

The Response of Court Mandated Participants to the Responsible Choices for Men Program

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Overview

- Describes Calgary's specialized domestic court process
- The Calgary Counselling Centre has been offering treatment for male DV perpetrators for over two decades. The Responsible Choice for Men Program is described.
- Research on data from 2002 to 2008 comparing mandated & voluntary clients.
- Qualitative comments on the group from the mandated men.

Calgary's Specialized Court model

- A specialized first appearance (docket) court sees accused very early after charges.
- The court 'team', seen as the 'backbone' of the process, includes: specialists Crown prosecutors, probation, Domestic Conflict Unit of Calgary Police Services, & HomeFront domestic court caseworkers.

- In the docket court, about 1/3 cases are stayed with a peace bond, whereby an accused enters into an agreement with the courts to abide by conditions.
- Most common conditions are to:
 - keep the peace,
 - report to a probation officer,
 - & complete mandated treatment for either domestic violence or substance abuse or both, or parenting courses.

- The mandated cases are referred to agencies very soon after docket court.
- The mandated clients may be seen in counselling within a week.
- Since the specialized court developed, the number of groups offered increased dramatically.

Responsible Choices for Men Program

- Responsible Choices for Men was developed in 1995 for men who use physical violence and control tactics in intimate relationships.
- Based on a narrative model by Australian therapist Alan Jenkins (1991)

- The Responsible Choices Program focuses on belief system change.
- It invites participants to review their beliefs about self in relation to the world,
- challenge those beliefs based on distorted perceptions and
- help men access their preferred or honourable selves

Prior to Group

- Clients must first engage with a CCC primary therapist.
- During this time, the therapist assesses the client's "readiness for change", the extent of violence in the relationship, & determines treatment goals.
- If available, the partner is contacted by the therapist during this phase.
- In addition, the partner will be contacted 4 other times during the man's treatment to assess her safety.

Entry Into Group

- Entry into group occurs when the man has begun to accept responsibility for the abuse
- Men's readiness for change is assessed using the URICA-DV

Group Process

- The groups are process-oriented rather than educational.
- Length of groups is 30 hours, conducted over 14-weeks.
- Groups typically comprise 8 to 12 men.
- While a manual has been written, the facilitators can focus on alternate issues should one emerge, allowing group members input into the agenda.
- A female-male team facilitates the groups

Research Design

- The study employs a pre/post-test design
- The major analysis compares mandated men to men who voluntarily participated in the program.
- The measures reflect the previously identified objectives of the Responsible Choices for Men program. They include:

Research Measures

- Abuse of Partner Scales: Physical and Non-physical (Hudson, 1992)
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- Rosenberg Self-Esteem
- Index of Clinical Stress (Hudson, 1992)
- Generalized Contentment Scale (Hudson, 1992)

Intervening Variables

- Marlowe Crowne Social Desirability
- URICA-DV (Levesque, Gelles, & Velicer, 2000)
 - Assesses readiness for change specific to relationship violence.
 - Stages include Pre-contemplation, Contemplation, Action & Maintenance/Relapse

Data Analysis

- Compared voluntary to mandated men 2002-2008 from pre to post-test
- A repeated measures ANOVA (mandated versus non-mandated as covariate) to compare the post test scores with mandated or voluntary, taking pre-test scores into account.
- To approximate an alpha of .10 (all hypotheses were one-tailed), a p-value of .005 necessary for statistical significance.

Participant Demographics

- 825 men began the RCM program from 2002 to 2008.
- Referral Sources:
 - 590 (74%) mandated by the Domestic Violence First Appearance court and/or probation.
 - 72 (9%) self referred,
 - 66 (8.3%) by counsellor;
 - 69 (8.7%) by “other”
 - 28 cases have missing data.

