment for comorbid

social issues such as mental illness, substance abuse and trauma issues may improve efficacy (Karakurt et al., 2019; Morrison et al., 2018; RCFV, 2016; Vlais & Green, 2018).

In Australia MBCPs can differ greatly in their duration, intensity, monitoring, funding, referral and requirements (Urbis, 2013). Evaluation is embedded into most program designs (Day et al., 2010; Gray et al., 2016; Urbis, 2013) but research still indicates that effectiveness of these interventions is limited (Day et al., 2010, Gray et al., 2016; Urbis, 2013). Evaluations often suffer from conflicting stakeholder requirements that alternately may address costs, quality, challenges sought after by providers versus clear demonstrated outcomes demanded by funding bodies (Diemer et al., 2015; Wheeler, 2005).

There is evidence to support an increase in potential for change where individual screening and assessment processes match certain offender characteristics such as risk, motivation and needs to specific types of programs (Gray, 2016; McGinn, McColgan & Taylor, 2020; Urbis, 2013). Providing 'wrap around' services is seen as critical by stakeholders for an intervention to be effective (McCulloch, Maher & Fitz-Gibbon, 2017). This entails assessing dynamic risk factors including a perpetrator's readiness for group work and referring to services (such as AOD, gambling, housing and mental health support) known to affect perpetrators ability to achieve change (Lilley-Walker et al., 2018; McCulloch et al., 2017; Vlais & Green, 2018). A *timely* focus on intervention matching is considered crucial due to the increased risk in the year following a reported crime, regardless of a perpetrators subtype (Petersson & Strand, 2017).

The Way Forward
Identifying and addressing dynamic risk factors and understanding the spikes in risk that can occur and vary over time will increase the likelihood of encouraging deeper and more long-term change (Vlais & Green, 2018). A perpetrator's motivation to change can differ, those with existential motivation have been found to be more likely to grow as a person and sustain change (McGinn et al., 2020).

Reliance on recidivism rates as an outcome measure do not portray the constellation of abuses including the more nuanced, complex form of coercive control affected family members can experience on a daily basis (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015; Sentencing Advisory Council, 2017; Vlais & Green, 2018). The UK longitudinal study Project Mirabel interrogated existing criteria of PI effectiveness, asking '[w]hat does it mean for a programme to work?' (Westmarland et al. 2010: 2). The researchers developed new measurements for success, such as enhanced awareness of the impact of perpetrators' behaviour on women and children and concluded success should be more than ending violence.

Recent ANROWS research by Fitz-Gibbon et al. (2020) examined how PIs are viewed, understood and incorporated into judicial decision-making. The project found a diversity of views about the role of PIs among judicial officers and pointed to the need for guidance on the use of PI histories as well as consistent and timely approach to PIs on a national level.

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