

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS: MEN, GENDER, AND VIOLENCE

By Fernando Mederos and Julia Perilla

PURPOSE

The battered women's movement made intimate partner violence a public issue in the 1960s. Since then members of this movement have engaged in a cultural conversation about the oppressiveness of masculinity (Connell, 1995, 2000), and have created institutional responses, spearheaded by the criminal justice system and batterer intervention programs, to re-educate and restrain abusers (Aldarondo & Mederos, 2002). This article will begin with a critical review of these institutional responses, and focuses on measures directed at abusers. The key questions we explore here are: 1) Do these institutional measures maximize safety and empowerment for all battered women? 2) Do they maximize the impact on abusers? 3) What alternatives and expansions of the current criminal justice response make sense? 4) What guiding principles should these new approaches follow? In this article, we also briefly describe five programs that are creating community-based responses to intimate partner violence and are expanding criminal justice approaches. Our companion paper posted on the Building Partnerships Initiative web site (at www.endabuse.org/bpi) describes these programs in greater detail.

BACKGROUND

The battered women's movement grew out of the women's liberation movement of the 1960s (Schechter, 1982). Initially, battered women's advocates created safe house networks and shelters for victims of violence, and advocated in state legislatures and criminal justice systems for effective interventions to protect victims of violence. These efforts resulted in the establishment of civil protective orders that direct abusers to stop abusive conduct, to leave a joint residence, to stay away from the victim and her workplace, and to give victims of violence temporary custody of children. Advocates also supported a strong criminal justice response, involving police, prosecutors, the judiciary, and probation departments, to protect victims of violence. They advocated for mandatory arrest policies and proactive prosecution of abusers. At the same time, battered women's advocates agitated for the establishment of educational programs for abusers (Mederos, 1999; Schechter, 1982). The first batterer intervention programs were established in the late 1970s. These programs provided an urgently needed alternative to mental health approaches that were largely ineffective with abusers. The goals of these programs were 1) to help men stop violent and abusive behavior, and 2) to take into account the safety of adult victims and their children. Early programs such as Amend, Emerge, and Raven pioneered group treatment approaches that accomplished these goals. These programs also provided a focal point for pro-feminist social justice activists, many of them men, who were interested in issues of gender justice and masculinity, and who wanted to end intimate partner violence.

COORDINATED COMMUNITY RESPONSE INITIATIVES

Initially, the criminal justice response to domestic violence heightened risk for many battered women because it was chaotic and uncoordinated (Pence, 1999). For example, when effective prosecution of abusers was followed by trivial sentences and ineffective monitoring during probation, the overall message for abusers was that their domestic assaults were not taken seriously. Eventually, this problem led to the creation of collaborations among the criminal justice system, battered women's services, batterer intervention programs, and other agencies (Pence, 1999). These collaborations are usually called coordinated community response

initiatives (CCRIs). The goals of CCRIs are to maximize safety for battered women, to hold abusers accountable, and to compel abusers to change their behavior or face imprisonment.

These initiatives typically include:

- Implementation of pro-arrest policies by the police;
- Proactive prosecution that is focused on victim safety;
- Effective judicial oversight of convicted offenders;
- Ongoing monitoring of abusers by probation officers;
- Batterer intervention programs that focus on behavior change;
- Imprisonment for abusers who violate probation or who re-assault or harass victims;
- Ongoing coordination with battered women's services; and
- Oversight of the process by battered women's advocates.

The CCRI is a life-saving innovation. It offers a protective framework for victims of violence and structures effective roles for institutions that previously ignored the plight of battered women. It has often provided the means to apprehend abusers and to compel them to stop their abuse. Current research demonstrates that the CCRI creates circumstances that help (or force) 80-90 percent of abusers to change their behavior and remain non-violent on a long-term basis (Gondolf, 2002).

The CCRI is also essential because it has involved state institutions in the effort to create and maintain a new standard of behavior in relationships. Many men understand that the system is likely to become involved in their lives if they physically abuse their partners. They know that the veil of privacy that used to cloak intimate relationships has changed. Nonetheless, it is also important to acknowledge that basic and coordinated protections for victims of violence are still missing in many locations. Although many towns and cities have implemented some aspects of CCRIs, many others have done little. We support the development of CCRIs as a basic protective framework for battered women. However, we do not believe that CCRIs alone can adequately address intimate partner violence.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF THE CCRI

Because they promise a valuable response in situations in which women and children are at risk, CCRIs have become the principal recipients of Violence Against Women Act and similar funding. However, there are unexpected negative consequences to making CCRIs the primary intervention with abusive men.

First, the CCRI serves few women. Most police departments report that the vast majority of women whose partners are arrested for assault do not pursue charges. In addition, the 2000 National Violence Against Women Survey indicates that 75 percent of intimate partner assaults are not reported to the authorities. Why? Battered women's advocates report that many women of color fear or mistrust the criminal justice system and believe it has an oppressive impact on men in their families. Many of these women are aware of the disproportionate levels of incarceration of men in their communities and of the historically oppressive impact of the criminal justice system on men of color. Likewise, many immigrant women avoid criminal justice system intervention because arrest results in the deportation of men who are undocumented or who have temporary work visas. Many immigrant women also associate law enforcement with the brutality that they suffered at the hands of the police in their countries of

origin. Finally, many women want the abuse to stop, but they do not want their partners to go to jail. Yet, the CCRI and measures such as arrest and prosecution are often the only resources directed at abusers. Even a well-functioning and comprehensive CCRI does not provide protective resources that can be accessed by all victims, particularly those who do not wish to prosecute their partners.

