

“ Spotlight on perpetrators ”

Programmes for perpetrators are a successful means of intervention and a necessity if we are to minimise the damage done by domestic violence, argues **Jo Todd**, Director of Respect

RESPECT

Without intervention, domestic violence is likely to continue or escalate. To stop it we must focus on the perpetrator.

Respect is the UK association for domestic violence perpetrator programmes. It was set up in 2001 and provides support to organisations and individuals from the voluntary, private and statutory sectors. We work with the perpetrators of domestic violence, setting standards and promoting best practice across the UK.

This is a relatively new field in the UK – the first perpetrator programme was only set up in 1989. There are now around 30 community based projects across the country and the Probation Service is rolling out two programmes for convicted offenders. But convicted offenders account for only a small proportion of perpetrators, so community based programmes still need to be developed.

Every day our helpline takes calls from people who want to refer themselves to a perpetrator programme and we also hear from frontline workers who want to refer clients. But the truth is that in many areas of the country nothing is available at all. Recent research from the Department for Constitutional Affairs proposed that 150 perpetrator programmes were needed.

Male violence

The vast majority of domestic violence is perpetrated by men against women and this is reflected in the priorities of

most agencies within the sector. However, it's not the whole story, and currently there are only perpetrator programmes in the UK for men who are violent to women. We still need specialist services for those in same-sex relationships, and for women who are abusive to their male partners. Hopefully, funding will be available to develop work with these groups soon.

With the programmes we have got, we know that behaviour change is a long-term process, Programmes should run for at least 75 hours over a minimum of 30 weeks and employ a mixture of techniques, including cognitive behavioural therapy, small group work, interactive exercises, humanistic psychotherapy, role-play, pro-social modelling and motivational interviewing.

Challenging expectations

The programmes are based on a pro-feminist understanding of domestic violence, which recognises that the perpetrator is 100 per cent responsible for his behaviour; believes violence is a choice and intentional. It's imperative that the programmes explore a perpetrator's expectations of power over a partner, challenge their denial and justification, and examine the attitudes and beliefs they hold which support their use of violence and abuse.

The programmes must also work in ways that are meaningful to men from different cultures and backgrounds. They should acknowledge and question the social and gendered

context of domestic violence; develop men's capacity to understand the impact of their violence on their (ex)partners and children in the long and short term; develop men's ability to have safe and appropriate contact with their children and encourage men to adopt positive, respectful and egalitarian ways of being.

Effectiveness of programmes is difficult to measure, but for us it means the long-term safety of women and children. Of perpetrators who complete a domestic violence programme, some will stop their physical violence and significantly reduce their abusive and controlling behaviour, the majority will stop their violence but maintain some level of abusive and controlling behaviour, and some will continue their violence. Perpetrator programmes cannot 'cure' violent men – or guarantee dramatic transformation. However, they can reduce the dangerousness of many of the men they work with and in some cases bring about significant and lasting change.

When men attend a perpetrator programme, their behaviour is under scrutiny. Even in cases where men are not changing, the risks can be managed more effectively. That's a start. Perpetrator programmes have a key role to play in increasing women and children's safety – and we have a duty to ensure that they are available and accessible to all who need them.

Currently there are only perpetrator programmes in the UK for men who are violent to women

”



Contact The National Association for Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programmes and Associated Support Services, Respect at www.changeweb.org.uk/respect.htm