British Journal of Social Work (2013) **43**, 1092–1110
doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcs049
Advance Access publication April 16, 2012

Why Extending Measurements of 'Success' in Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programmes Matters for Social Work

Nicole Westmarland* and Liz Kelly

Nicole Westmarland is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology in the School of Applied Social Sciences at Durham University. Liz Kelly is Director of the Child and Women Abuse Studies Unit at London Metropolitan University. They are leading a research project funded by the ESRC and Northern Rock Foundation looking at what domestic violence perpetrator programmes add to a co-ordinated community response.

*Correspondence to Nicole Westmarland, School of Applied Social Sciences, 32 Old Elvet, Durham University, DH1 3HN, UK. E-mail: *nicole.westmarland@durham.ac.uk*

Abstract

Ever since domestic violence gained prominence on the social policy agenda, the focus of interventions has been on victims. A range of studies on social work/social welfare note the invisibility and/or lack of interventions aimed at domestic violence perpetrators. The exception has been perpetrator programmes (known in the USA as batterer intervention programmes, or BIPs), which increasingly receive referrals from social workers. However, there remains ongoing disagreement internationally about their effectiveness. Part of this disagreement stems from the failure to consider a broad range of potential outcomes, with most research focusing on an overly narrow understanding of what 'success' means (as no subsequent police callouts or incidents of physical violence). A total of seventy-three interviews with men on programmes, their partners/ex-partners, programme staff, and funders and commissioners were undertaken to explore what 'success' meant from their perspectives. Findings reveal that success needs to be redefined and connected not just to criminal justice, but also to health and social care agendas.

Keywords: Domestic violence, perpetrator programme, batterer intervention programme, outcomes

Accepted: March 2012

Introduction

Domestic violence is now recognised as a serious, widespread social problem that affects the lives of many women, children and men. The World Health Organisation argues that, in Europe, domestic homicide represents the most frequent cause of violent death of women (Ruuskanen and Kauko, 2008) and successive UN secretary generals have highlighted violence against women as not only both a cause and consequence of gender inequality, but also a major barrier to the achievement of equality across the global North and South. Two multi-country domestic violence prevalence studies (Garcia-Moreno *et al.*, 2006; Johnson *et al.*, 2008) have found levels of lifetime prevalence of one in four and higher across developed and developing countries. Following the UN, we view domestic violence as a form of gender-based violence against women, which is defined as 'violence directed at a woman because she is a woman or acts of violence which are suffered disproportionately by women' (UN Declaration on Violence Against Women, 1993, *www.un.org*), and specifically as a pattern of coercive control (Stark, 2007). This framing does not exclude men as potential victims, but recognises—as the data from all prevalence studies, including the British Crime Survey, do—that repeated violence that results in fear and injury is disproportionately experienced by women. Domestic violence perpetrator programmes and this paper, therefore, focus on the main pattern seen in practice—female victims and male perpetrators. After a brief overview of problems within criminal justice and social work responses to domestic violence, we situate perpetrator programmes within current responses. We then present data from an empirical study into what key stakeholders view as 'success' in relation to domestic violence perpetrator programmes.

Domestic violence perpetrators and the criminal justice system

It is our contention that too little attention has been given to domestic violence perpetrators in discussions of women and children's safety, despite research showing they will and do continue to be violent in future relationships. Hester and Westmarland (2006) tracked 692 domestic violence perpetrators who were reported to the police for a three-year period. They found that exactly half (50 per cent) were involved in one or more domestic violence incidents (measured as a police report) during this three-year period. Of the perpetrators who were re-reported, nearly one in five (18 per cent) were reported for assaulting a different partner. Since the measurement of further violence relied on police reports, this should be considered an underestimate. Even of those domestic violence

perpetrators who are reported to the police, research consistently shows convictions and criminal justice sanctions occur in a small minority of cases (Hester, 2006; Hester and Westmarland, 2006; Westmarland and Hester, 2007). Moreover, convicted men rarely receive interventions that invite them to abandon their use of violence, power and control.