In addition, a CCRI reaches very few men. Unless an abuser is arrested for assault or for violating a restraining order, the CCRI will not reach him. A CCRI does not include outreach to abusers or to community members who are at risk of engaging in domestic violence. It does not reach men in community settings such as street corners, barber shops, bars, sports events, or neighborhood organizations. Similarly, there is no educational outreach for other men in the community who could serve as models of non-violent marital and parental roles.

The CCRI relies primarily on standardized batterer intervention programs that ignore other avenues of engagement with men. Although these programs excel at confronting underlying beliefs of male supremacy and can teach participants alternatives to coercive control in relationships, they give minimal attention to class, race, ethnicity, and other life context issues. Yet class, race, ethnicity and other issues can complicate or facilitate the change process for many abusers. The most widely implemented batterer intervention program models, such as EMERGE (Adams & Cayouette, 2002), Duluth (Pence & Paymar, 1990, 1993; Pence, 2002), *Manalive* (Sinclair, 1989, 2002) and Compassion Workshops (Stosny, 1995, 2002), take a color-blind, culturally generic approach that assumes there is a universal pattern of coercive control in relationships. They do not mobilize protective factors in different cultures, factors, for example, that support respectful relationships with women. They also do not acknowledge culture-specific forms of male privilege or different life challenges that men from diverse backgrounds have encountered. For example, these programs do not take into consideration that exposure to racism and violence makes it easier to adopt a rigid defensive/aggressive posture in intimate relations and that such experiences can reinforce existing gender norms that support male supremacy. These programs also cannot speak to different traditions of male identity that can be both risks factors as well as sources of pride and models of respectful relationships. In addition, standardized batterer intervention programs may be successful with mandated program participants, but have had very limited impact on men who are not mandated to attend.

Other factors undermine the positive impact of batterer intervention programs. One such factor is the sizable number of practitioners who adopt a confrontational and self-righteous tone in their programs. For many participants, this reproduces the hierarchical and oppressive relationships that they encounter in their daily lives and that abusers are being asked to stop using with their partners and children. Instead of providing non-violent models for relationships, this confrontational style increases the risk that abusers will adopt a defensive or falsely compliant stand during sessions, and then maintain a defensive or hostile attitude when they return home.

Finally, most men mandated to attend batterer intervention programs through the CCRI are poor, underemployed, or unemployed, and have low levels of educational attainment. The CCRI approach is not intended to address these issues. CCRI miss the opportunity to reach men while they are on probation, to help them attain education and employment goals. Such improvements in education and employment might enhance abusers' stake in conformity, and increase the probability that they will remain violence-free. This omission is aggravated by the fact that

abusers pay significant fees to participate in batterer intervention programs. For many indigent and low-income men, a registration fee of \$150 and a six-month minimum weekly fee of \$15 to \$25 are serious burdens. This fee structure is another obstacle to wider involvement in batterer intervention programs. Although understandable from a pragmatic and philosophical perspective, the historic decision not to fund batterer intervention programs at reasonable levels has served to further marginalize these programs.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE CCRI

These unintended impacts of CCRI do not negate the positive impact of a coordinated criminal justice response to intimate partner violence. CCRI remains a life-saving intervention whose absence deprives victims of violence of critical protections. Nevertheless, we believe that these unwanted consequences of the CCRI can be reduced and that a broader approach to abusers is possible, without undoing the benefits of the CCRI. It should be possible to create initiatives that:

1. Reach out, through preventative community education and early intervention activities, to abusers, to men who are at risk of becoming abusers, and to men who can act as educators for their peers.
2. Engage men in ways that reflect a deep knowledge of their cultural backgrounds, life challenges, and positive aspects of their traditions of manhood.
3. Engage a wide range of community agencies in educating and reaching out to men about ending intimate partner violence.

The initiatives described in greater detail in our companion paper (available at www.endabuse.org/bpi) illustrate these approaches. The Boston/Dorchester initiative includes a community outreach program and a culturally-based public education campaign, which are intended to reach men at the very early stages of their involvement with the criminal justice system, as well as to engage men who can educate their peers about ending intimate partner violence. Three Atlanta-based projects, Caminar Latino, Tapestri, and Men Stopping Violence, are all examples of culturally-based batterer intervention programs. These programs take into account how life challenges, such as oppression, poverty, and exposure to violence, can normalize abusive relationships with women. Caminar Latino, Tapestri, and Men Stopping Violence also structure the change process with abusers to reflect the positive aspects of their cultural background that are sources of pride and that facilitate respectful relationships with women. A social change perspective and a deliberate focus on community outreach are also core themes for these three programs. The Men's Nonviolence Project of the Texas Council on Family Violence is a statewide initiative focused on community organizing, education, and networking directed at helping men change their abusive behavior. Other goals of this project include encouraging approaches outside of the criminal justice system and improving the batterer intervention programs that are attached to that system.

CONCLUSION

These projects represent a preliminary step toward reaching abusers whose partners will never seek assistance from the criminal justice system or a shelter. Carrying this work forward calls for learning how men can talk to each other about intimate partner violence

and incorporate in these discussions the strengths and wisdom of their own cultures. It calls for men to learn to talk to each other in informal settings such as street corners, at home, at work, and at family gatherings. It calls for a careful combination of support, respect, and clear accountability. Without these dialogues, the movement to end intimate partner violence is reliant on a system that can reach only a small percentage of men who batter.

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