

## Evidence for impact of Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programmes: College of Policing evidence commentary

As part of the academic commissioned partnership programme<sup>1</sup> supporting the College's What Works Centre for Crime Reduction, the Institute of Education (IoE) reviewed the existing literature relating to domestic violence perpetrator programmes (DVPPs). Specifically, they synthesised findings from existing systematic reviews.

This 'review of reviews' concluded that no clear impact of DVPPs has been identified, and that effects on further victimisation have been small. Caution is required when applying these findings to England and Wales for a number of reasons, set out below. When deciding whether to commission or fund DVPPs, consideration should be given to how the programme is expected to work, the outcomes that are being sought, and how success is best measured.

- **Context and transferability.** The majority of evidence that informs the overall findings in the review of reviews comes from evaluations of DVPPs delivered in the US, prior to 2013. There are key differences in how programmes operate in the US and in England and Wales. In England and Wales, community-based programmes accredited by 'Respect' and court mandated programmes run by prison and probation services ('Building Better Relationships') operate to a 'coordinated community response' model. Alongside interventions focused on changing perpetrator behaviour, DVPPs must provide support and safety planning for victims, and be fully embedded in multi-agency partnerships for perpetrator risk management. US evaluations of DVPPs have often focused specifically on the perpetrator behaviour change element, ignoring the wider system within which it is situated. It has been suggested that, in some instances, it may have been weaknesses in the wider co-ordinated response that contributed to the limited impact observed for a programme (see Gondolf, 2001).
- **Matching intervention to need.** DVPPs in England and Wales do not accept perpetrators where 'there is little or no expectation of a reduction in risk' (Respect, 2012). Rigorous 'suitability assessments', including 'motivational interviewing' techniques are undertaken prior to acceptance on a programme. Another IoE review has reported promising findings from evaluations of motivational interviewing, suggesting lower levels of victim-reported reoffending for those offenders who received motivational interviewing prior to attending a DVPP. In the US, where programme attendance is primarily court mandated and not generally subject to suitability assessment, it is likely that interventions are provided in cases where there is no realistic prospect of ending the abuse, diluting the programme impact.
- **Outcome measures.** Existing reviews have considered primarily the impact of DVPPs on official records of reoffending, through reconviction and arrest data and/or victim reports of further abuse. A range of alternative outcomes beyond physical assault have been identified from qualitative research as

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being important to victim-survivors (see Westmarland et al., 2010). In addition, co-ordinated community response models can have positive impacts beyond behaviour change, concerned with risk management of the perpetrator and contribution to the effectiveness of multi-agency partnership working (see Kelly and Westmarland, 2015).

- **Follow-up periods.** The length of the follow-up period in some existing evaluations has been relatively short. A longitudinal multi-site evaluation, not included in existing reviews, showed most physical assaults took place within the first nine months, while the perpetrator was still receiving treatment. Four years after programme intake, more than 90% of men had not been violent toward their female partners for at least a year (Gondolf, 2002).
- **Implementation issues.** Many DVPPs included in existing reviews have experienced high levels of attrition, meaning that maintaining the integrity of experimental evaluation designs has been difficult. Perpetrators have either not completed or not enrolled on programmes, and evaluators have been unable in some cases to conduct follow-up interviews with victims.

### **Project Mirabal**

A large evaluation of DVPPs in England and Wales was published in 2015. 'Project Mirabal' was a multi-site evaluation using a wide range of outcome measures including respectful communication, expanded 'space for action' and shared parenting. As well as follow-up surveys over a fifteen month period, in-depth interviews were conducted with perpetrators and their (ex)partners to unpick the ways in which the interventions may have influenced perpetrator behaviour and consequent outcomes. The evaluators concluded that: DVPPs 'do extend men's understandings of violence and abuse, with clear shifts from talking about standalone incidents of physical violence to beginning to recognise ongoing coercive control' (Kelly and Westmarland, 2015:45).

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). Outcomes for the other key indicators were more mixed, though still tending towards positive improvement. The findings from Mirabal are consistent with those from longitudinal, multi-site evaluations of DVPPs in the US.

### **References**

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