A number of researchers have asked searching questions about the capacity of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) to deliver protection for women and children (Hagemann-White, 2010; Buzawa *et al.*, 2011), and some are now exploring the question of whether women's 'justice goals' are in tension with justice system goals (Herman, 2005; Holder, 2009). In summary, the argument here is that what women are seeking when they call the police is a countervailing power to stop an immediate violent event. To the extent that intervention is thought to afford some protection, their justice goals have been met and further involvement in a legal case unnecessary. Even where actions by others are ineffective, women may also decide not to proceed, reasoning that a prosecution is unlikely to improve the situation for themselves and their children, especially if they are aware that the most likely sanction will be a fine. System goals are less nuanced, linked to the number of cases that pass certain thresholds in the CJS process, with outcomes measured in terms of charges, prosecutions and convictions: the extent to which each of these enhances or decreases safety is irrelevant at the system level (Kelly *et al.*, 2008).

Domestic violence perpetrators and social work

Social work also stands accused of failing to work effectively with domestic violence perpetrators. In Edleson's (1998) article entitled 'Responsible mothers and invisible men', he talked of being puzzled at how it can be expected that children and mothers will be safe if the male abuser does not receive any form of social work intervention. Over a decade later, Cowburn (2010) describes how the gendered nature of sexual violence perpetration continues to be ignored and Brown *et al.* (2009) describe 'ghost fathers' who are manufactured within child welfare policies and practices. Earlier research revealed the processes through which this happens, with Farmer and Owen (1995) finding that the focus of intervention in child protection cases tended to switch from the abusing father to the mother. Scourfield (2006) demonstrated that there is a gendered organisational culture in child protection social work, in which men were consistently 'screened out', whilst women were increasingly scrutinised. Following his analysis of cases, Scourfield found that it was 'neglect' rather than 'violent men' that was seen as the relevant factor, despite most of the cases involving children that had died at the hands of violent men.

These issues have returned to the fore in recent studies, with Walmsley (2009) arguing that the most complex challenge for practitioners working

with fathers is recognising the reality of men's violence towards women and children. This remains the case in relation to child contact, where policy has tended to construct fatherhood as essentially 'non-violent', viewing any involvement by fathers as 'good enough' fathering that should be supported and continued and children's views discounted through gendered expectations of girls and boys (Eriksson, 2009).

Stanley *et al.* (2010) studied what happens when children's services are notified of a domestic violence incident by the police. They found that, in the majority of cases, no substantial work was conducted with the family and that, where work did take place, the focus tended to be on the women (in forty-four out of forty-six cases that received an assessment or intervention, the mothers were the focus of social work input). Initial assessment team workers were found to be less likely than their colleagues in safeguarding teams to engage with male perpetrators, citing concerns about staff safety, the difficulties associated with speaking to men within the seven days within which the initial assessment needed to be completed, the extent of their involvement with the children and also the lack of services they had to refer them onto. In particular, practitioners mentioned the gap in services for non-court-mandated men and argued that this lack contributed to the pressure they then placed on mothers to protect children.

Domestic violence perpetrator programmes in the UK

Domestic violence perpetrator programmes emerged in the UK in the late 1980s, with Change in Scotland and Domestic Violence Intervention Programme (DVIP) in London. Each had a clearly developed curriculum, influenced in part by precursor programmes from the USA. Initially, they delivered services for both self-referred and court-mandated men, and both were the subject of early evaluations (Dobash *et al.*, 2000; Burton *et al.*, 1998, respectively). Since 2005, court-mandated men are referred into programmes within the CJS run by the National Probation Service and the National Prison Service (Bowen, 2011). The policy landscape has also changed, with work with perpetrators included in successive government Domestic Violence Delivery Plans and safeguarding children's board procedures. Programmes now have more collaborative local links with specialist women's services.

It is community-based domestic violence perpetrator programmes that are the focus of this research—that is, those that work with non-CJS-mandated men. Community-based programmes have evolved in distinctive ways in the UK, and now offer a range of services intended to reduce risk and promote safety: individual assessment; risk assessment and case management; court reports; group work with men over a minimum of sixty hours; proactive and extended contact with, and support for, partners and ex-partners of men referred to programmes; joint case management

between men's and women's workers; and inter-agency liaison with other services including children's services and specialist domestic violence services (Respect Accreditation Standard, 2008, *www.respect.uk.net*). Well established programmes are now said to be deeply embedded in the co-ordinated community response to domestic violence that forms the foundation of government policy (HM Government, 2009). However, less than one in ten local authorities in Britain has a community-based domestic violence perpetrator programme (Coy *et al.*, 2009).

