

Emerging Lessons from Project Mirabal

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Mirabal aims

The aims of the project are to investigate the extent to which perpetrator programmes reduce violence and increase safety for women and children, the routes by which they do or do not produce effects alongside the overall contribution programmes make to coordinated community responses to domestic violence.

Methods

- ✧ Qualitative interviews with men and women at the beginning and at the end of programmes, plus drop outs.
- ✧ Interviews with practitioners, stakeholders, and community partners.
- ✧ Research book with children.
- ✧ Redamos plus – quantitative analysis of who attends programmes.
- ✧ Tracking over a 15 month period women whose partners have been on a programme [intervention group] and have not [comparison group].

Situating domestic violence perpetrator services within a coordinated community response to domestic violence

What do we mean by a coordinated community response?

- ✧ Historical perspective – USA, Duluth, Minnesota.
- ✧ Duluth approach – system of perpetrator accountability – communities working together to
- ✧ England approach – caricature of Duluth
- ✧ DV forums of 1990s
- ✧ 2000s – ‘statutorisation’ of the domestic violence voluntary sector
- ✧ Move away from volume towards seriousness
- ✧ New roles and structures, much of it state funded/forced
- ✧ Attempts by Home Office to develop/map out what a CCR should look like
- ✧ So to answer the question – varies/is confusion

What are domestic violence perpetrator services and why should we have them?

- ✧ Most aim to improve the safety of women and children and challenge gender norms and stereotypes around 'abusive household regimes'.
- ✧ Criminal justice and non-criminal justice programmes plus wider services.
- ✧ Mirabal – non-criminal justice (language is important and links to referral pathways).
- ✧ Ever decreasing circles.
- ✧ So why? 1) Children 2) reoffending against subsequent partners

Project Mirabal – developing indicators of success

- ✧ Ongoing disagreement about whether they ‘work’
- ✧ Based on not enough discussion about what ‘works’ means or what ‘success’ should look like.
- ✧ Incredibly high standards – more than other interventions – plus very strong ‘feelings’
- ✧ 73 interviews with men on programmes, partners/ex partners, programme staff and commissioners.
- ✧ Success needs to be redefined and connected not just to criminal justice but also to health and social care agendas
- ✧ ‘Success’, then, means far more than just ‘ending the violence’. It would be quite possible for the physical violence to stop but at the same time for women and children to continue to live in unhealthy atmospheres which are laden with tension and threat.

The 6 indicators of success

1. An improved relationship between men on programmes and their partners/ex-partners which is underpinned by respect and effective communication.
2. For partners/ex-partners to have an expanded 'space for action' which empowers through restoring their voice and ability to make choices, whilst improving their well being.
3. Safety and freedom from violence and abuse for women and children.
4. Safe, positive and shared parenting.
5. Enhanced awareness of self and others for men on programmes, including an understanding of the impact that domestic violence has had on their partner and children.
6. For children, safer, healthier childhoods in which they feel heard and cared about.

Examples completers and non completers

- ✧ Prior to the indicators of success, success largely perceived as 'no more violence' or 'completion'.
- ✧ Completion does not necessarily = success

The example of Mapletown

- ✧ Mapletown – NE England service within a national children’s charity
- ✧ Nearly 6,000 dv incidents reported to the police per annum
- ✧ One of our case study areas – 18 interviews with service staff plus multi-agency partners

- ✧ Symbolic importance

‘My past experience of working with domestic violence is that the focus always had to be on the women to do the change whereas I think clearly the focus needs to be on the man to make the change [...] the fact that you’re now seeing Children Protection Plans where the man needs to attend the DVPP feels like the focus and the emphasis is definitely on him engaging and not her engaging. In that sense, it feels like a proper shift on the men rather than being always on the women’s shoulders.’ (DVP service women’s worker)

- ✧ Value of an integrated service – someone else knowing what is going on

‘The most challenging and frustrating part of the job is when we know from a woman that her partner or ex-partner is not disclosing abuse, is continuing, and we can’t do anything about it. We can’t challenge him, because if we challenge him it’s going to increase the risk to her [...] I’ve had cases where this has happened and I just want to shake him and say ‘you’re lying to me!’ and ‘do you think I’m stupid?’ because I know you’re still doing this to her’ (DVP service men’s worker)

This awareness was described as the ‘hardest part of the job without a doubt’. One worker found it difficult to live with the knowledge that his completion of the programme did not reduce risk and danger to his family. She described how she feared recognising the names of his partner and children each time a local domestic violence homicide is reported in the media.

✧ Misconceptions, and doubts amongst some organisations that men do not complete, men can not change, and that programmes do not ‘work’

‘I think there are still significant numbers of people out there working in social care who as far as perpetrators are concerned its all ‘prosecute, bang them up, and throw away the key’ (DVP service worker)

‘I’m simply not convinced of its cost-effectiveness and I’m not convinced that on the majority of perpetrators that it works’ (Police)

Women’s services – examples of men that had not changed.

The police said they were very unlikely to refer:

‘we refer people to jail, that’s where they should be!’

✧ Very high expectations and holding them to unrealistic goals

Perpetrator programmes were held to very high standards, in which anything less than a cessation of violence indicated failure.

‘I’m not sure if the talk and the engagement that goes on in the community domestic violence programmes ... is realistically going to be sufficient to overcome all the stresses and strains of poverty, bringing up children, drug and alcohol abuse, and the chaotic situations that the victims and the perpetrators themselves actually live in. I’m tempted to say that its unrealistic to expect a programme to undo twenty or thirty years of damage and expect it to reduce the risk of the particular victim being offended against again.’ (police)

✧ Potential for development

Need for more ... But within a ‘pond of piranhas’.

Waiting lists, length of programme, motivational work, content, those who drop out, those who don’t turn up, post programme work, ‘gaps in the market’.

✧ The Mapletown integrated approach – benefits for coordinated responses

Someone knowing what is happening

Feeding into other organisations decision making, e.g. around child contact

Safer decision making

Work differently and more holistically/accurately with men and women

Ability to end relationship