

## Group work with IPV perpetrators:

### Assessment questions

In order to discuss the first incident of violence and move on to subsequent violence it is useful to outline what it is you are setting out to do. This will vary slightly depending on your organisational structure and model of work you are using.

In this case we are going to structure the assessment interview around the first, worst and last incidents of violence. Therefore as a start you might want to consider the following:

### Introduction:

#### Confidentiality

It is worth being clear about exactly what you mean. Confidentiality means different things to different people. In this case you want to be clear that your confidentiality policy is governed by two processes: Criminal law & how you work as an agency. Criminal Law means you are obliged to contact relevant authorities if you believe that person will seriously harm themselves or others. Agency process means that their confidentiality is limited in that you will inform the link partner support service about their attendance on the programme, what topic areas are being covered and whether or not they have disclosed using abuse or violence. Everything else is confidential. (You should also be presenting them with a confidentiality agreement that outlines this and asking them to sign it).

#### Define terms

The words violence and abuse have particular connotations for people, so it's worth explaining what you mean. E.g. ***"I'm going to ask you some questions about your relationship with Jane and in particular times when you feel you've been either violent or abusive towards her. I realise this can mean different things for different people, so just to make things clear; when I talk about violence I mean anything physical – pushing, shoving, right up to use of a weapon. When I talk about abuse I mean anything else – shouting, screaming, name calling – that kind of thing."***

#### Don't expect immediate disclosure

You can't back men into a corner and then expect them to tell you everything. So you need to work up to the point of asking them to define exactly what it is they have done.

Therefore, it's worth acknowledging that what they are attempting is difficult: ***"I know this isn't a particularly easy conversation to have."*** while also trying to encourage him for taking positive steps: ***"It's really good you've taken the first step towards getting some support" "Try and be as honest as you can so we can make sure we get you the support you need."***

It's also worth thinking about the relationship in broader terms to begin with:

***“How long have you and Jane been in a relationship?” “How did you meet?” “What was it that first attracted you to Jane?” “What was it that first attracted Jane to you?” “When did you first move in together?”***

### **Try and get a starting point for things changing**

***“Typically most relationships have what sometimes gets called a “honeymoon” period and then people start to reassess the kind of relationship they want. Normally if any arguments are going to begin they start at this point. Was there anything you and Jane would argue over regularly?”***

***“How long into the relationship did these arguments start?”***

***“When did you both begin living together?”***

***“When do you recall first arguing with Jane?”***

***“What typically would you and Jane disagree on?”***

This should help you build into...

### **First Incident of violence:**

***“What are you like when you argue?”***

***“If you were to make a film of yourself arguing what would you be doing?”***

***“Different men have different ways of arguing – some men sit still for a long time and explode into life; some shout very loud straight away; others pace up and down and begin gesturing a lot with their hands – what do you tend to do?”***

***“What’s been the worst argument you’ve ever had with your partner?”***

***“Do you recall the first time you ever laid hands on Jane?”***

***“When would you say was the first time you were ever violent towards your partner?”***

Once you have established that violence has taken place – you then want to try and get details of what happened. This can be made harder by the fact that the man will very often want to tell you a lot about how he felt and how his partner was behaving. You want to try and reverse this by getting him to talk about how he was behaving and how he imagines this left his partner feeling. To do this you need to first focus on what Actions he took and be exacting in understanding them – so how did he get from A to B to C and so on?

***“What time of day was it?”***

***“What room were you in?”***

***“What happened that meant you left the kitchen and moved into the living room”***

***“I’m sorry – I just want to get this clear in my head so I’m going to stop you a bit as we go, but you said you were sitting on the sofa and then the next thing you were having a full blown row. How did you get to that point? Did your voice start to get louder? Did you begin calling her names? Do you remember standing up? What happened?”***

***“You said you pushed your partner – whereabouts on her body did you push her?”***

***“Did you push her with both hands?”***

***“On a scale of 1 – 5 with 5 being the hardest how hard do you think you pushed your partner?”***

Other things to bear in mind at this point are that there is likely to be a lot of “short hand” at this point. So as discussed earlier – he’s unlikely to give a completely honest account and instead say things like “I just lost it...” Obviously, you need to challenge this and establish exactly what he did do.

However, the other area he will abridge events is in regard to his partner’s behaviour: “she wouldn’t stop nagging me” “she went mental” “She just started screaming at me really loudly”. Although you have to be careful that the interview does not become an exercise in discussing her behaviour it can be useful to find out exactly what happened by asking:

***“So what exactly did Jane say?” Or “It sounds like your partner was angry with you – what was she angry about?”***

The reason asking these types of questions are useful is because they can help you establish the following:

How well he has actually been listening to his partner. What his sore points or triggers are. When he made the decision to use violence & also you can begin re-framing his partner’s behaviour in a more empathic light. ***“It sounds like your partner was feeling...let down/upset/poorly treated etc”***

In establishing what violence was used it is also useful to suggest levels of violence that the man can come down from E.G.

***“Did you try and stab her?”***

***“How many times did you slap her, twenty times? Thirty?”***

***“Once she was on the floor did you kick her in the head?”***

This allows him to disclose violence he has used more easily sometimes as by denying what he did not do he can tell you what he then did do.