The limited number of programmes is, in part, linked to scepticism about perpetrator programme effectiveness, which is widespread within women's services, social care services, policy makers and research communities. Although domestic violence perpetrator research has been conducted, the body of work fails to show a consistent answer as to their effectiveness (see, e.g. Dobash *et al.*, 2000; Gondolf, 2004). We concur with Gondolf (2004) that methodological issues, including the interpretation of data, can explain the variation in findings in different studies. Measurements of success range from the minimal—a subsequent report to the police—to a maximal measure of no further violence and abuse according to current/ex-partners. Measurements may be limited to post-exit/completion of the programme or include any incident since beginning the programme, the sample/analysis may include those who drop out early or only those who complete it and few studies include comparison groups of violent men not on programmes.

This paper seeks to clarify what success means and move the debate away from the limited focus on ending physical violence, which has dominated measurements of success to date: as Gondolf (2004) explains: 'Re-assault has been the principal outcome of interest since it is associated with physical injury, is the prime concern of the courts, and is more concretely measurable' (Gondolf, 2004, p. 607). Between us, we have conducted over 100 research studies in the area of male violence against women. In this body of work, although this was never a specific research question, women talked in sophisticated, intelligent, nuanced ways about their hopes and expectations of interventions and their struggles to 'get free' from abuse, and the debilitating impacts of being subjected to ongoing controlling and abusive behaviours. A reference to bruises healing but damaged spirits and undermined selves being harder to repair was not uncommon. What they hoped for from both the CJS and perpetrator programmes was deeper and more complex than current measurements of success. This formed the backdrop to the study we report on in the rest of this paper. The relevance to social work is most obvious with respect to child protection, and the increasing use of referrals to programmes as part of social work intervention. It extends beyond this, however, to women without children who are accessing mental health services and whose lives are also etched by unsafeness. Whilst the research is based in community-based provision, the research findings may be transferrable to criminal justice programmes.

Research methods

The aim of the study was to explore what counts as 'success' from four different perspectives: that of men who were currently or had previously been on community domestic violence perpetrator programmes ($n = 22$, eight had completed and fourteen were still on the programme); female partners/ex-partners ($n = 18$, four were separated and thus designated ex-partners); programme staff (managers, group work facilitators and women's support workers) ($n = 27$); and funders and commissioners ($n = 6$). A total of seventy-three interviews were thus conducted with these key stakeholders. Perpetrator, ex/partner and practitioner participants were self-selecting from five community-based domestic violence perpetrator programmes in the UK. Funder/commissioner participants were approached who were listed by Respect as funders of perpetrator programmes.

Ethical approval was sought and researcher and interviewee safety protocols were established. Whilst we did not ask the interviewees to describe the violence and abuse that they had perpetrated/suffered, this information was often volunteered in interviews with victim-survivors. It was clear that many had experienced a wide range of abusive and violent behaviour: some revealed marital rape and/or severe physical violence while, for others, their lives had been dominated by threats and other verbal, emotional and financial abuse. Interviews lasted between thirty and sixty minutes, depending on how much the interviewee had to say: they covered participants' experiences and understandings of programmes, the aims of the programme, how the programmes could be improved and what success meant for them. The interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed using a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis program (QSR NVivo). Initial micro-level coding was done on each interview transcript by the first researcher, which was then thematically organised and sent to the second researcher. The theme names and the micro-level codes were then moved around a number of times for each group of participants until both researchers were content the themes were fully reflective of the content. Finally, overlaps and differences between the four groups of participants were identified.

Limitations of the study

Whilst the number of interviews is relatively large for qualitative research, self-selection means we may have a sample of service users who are more engaged and more positive about DVPPs. Perpetrators and ex/partners were not necessarily linked, so it was not possible to compare accounts. A number of researchers have noted the manipulative behaviour of some perpetrators to recruit programme workers into their worldview (see, e.g.

Pence and Paymar, 1993) and researchers have noted that men's descriptions of their violence differ markedly from those of their victims (see Dobash *et al.*, 2000). It is this tendency of perpetrators to minimise and justify that has led to the preference of using the accounts of ex/partners in assessing the success of DVPPs. Whilst this could be seen as a limitation of this study, we were not asking men about their use of violence, but rather their experience of DVPPs and how their success should be measured. At the same time, their contributions may be considered in light of the existing evidence base. Similarly, it is well documented that women minimise domestic violence (Kelly, 1987), especially when they are living with it; this could have influenced their responses to what they perceived as success.

