

Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programmes: Do they work?

This factsheet is for anyone who wants to know whether Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programmes are effective at changing violent and abusive behaviours.

Introduction

Since 1989, the UK has seen a steady growth of Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programmes (DVPPs/ DAPPs).

Initially, these offered behaviour-change interventions in a groupwork setting to male perpetrators of violence towards female partners and/or ex-partners (survivors).

As work with perpetrators evolved, practitioners developed interventions for delivery in a 1-2-1 setting, as well as behaviour-change interventions for female perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse.

Referring agencies and, most crucially, those experiencing domestic violence, have always been anxious about the effectiveness of these interventions:

- Commissioning organisations need evidence that any investment in such interventions are good value for money
- Victims of domestic violence need answers about what is often their last hope of staying in a relationship

There is a growing body of UK and international research that shows such programmes have positive outcomes for both perpetrators and survivors. The information in this factsheet is not a comprehensive review, but an indicative summary of key research, evidencing the effectiveness of interventions with domestic abuse perpetrators.

What works?

Programme evaluations have been a critical part in the development of Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programmes. These studies have employed a range of research methods to examine programme effectiveness in enhancing victim/survivor and children's safety and holding perpetrators accountable for their behaviour, whilst supporting them to stop using violence and abuse.

The most common way of deciding whether perpetrator programmes are successful is to look at whether perpetrators

are less likely to use physical and sexual violence after completing the programme.

Over the last 30 years, various evaluations from across the globe have offered evidence that perpetrator programmes do reduce physical and sexual violence.

USA evaluations

- **Melanie Shepard** examined abusive behaviour at different programme phases in a 1985 study. A one-year follow-up study of victims' data was collected from 39 victims whose partners had completed the programme an average of twelve months earlier. Victims reported significantly lower rates of physical and psychological abuse when compared to rates of abuse during time periods prior to or during their participation in the programme. Shepard M (1985) "Summary: Evaluation of Domestic Abuse Intervention Project Counseling and Educational Program," Duluth, Minnesota
- **Edward Gondolf** conducted a seven-year, multi-site evaluation in 2002 and followed it up in 2004 to look at the lasting impact of domestic abuse perpetrator programmes. He concluded that "well-established batterer intervention programs with sufficient reinforcement from the courts do contribute to a substantial decline in re-assault." Gondolf E (2002) *Batterer intervention systems: Issues, outcomes and recommendations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
<https://sk.sagepub.com/books/batterer-intervention-systems>

In 2004, he reported that "at the 30-month follow-up, less than 20% of the men had re-assaulted their partner in the previous year; at the 48-month follow-up, approximately 10% had re-assaulted in the previous year. Moreover, over two-thirds of the women said their quality of life had improved and 85% felt very safe at both these follow-up points."

Heckert D and Gondolf E, (2004) *Predicting Abuse and Reassault Among Batterer Program Participants*. NCJ 199730.
<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/199730.pdf>

UK evaluations

- The community-based 'Repair' programme (ADVA and Sue Penna Associates, 2009), found a strong decrease in risk of re-abuse among programme completers (corroborated by women/partner reports) and significant psychological improvement amongst perpetrators and among women/partners and children. REPAIR (Resolve to End the Perpetration of Abuse in Relationships): A Community- and Whole-family-based Intervention Programme Targeting Perpetrators of Domestic Violence and Abuse in Devon. An evaluation of a three-year Invest to Save (ISB) PROJECT. Exeter: Devon County Council, 2008
- The Project Mirabal report of a large evaluation of DAPPs in England and Wales was published in 2015. 'Project Mirabal' was a multi-site evaluation research, using six different measures of success:
 1. Reduction of physical violence
 2. Respectful relationships
 3. Expanded space for action (the ability of victim/survivors to restore agency and freedom safely from abuse)
 4. Decreased isolation
 5. Enhanced parenting and
 6. Understanding the impact of domestic violence.

Measured outcomes were largely positive: physical and sexual violence was 'not just reduced but ended for the majority of women' (Kelly and Westmarland, 2015: 45):

- 30% of women involved in the programme reported being made to "do something sexual" they did not want to do in the three months before the programme started. That was reduced to zero a year after starting the programme.
- 29% of women reported having a weapon used against them in the three months before the programme. This was reduced to zero a year after starting the programme.
- Reports from women who said they were slapped, punched or had something thrown at them reduced from 87% to 7%.
- Far fewer women reported being physically injured after the programme (61% before, compared to 2% after).
- Similarly, the extent to which children saw or overheard violence also dropped substantially, from 80% to 8%.

The evaluators concluded that: DVPPs 'extend men's understandings of violence and abuse, with clear shifts from talking about stand-alone incidents of physical violence to beginning to recognise ongoing coercive control' (Kelly and Westmarland, 2015:45).

Outcomes for the other key indicators were more mixed, though still tending towards a positive improvement for most participants.

Project Mirabal also found that fewer children were scared of the perpetrator, or were worried about the safety of their mother, and men were less likely to make excuses for their behaviour. This kind of behaviour, however, did continue for a significant proportion of men.

The findings from Mirabal are consistent with those from multi-site evaluations of DVPPs in the US. The combined results of this body of non-experimental research indicates the potential for largely positive outcomes for women/partners and their children (improvements in well-being, quality of life and resilience to repeat victimisation) supporting the argument for a more wider definition of intervention 'success' and for the use of women/partner reports in evaluation, which has long been proposed as a valid and reliable measure of change or 'success'. Kelly L and Westmarland N (2015) Domestic violence perpetrator programmes: Steps towards change. *Project Mirabal Final Report*.

Safe and effective service provision – Respect accreditation

Providing a service to perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse brings with it a considerable responsibility: to ensure that this work is safe and effective and that it does not inadvertently further contribute to the harm experienced by victim/survivors or escalate the risk from a perpetrator to a victim/survivor.

Where interventions with perpetrators are delivered in a professional and competent manner, they have proved effective in creating change and reducing harm. However, poorly run

services can raise the risk and add to survivor vulnerability. Therefore, no organisation should provide perpetrator services without full regard of the Respect Standard, the nationally agreed principles and standards, and without sufficient resources to ensure compliance.

Respect accreditation is a quality assurance certification for organisations working with perpetrators. It was developed so that everyone, including perpetrators, survivors, funders, commissioners and practitioners can be assured that a service is of a high-quality standard, regularly monitored and supported to frequently reflect and improve on best working practices.

For the availability of Respect accredited perpetrator programmes in your area, please contact the Respect Phonenumber on freephone 0808 8024040, email info@respectphonenumber.org.uk