	Mandated Men	Voluntary Men
Age* t = -3.06; p=.002*	34.7	37.2
Partner's Age n.s.: t= 1.7; p=.07	32.9	34.5
Income n.s. :t=2.2; p=.02	\$31,220	\$39,231
Female Partner n.s.	98.3%	96.7%
First Language English n.s.	93.6%	97.0%

Marital Status*

chi=36.2; p >.000; phi=.217	Mandated Men	Voluntary Men	Total
Single	210 (36.9%)	35 (17.1%)	210 (31.7%)
Married	133 (23.4%)	72 (35.1%)	205 (26.5%)
Separated	77 (13.5%)	43 (21%)	120 (15.5%)
Common-law	118 (20.7%)	38 (18.5%)	56 (20.2%)
Divorced/Wido wed	31 (5.4%)	17 (8.3%)	48 (6.2%)
Totals	205	569	774

	Mandated Men	Voluntary Men
Have police intervened? n.s. Chi=3.2; p=.07	38.6% (n=213)	31.6% (n=65)
Use of peace bonds* Chi= 60.9; p=.000; phi=.283	61.1% (n=338)	29.3% (n=60)
Abuse in man's family of origin* Chi=14.5; p=.000; phi=.138	31.9% (n=179)	46.8% (n=95)
Self Reported Psychiatric History* Chi= 12.2 p=.000; phi = -.126	5.7% (n=32)	13.3% (n=37)

Adjusted Scores at Pretest

Measure (Adjusted)	Mandated	Voluntary	T-test
Rosenberg Self Esteem	24.7 (n=551)	25.5 (n=202)	t= -1.9 (p=.05ns)
Hudson Clinical Stress	43.1 (n=549)	47 (n=202)	t= -3.4 (p <.001*)
Hudson Generalized Contentment	45.6 (n=543)	52 (n=201)	t=-5.5 (p=.000*)
I physically abuse my partner	5.6 (n=491)	4.6 (n=190)	t=.15 (p=..88 ns)
I psychologically abuse my partner	24.5 (n=495)	24.7 (n=184)	t=.-1.5 (p=.12 ns)
Partner Physically Abuses Me	4.6 (n=498)	4.4 (n=188)	t=-1.5 (p=.59 ns)
Partner psychologically abuses me	24.5 (n=495)	24..8 (n=184)	t =-1.6 (p=.87 ns)

Adjusted Measures	Mandated Pre	Self Referred Pre	Mandated Post	Self Referred Post	Group Effect (F-test)	Mandated/Self Referred Comparison
Rosenberg Self Esteem	24.4 (n=383)	24.7 (n=125)	21.4	21.4	236 (p=.000*)	.79 (p=.37 ns)
Hudson Clinical Stress	45.5 (n=379)	49.9 (n=124)	32.1	35.2	517.2 (p=.000*)	0.98 (p=.32 ns)
Hudson Generalized Contentment	42.4 (n=382)	45.7 (n=124)	33.9	35.2	302 (p=.000*)	3.3 (p=.07)
I am psychologically abusing my partner	24.8 (n=331)	24.7 (n=111)	6.3	6.9	381 (p=.000*)	.13 (p=.71 ns)
I am physically abusing my partner	4..8 (n=334)	3.7 (n=110)	7.5	8.3	57.1 (p=.000*)	3.7 (p=.05 ns)
My partner is psychologically abusing me	24.7 (n=331)	24.7 (n=111)	16.2	19.2	65.7 (p=.000*)	.2.9 (p=.89 ns)
Partner Physically Abusing Me	5.2 (n=328)	3.8 (n=114)	4.5	4.0	.30 (p=.58 ns)	1.4 (p=.24 ns)

Quantitative Conclusions

- Few differences between mandated & voluntary men. Both made gains when scores adjusted for social desirability.
- This may reflect the specialized court's practice of mandating low risk offenders to treatment.
- Almost half of the men in the Action: Low Relapse phase at posttest. This compares very favourably with US studies.

- Continued research important.
- Follow-up studies needed to test maintenance of change.
- Partner checks needed.
- Additional counselling may be recommended especially if the relationship involved in the assault remained intact.