Findings

One of the key findings was that 'success' meant far more than just 'ending the violence' for all of the groups of interviewees. There was widespread recognition that it would be quite possible for physical violence to stop yet women and children continued to live in unhealthy atmospheres laden with tension and threat. The interviews revealed nuanced understandings of success in which more subtle, though ultimately life-enhancing, changes were recognised. The thematic analysis revealed six broad areas of success, discussed below in the order of frequency with which they were present across the whole sample and drawing out the implications for social work.

1 An improved relationship between men on programmes and their partners/ex-partners which is underpinned by respect and effective communication.

Having an improved relationship was the most frequently noted and valued outcome for women partners and ex-partners. Whilst this might require, by definition, violence and abuse to be absent, this was implicit in women's responses. Those who stayed with their partners talked about doing more as a family, feeling happier and having a better, stronger partnership. They described their partners as more thoughtful, supportive, respectful, calm or alternatively less moody. Open and respectful communication was at the core of these shifts, such as being able to talk about difficult issues, negotiate, express opinions, open up and talk about feelings. Many women spoke of having a new sense that their partner was willing not just to listen, but also to hear and understand their point of view, and that of their children. Everyday acts, such as making a cup of tea in the following example, symbolised deeper realignments in relationships that were

associated with increased respect. It is not possible to overstate just how important these everyday acts were to the women:

> Well we can all walk back into the house without feeling a bit scared to be honest . . . I mean now I text him because he gets in before me, I text him at the lights and he has a cup of tea ready for me and . . . he'd never have done that before—I would spend ages out of the house just walking around the shops so I didn't have to go home (Partner/ex-partner).

For some, the man gaining respect for himself was connected to increased respectfulness they were now showing towards those around them. Better communication was an important sign for the programme men interviewed, with some explicitly linking this to the reduction in their violent and abusive behaviour. This man explains how being able to communicate better with his partner was at the core of his behaviour change:

> I'm more patient, less aggressive . . . I'm not bottling nothing up . . . it's like a bottle of coke, if you shake it and shake it and then take the lid off it makes a mess, whereas I'm letting that gas out slowly now because I don't hold nothing in, I'm not sweeping problems under the carpet. We will talk hopefully about 'em there and then—to deal with the problem there and then and talk—we have learnt to talk and to cooperate better together (Man on programme).

Having 'honest' communication was mentioned regularly by the men, as was being able to rebuild and sustain it in a context of broken trust. Many recognised that holding onto previous patterns was not an option if their hope of not losing their partner was to be an outcome of the programme. One man, for example, explained that he had previously attended a number of anger management courses but that these had simply taught him to remove himself from the situation rather than to be able to openly and honestly communicate.

Practitioners also recognised improved relationships as one element of success. This encompassed changes in relation to partners and children whether or not they continued living together as a family. Indeed, men being able to accept separation and make the best of it was as 'successful' as remaking relationships in the family. Within this, changing attitudes to, and expectations of, women featured strongly, including adjusting their sense of masculine entitlement. Recurring phrases here were: women and children not living in fear; understanding what a healthy relationship was; everyone being happier; men being less depressed. Funders and commissioners did not talk specifically about better relationships, but did talk about increased well-being. They were concerned with the well-being not only of women, but also of their children and of the men on programmes.

Implications for social care/welfare

For workers who have responsibilities for children's safety and well-being, the ability and willingness of parents to discuss between themselves and with workers is a key element in effective engagement. To the extent that perpetrator programmes produce this outcome, it enables more effective social work interventions. In addition, the fact that children are not witnessing disrespect to their mothers is also important, providing them with less harmful models of gender relations and potentially undoing damages to attachment that living with domestic violence can create (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Morris, 2009). For women without children, but in mental health services, having a more positive connection with an ex/partner would provide a stronger foundation for self-care and positive change.