Finally – once you have established what violence took place you need to establish what injuries his partner suffered as a result. This is likely to be highly minimised – but again this tells you something about his empathic understanding and ability to imagine effects upon his partner.

***“What injuries did your partner suffer as a result?” “What treatment did your partner require for what happened?”***

### **Last/worst incident of violence**

These are often the same & essentially you want to follow the same lines of questioning as above and trying to get as detailed a picture of what took place as possible.

### **Levels of understanding about his behaviour (responsibility)**

Here you are trying to establish how much insight a man has into how he behaved and how much responsibility he is willing to take for his use of violence/abuse.

***“Why do you think you have used violence?”***

***“How do you feel about the violence you have used?”***

***“Who do you see as responsible for what’s happened?”***

***“How would you explain your use of violence? What’s your understanding of the reasons you reacted violently?”***

You should also make note here of particular use of minimisation/partner blaming/denial – so that you have some early reference points as to whether or not he is suitable for treatment & how you may need to target that treatment.

### **Levels of understanding about the effects of his behaviour upon his partner/children (empathy)**

Obviously it is going to be very difficult to engage someone in a process of changing their abusive behaviour if they cannot empathise for those who have been adversely affected by their behaviour. However, initially empathic understanding may not be immediately obvious. Unsurprisingly, men often arrive at assessments still holding views of their partners – particularly ex-partners - that effectively put her in the position of being an enemy. It is also not uncommon for them to greatly underestimate the effects of their behaviour upon their children. Therefore, some caution is required before dismissing a man’s suitability for treatment based upon a perception of his empathic understanding alone. *Some* empathic understanding with the possibility to increase this through treatment is what you are looking for here.

***“What effects do you think you use of violence has had upon your partner/children?”***

***“Do you think your partner/children are afraid of you?”***

***“It sounds like your behaviour can be frightening. Are you aware of your partner/children acting differently around you?”***

***“If your partner/children were here now how do you think they would say your use of violence has affected them?”***

***“Where were the children when this was taking place? How do you think they understood what was happening?”***

**“Most of us don’t live in mansions – so do you think there is a possibility the children might have heard what was going on and been affected by it?”**

### **Any problems with mental health?**

There are a number of reasons why you want to enquire about a client’s mental health:

Risk – there are clear correlations between issues of mental health and an increase in the risk a perpetrator presents to his partner/children.

Future foreshortening – sometimes referred to as the “fuck-it” factor, whereby a man no longer believes there is a chance of a positive future between himself and his partner/children. This is usually because of issues such as his partner leaving him or starting a new relationship and/or contact with his children becoming difficult or being refused. This can be a very dangerous time and is linked to homicide-suicide.

Treatment – knowing that someone has particular needs around their mental health is important with regard to treatments that you may offer

Wellbeing/equality – understanding someone’s needs and ensuring that they are not discriminated against because of them is one of the competencies for achieving accreditation. Identifying unmet need can also help drive future development of your service. If you do not feel able to discuss someone’s mental health need in relation to assessment then you should seek further skills training.

***“Have you ever required support for any mental health issues?”***

***“Have you ever self-harmed in front of your partner? How did this affect her?”***

***“Have you ever blamed your partner for your own self-harm?”***

***“Are you currently taking any form of medication?”***

***“Have you ever felt suicidal?”***

***“If you have felt suicidal – have you a plan/idea as to how you would commit suicide?”***

***“What prevents you from committing suicide?”***

***“Have you ever been to see your G.P in relation to how you are feeling?”***

***“Have you ever suffered with depression or anxiety? Has this ever reached the stage where you have sought professional help as a result?”***

***“How well are you sleeping at the moment?”***

***“How’s your appetite?”***

***“Do you find your mood is lower at the start of the day and then gets steadily better by the evening”***

***“What do you do to relax?”***

***“What do you do to take care of yourself?”***

### **Any substance/alcohol misuse?**

As with issues of mental health assessors should also screen for issues of substance and alcohol misuse.

Again there is a correlation (not a causal link) between misuse of alcohol and substances and an increase in the risk a perpetrator poses to his partner/children which includes an exacerbation of the *severity* of the violence used.

Additionally from a treatment point of view it is going to be important that a man can come to treatment and maintain sobriety if he is to benefit from what is being discussed. He is unlikely to be a stable member of the programme if he is regularly being excluded for intoxication. Therefore, it may be necessary to link him into appropriate treatment either before or during his participation on the programme.

***“How much do think you drink a week?”***

***“Does the amount you drink concern you?”***

***“How often during the last year have you failed to do what was normally expected of you because of your alcohol intake/drug taking?”***

***“Do you ever take recreational drugs? What type and how often?”***

***“Are you concerned at all by your drug intake?”***

***“Have people close to you expressed concern at the amount you drink/take drugs?”***

### **Has he been violent to any previous partners? Or someone else?**

Finally, you need to discuss with him if he has ever used violence in another relationship or in other contexts. This is useful as it can help him crystallise his use of abuse as part of a systematic pattern (though many men deny any abuse in previous relationships). It can also help you ascertain whether or not you should be taking steps to contact any ex-partners.

***“Have you been either violent or abusive in any of your previous relationships?”***

***“What has been the worst violence that took place?”***

***“did anyone ever call the police? If so, what happened?”***

***“have you ever been violent to anyone else? Were you ever arrested or charged?”***