Qualitative follow-up

- 17 interviews were conducted with men who were mandated to & completed RC for Men to determine the program impact.
- 15 men commented on the length of their relationship with their partner which on average was 11.4 years ranging from 2 years to 38 years.
- 13 men were fathers

- Average of 2.3 years since attending the Responsible Choices for Men Group counselling with a range from 1.5 years to 5 years since attending group.
- 9 men were with the same partner, with one reporting that his wife had died since he completed group.

- 15 men were forthcoming about the incident that led to RC for Men group.
- 6 men admitted previous abuse incidents.
- 9 men reported substance use (alcohol) during the incident, with 2 reporting their partner using as well.
- 6 men reported no substance use but 2 reported their partners were substance users at the the incident

- In describing the abusive incidents, the men justified or minimized their behaviors, essentially blaming their partners or child/relative.
- 9 men alleged that their partners were also abusive to them & often initiated the assaults, to which the men responded by using physical force due to a reflexive action, defence or to restrain & to prevent further abuse.

- *It started off with silly things; it just escalated. We were in the car going home with our son sleeping in the back. She was saying hurtful things to me. I kind of reached over and do a backhand hit her on the chin. Then we're struggling to grab the key. She started pulling my hair really hard. I hit her so she let go of my hair. She came after me and hit me. I hit her back. And that was it.*

- 8 men commented on the group & individual counselling.
- 4 preferred group counselling over one on one counselling while the other 4 preferred individual counselling.
- 10 men had attended counselling previously for anger & addictions, with 3 having attended couples counselling

Program components

- The men identified several components that worked well:
 - Program material,
 - Social support of a group format
 - Skills of the facilitators.
 - Specific program exercises mentioned were: role playing, Karpman triangle, family tree (genogram), iceberg (anger) & social roles theories.

- *Actually it was pretty good. It was quite informative... It's the understanding of the other person and certain things that they believed that it's okay to get into and how it can effect their partner... It was kind of neat. I found group session is more productive than individual sessions.*

Genogram

- ... family tree. Incredible. Common sense, but something that I'd never really addressed. Are you an alcoholic? Yes. Take your mother and your father, I bet one of them was an alcoholic. Okay, take their parents. Was one of them an alcoholic? Well, yeah. Okay. Or physical abuse, if you abuse your spouse chances are one of your parents abused the other.

Gender Roles

- ...they talked about our roles and how to treat your partner. Once, the male facilitator [said], “What happens when you come home and you’ve had a few drinks and you want to get it on with your wife, but she’s not in the mood. What do you do then, guys? Do you force her?” So giving us a realistic situation that we’ve all come across. I think they talked about those roles.

Empty Chair

- *The role-playing where you took your partner's position ... pretending to be her. Taking that role on just opens your eyes to try (sigh) and empathize with the other person's position. To think from their point of view versus your own point because most people think of their own point of view. People say, "Try to see it my way." Right? And so that's the picture we get.*

- Where you had to act yourself and then sit in the other chair and act as the abused person was fantastic. You sit there as the one that's being abused, like holy crap, you can really see what you've done. You got tears running down, everybody did. Most of those young men were really honest and you could see the ones who were evasive but most of them were so forthright.

Accepting Responsibility

- *When you go to counselling they point out, “You can’t blame someone else for your anger.” That’s important because you can calm a serious situation by controlling your own temper. Then your partner calms down too and that’s what you wanted anyway.*

- After taking the program, I'm a firm believer [that] all people should take this program. High school is probably the best time to take a program like this because it teaches us a lot about human interaction behaviour and interpretation, everything from words to body language. I did learn things through the program that were beneficial to me.

- Coming in here and going through the program [Responsible Choices] definitely helped me to change. I think that I had the chance to see not just myself or what I come up with and got to deal with, but what other people go through and problems other people face. It could be a lot worse than it already is.

Conclusions from Qualitative

- More than half of the men had stayed with same partner. Supports the need for sustained change.
- Reverting to “He said, she said” is concerning. Need for refresher? Post group couple counselling?
- Descriptions of group components were powerful and suggest changes.

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