2 For partners/ex-partners to have an expanded 'space for action' that empowers through restoring their voice and ability to make choices, whilst improving their well-being

Qualitative research on domestic violence has long documented the debilitating impacts it has on women's sense of self (see, e.g. Hoff, 1990; Kirkwood, 1993), narrowing what Nordic researcher Eva Lundgren (2004) has termed their 'life space' and Liz Kelly (2007) refers to as 'space for action'. As everyday life becomes more and more imbued with fear and threat, women attempt to manage the violence through constraining their own behaviour, whilst abusive men increasingly coercively control who women may see and how they should behave. This theme was evidenced by partner/ex-partner interviewees talking about being able enter the house without being scared, stay out late without feeling she would have to 'walk on eggshells' the next day, choose to spend time with family and friends without being challenged: all are examples of what we term 'expanded space for action'. Like the woman above who talked about a simple cup of tea signifying deeper changes within the relationship, changes noted here were often simple, everyday events, but which are integral to having personal and bodily integrity:

> I'm not on eggshells anymore and I'm relaxed more. I can just say 'I'm on my way out' and not worry about what is going to happen when I come back. I've started going to me friend's on a Friday night, I wouldn't have dared do that when he was like that 'cos I knew what would happen when I come back (Partner/ex-partner).

The emphasis on physical assault in law and policy has resulted in the coercive control that is at the heart of much domestic violence remaining hidden, meaning that the extent that women and children adapt their behaviour in an effort to prevent further outbursts is misrecognised as weakness or

personality factors (e.g. references to victim proneness). What we seek to emphasise here is that women and children actively narrow their 'space for action' and/or have it narrowed for them by having to live within the parameters the perpetrator sets. Stark (2007) likens this to a hostage situation, explaining that 'victims of coercive control are frequently deprived of money, food, access to communication or transportation, and other survival resources even as they are cut off from family, friends and other supports' (Stark, 2007, p. 5). He contends that the primary method of establishing such control is through the 'microregulation of everyday behaviours' (Stark, 2007, p. 5), thus constraining women's space for action. Being able to stretch this space and live with less microregulation was hugely important to women, reflecting a sense of greater safety. Again, many of the examples they gave focused on being able to decide about simple, mundane, everyday events that had previously terrorised them, such as being able to make a 'mistake', such as breaking something or getting a bank charge. Without an understanding of coercive control, it is easy to underestimate the importance of such shifts, but one woman described this as getting her life back and others that they now felt able to move forward in life, such as going to college, university, or starting a business. These bigger decisions were only possible because their space for action was no longer minimal.

This expanded space for action was closely linked with access to support, which, in turn, decreased women's isolation. Therefore, it is the access to the women's support worker that accompanies a man attending a community-based programme that contributes to success, not just the programme itself. The women described the support (worker) as acting as a 'safety net', with this contact important in its own right, helping the women gain strength and confidence. Access to support also increased men's accountability, since women now had someone they trusted to act if the violence and abuse continued:

> [Speaking to the support worker] gave me the courage to then speak to [partner] and say 'look I have spoken to a professional about this, you're the one that's going on about counselling and speaking about feelings and everything, this is actually what you are doing'. He went away, come back and he went 'yeah, you're right, that was completely controlling, bang out of order' (Partner/ex-partner).

Practitioners talked about this theme in terms of women's empowerment/having a voice. This reflected the awareness of practitioners that domestic violence is ultimately about power, and that women's power over their body and life is diminished by it. Within this was recognition that women and children frequently censor their own voices and needs in efforts to avoid conflict. Restoring power (sometimes referred to as agency in contemporary social theory) to women, through an understanding that they deserve better than this, was considered key, in that it enabled women to: see that they had options and choices; place responsibility for violence on the

perpetrator; and enhanced their sense of self-worth. These were all considered positive outcomes by practitioners. 'Having a voice' specifically referred to women being able to speak their mind without fear of the potential consequences and, even prior to this, having the space that safety provided to explore what her own independent perceptions and decisions might be. One critical component here was that each woman had felt able to decide whether, and on what terms, to end or continue with the relationship. We also include within this theme knowing that help and support were available, and that they could access them in the future, including being prepared to report further violence and draw on a safety plan.

Another component here is improved well-being; practitioners frequently referred to the corrosive impacts abuse has on women's sense of self: enhanced self-esteem and self-worth were hoped for outcomes of interventions. Being less stressed, feeling stronger and better in oneself led to the ability to grow and manage change, move on. Some noted the very individual and specific signs of this for a particular woman, such as having a haircut, choosing to put on make-up, becoming comfortable enough to take a coat off before group support sessions. Here again, we find everyday actions signifying more profound shifts in terms of the space in which women were able to make choices and exert control.

Implications for social care/welfare

We have already noted that, too often, social work interventions in domestic violence involve surveillance of women, including making them responsible for children's safety. Where this is taking place in the context of constrained space for action, the outcome is frequently an impasse—with social workers requiring actions from women that they would like to take but are not able to. These findings, and the wider evidence base on the impacts of domestic violence, show that social work theory and practice needs to be more cognizant of this and to shift from surveillance to empowerment, enabling women to expand their space for action. Perpetrator programmes may provide one resource for social work in achieving this goal.

3 Safety and freedom from violence and abuse for women and children

In this theme, following Stark (2009), we refer not just to safety, but 'freedom' from violence in recognition that the reduction or cessation of violence and abuse overlapped with themes 1 and 2. For example, partners and ex-partners spoke of wanting the men to be less obsessive and

controlling by, for example, sending them fewer and less-harassing texts and not subjecting them to interrogation about where they had been and with whom. These everyday intrusions were often mentioned as physical assaults, again pointing to the importance of not just focusing on isolated incidents of violence and that safety also meant greater freedom. One woman's hope was that, by the end of the programme, they would be able to have a 'normal argument'. The reduction or cessation of violence and abuse was discussed more often and more explicitly by men on programmes than the women partners, undoubtedly in part because programme content focuses on this. Many maintained they had already made this change.

This was the measure of success most frequently mentioned by funders and commissioners, and it included the ability to engage men who were not in contact with the CJS and safe child contact. Safety/freedom from violence was also the most prominent for practitioners. This was generally linked to the stated goals of programmes, and included both being and feeling safer for women and children. Most emphasised ending violence and abuse, with some offering a more qualified reduction in violence or risk and others ending physical violence and reducing emotional abuse. The latter two possibly reflect a desire not to over-claim what programmes could achieve. 'Feeling safer' was sometimes expanded upon through phrases like 'no longer living in fear'. Whilst the majority of practitioners were aiming for a total cessation of violence, a minority argued that less ambitious changes could also be seen as some level of success, referring to 'just small changes' and fewer police callouts. As one practitioner put it:

> I view success that some have made some changes and those changes mean that they are at best, you know, no longer abusive, at worst that their abuse has significantly reduced (Practitioner).

Here, we see a perspective from which a range of changes in the same direction are considered by practitioners, in contrast to the single and often absolute measurements used in most research evaluations.

Implications for social care/welfare

The possibility of incremental change is at the foundation of much social work theory and practice; applying this to assessments of the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes would open up a productive dialogue with those who work with violent men. The importance of freedom alongside safety alerts professionals to the possibility that, whilst physical violence might cease, women and children's freedom could remain restricted as previously, that women were more likely to value an improved relationship/having a voice and more space for action confirms the necessity of including freedom in measurements of success, and further supports the contention that social workers need to develop skills and practices that contribute to empowerment.

4 Safe, positive and shared parenting

For the women ex/partners, positive parenting refers not only to the fact that children benefited from the changes noted above, but also that parenting the children together was enhanced, with family activities more frequent, men being more attentive to the needs of the children and/or access no longer something to be dreaded. For both current and ex-partners, being able to trust the man with the children played a significant part in this. Re/building trust was also recognised as important for the men on programmes, especially if they had separated and were making contact arrangements:

> I can trust him to be left alone with the kids [now]. Before he dealt with it [the violence], he liked to be in control and try to fix things. I would fix the problem of his temper by not allowing him to be left alone with the kids at times (Partner/ex-partner).

> I'd always try to get home before the kids got home from school because I didn't want any friction between him and the kids and there would always be. He wouldn't hit them, he just wasn't very nice, he was blunt, he didn't show any interest … but now I'd sort of say 'well yeah I know you don't [want to go] but he'd like to go and you'd have a good laugh'. When you're a parent you end up doing an awful lot of stuff that really you would rather not be doing, don't you? You'd rather not go and listen to the little darlings singing and … much as I love my kids you do get dragged to some crap … he'd sort of say 'oh no no no' and I'll say '[name of perpetrator] that's not very nice, she wants you to take her' (Partner/ex-partner).

Enhanced/safer parenting also featured for practitioners: here, practitioners were reflecting on the fact that women often feel distressed about the impact of domestic violence on their children but at the same time are required to comply with court-ordered contact—a context that can often exacerbate the risks to children that a woman has tried to reduce by separating. They also reflected women's concerns about the impact of domestic violence on their capacity to parent. Safety here was, therefore, multi-layered: it was material in terms of safe contact and safety at home, but also a bedrock upon which women could rebuild and undo harms that living with domestic violence had already done to their children and their relationships with them. Practitioners noted here: better relationships with fathers; safe contact; children beginning to thrive; positive co-parenting. Several also mentioned children not learning that abuse was normal. Both safety and the non-normalising of abuse were also highlighted by funders and commissioners.

Implications for social care/welfare

Parenting was a key theme for women and practitioners, but less obvious in the perspectives of men and funders/commissioners. A number of studies (see Radford and Hester, 2006, for an overview) have revealed that most women living with domestic violence endeavour to protect their children from knowledge of the abuse and from the potential harms and losses associated with family breakdown, undertaking their own risk analysis of the costs of leaving/staying. For social workers to begin from recognition of this, alongside an awareness of coercive control, provides a route to building alliances with women who are struggling to mother in constraining contexts. Within this, understanding the 'protective silences' (Mullender *et al.*, 2002) that sometimes grow up between women and their children in abusive household gender regimes (Morris, 2009) will provide workers with new avenues to travel, in which women are more likely to think that their situation and its limitations have been recognised. What we are suggesting here is that, rather than confronting women with what they often perceive as coercive options—leave or lose your children—practice should be based on workers engaging in a joint exploration with women about how they have attempted to protect their children to date, the constraints on their actions and how being free from violence will create more space for positive parenting.

5 Men's enhanced awareness of self and others, including an understanding of the impact that domestic violence has had on their partner and children

Enhanced awareness of self and others covers the ability to monitor and understand self and others' feelings and emotions and use this knowledge to guide thinking and action. This was the theme most frequently mentioned by the men on programmes in talking about: emotional self-awareness; self-control; empathy; and responsiveness. They described themselves as being more patient, having a greater ability to control and moderate their own behaviour, having different reactions to situations and generally being able to engage better with everyone.

Self-reflection, something that is required in programmes, and improved communication skills were important and valued gains for some men. This chimed with women's responses, especially when men talked about their newly found ability to listen and understand her point of view:

> He respects the fact that I don't feel able to talk to him about a lot of things, and he respects my distance now. He tries to offer support knowing that I'm unlikely to accept that much support from him, but he does try. He respects the boundaries that I set within our relationship and he tries to be honest

> with me about how he's feeling too, which is something that he was never really able to do (Partner/ex-partner).

Understanding the impact of domestic violence on others was an important part of this with, some women welcoming that the man had developed a sense of what it had been like to have lived under his regime of control.

Awareness of self and others was the most commonly cited desired outcome for men by practitioners, presumably reflecting that they believe this to be the foundation of not only choosing to change, but, importantly, being able to maintain this after completing the programme. The outcomes they were seeking here included: empathy; the ability to reflect on behaviour and feelings; ability to 'be in' relationships with others; taking responsibility for their actions and their impacts on others; willingness to seek help; ability to identify what they had changed and why it made a difference; capacity to name and discuss problematic behaviour.

Implications for social care/welfare

Where programmes are successful in this respect, it creates a situation in which social workers can engage more safely and constructively with men as fathers. Given the concerns of practitioners noted earlier in the research by Stanley *et al.* (2010), closer links with programmes will provide a foundation for practice development in which abusive men are no longer invisible, but are addressed specifically and explicitly within child protection and family social work.

6 For children, safer, healthier childhoods in which they feel heard and cared about

Whilst, to some extent, this overlaps with theme 3, here the focus is on children themselves rather than parenting. This was talked about primarily by practitioners and funders/commissioners rather than by the women and men. For practitioners working in perpetrator programmes, children's safety has become a more specific focus, both whilst living with the perpetrator and where child contact is an issue. This is in large part due to increased referrals from social work and CAFCASS and being commissioned to do risk assessments with respect to contact hearings. Again, safety was deeper than physical safety, encompassing: physical and emotional health and well-being; happiness; freedom from fear and/or having to protect their mother or siblings. Some workers took the risks to children very seriously, making reference to decisions to remove perpetrators from the household if children 'were terrified' and the importance of appropriate child-contact decisions being made by the courts and other professionals.

One highlighted just how much information they could be holding about a man's behaviour:

> . . . what we do is we go out and do the initial assessment and then ask them to sign a consent form so we can gather information from other agencies—children's social care, the police, probation, mental health services—and quite often what comes back is reams of information about very serious violence and very serious incidents that they haven't disclosed (Practitioner).

Improved well-being for children is part of this category, which was linked to having access to support (within and outside the family), being able to talk openly about violence, express their feelings and know that they were heard. The hopes practitioners expressed here as examples of potential success included: children not witnessing violence; children feeling included in family life; safe separation with ongoing positive and safe interactions with both parents. Where these could be achieved, it was assumed that children would feel more secure and less torn, and would know and feel that their parents loved and were interested in them.

Children's future relationships were a very strong theme for funders and commissioners, often linked to the ubiquitous, though strongly contested, cycle of abuse theory (that children who live with domestic abuse are more likely to be abusive/abused in their own future relationships). Some responses were more immediate and connected to the realities of the everyday lives of children and young people, referring to: knowing violence is wrong; improved and more stable peer relationships; for teenage boys, positive interactions with girlfriends; for teenage girls, seeking more equal relationships.

Implications for social care/welfare

Whilst the outcomes in terms of improved health, well-being, stability and achievement through education are at the core of all policies on children, social work should have an interest in fostering childhoods that are not lived in abusive household gender regimes, where children are not confronted daily with abusive masculinity and constrained femininity. How children respond to the gender relations and models they see in their family is varied and mixed (Mullender *et al.*, 2002; Eriksson, 2009), but it is certainly not conducive to healthy development for gender to be constructed through violence and abuse. Thus, both expanding women's space for action and enabling men to become more aware of and responsive to their children change the environment in which children develop their own gender identities. Building more collaborative links between local community-based perpetrator programmes can also be said to reflect the directions recommended in the Munro review (2011) of child protection systems.

Conclusions

This paper has clarified and expanded what we mean when we talk about whether a domestic violence perpetrator programme 'works'. The absence of further physical violence, whilst an important measurement, fails to reflect the extent of change that female partners, perpetrators, practitioners and funders/commissioners hope for and to varying extents is achieved. For female ex/partners, success is about so much more, encompassing their freedom and ability to live life to the full, have a respectful relationship, and share positive and safe parenting. The six broad areas identified are the 'indicators of success' that will be measured in an ongoing ESRC and Northern Rock Foundation funded research project that the authors are currently engaged in.

Social work practice needs to begin from a deeper understanding of the role of coercive control in domestic violence, especially the extent to which it limits women's space for action. Whilst we know that the vast majority of victim-survivors endeavour to protect children whilst managing their own safety, they are constrained by both the rules imposed by perpetrators and their own diminished capacity and energy. It is in this context that we use the concept of 'expanding space for action' as both an important indicator of success for perpetrator programmes and a practice framing for social work. Following the key message of the Munro review (2011)—that social work develops a 'learning culture' in which they are more able to assess need and provide appropriate help and support—we argue that there is much to be learnt from closer links between child protection, adult safeguarding and perpetrator programmes. Rather than the traditional social work model in which the perpetrators become invisible and victim-survivors are made responsible for children's safety, where they are not even able to ensure their own, we commend an approach in which social workers join efforts that seek to enhance women's safety and freedom, and that—to the extent that they are successful—ensure that children are not witnessing harmful gender constructions.

That the women interviewed in this study placed most significance on an improved relationship/having a voice and more space for action supports the contention that social workers need to develop skills and practices that contribute to female empowerment, as this—alongside behaviour changes in men—will contribute to safe parenting and improved health and well-being for children. We further contend that, if perpetrator programmes are successful in changing men's ways of engaging with others, through self-reflection, more open and honest communication, this in turn removes some of the barriers to social work engagement with perpetrators. If social work is to forge alliances with both victim-survivors and community-based perpetrator programmes, violent men have to become visible within policy and practice.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the Home Office, LankellyChase Foundation and Northern Rock Foundation. We would like to thank the funders, Respect (UK membership association for domestic violence perpetrator programmes and associated support services), Julie Chalder-Mills (for assisting with the research) and the independent advisory committee that was established to oversee the programme of research. We are also grateful to two anonymous reviewers whose comments undoubtably strengthened the paper.

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