

Lessons from the Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme, for the implementation of Building Better Relationships

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Abstract

This paper offers reflections on the Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP), and its implications for the Building Better Relationships programme (BBR), which has now replaced IDAP as the main criminal justice intervention for male domestic violence perpetrators in England and Wales. While the BBR programme should be regarded with optimism, many of the principles underpinning IDAP are of ongoing relevance for practice with abusive men. There has been a tendency to distort IDAP and the broader Duluth model in discussions of interventions for perpetrators of domestic abuse. Although the BBR programme constitutes some changes of direction, its successful implementation requires continuity in the application of facilitator judgement, knowledge of group dynamics, non-judgemental dialogue, willingness to ‘challenge’, and responsiveness to individual service users.

Keywords

accredited programmes, desistance, domestic violence, effective practice, engagement, group work, relationships

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Introduction

The Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP) was accredited in 2004, and rolled out across probation services in England and Wales. The phasing out of the programme commenced in 2013 (Bloomfield and Dixon, 2015). This followed criticisms of its effectiveness, content and style (Dutton and Corvo, 2006). IDAP continued to be delivered in some areas until 2015, during a transition period which saw its replacement with the Building Better Relationships programme (BBR). Drawing on research undertaken as part of a PhD (between 2014 and 2016), and wider literature, this paper argues that many criticisms of IDAP, and the broader Duluth model on which it is based, misrepresent the way in which these programmes are delivered, and distort their theoretical base. Additionally, there has been a tendency to overlook empirical evidence which indicates that Duluth style programmes can have a modest but significant impact when appropriately targeted and delivered (Kelly and Westmarland, 2015). The contributions of IDAP should not, therefore, be dismissed: there are learning points which have emerged through its delivery, which are relevant to the ongoing development of effective practice. There is a risk that the approaches of IDAP and BBR are polarized, with the former characterized as being theoretically rigid and confrontational, and the latter being presented as theoretically flexible and therapeutic. This dichotomy obscures the complex dynamics involved in the delivery of interventions with abusive men. BBR's emphasis on a non-confrontational and engaging style is positive. However, while it purports to have a therapeutic theoretical basis, it has a heavily structured design. This risks undermining a dynamic and responsive approach to participants.

Based on the above, the application of 'programme integrity' requires reflection (Phillips, 2015). There is a need to balance consistency of the delivery of content with an approach which gives sufficient space to facilitators to engage participants and explore emerging themes. Evaluations and practice guidance have tended to focus on content rather than the processes of delivery, or the experiences of those who have delivered and attended perpetrator programmes. Factoring into 'programme integrity' issues of 'style of delivery', 'ethos' and the management of group dynamics is likely to be of benefit in understanding effectiveness. Many evaluations rest on reconviction data, to demonstrate *which* programmes are most effective; this paper seeks to contribute to an understanding of *how* particular programmes work, and which aspects are experienced as most significant by men attending the group and facilitators. The transition from IDAP to BBR has occurred during a substantial reorganization of probation services, under the 'Transforming Rehabilitation' (TR) agenda. Responsibility for domestic violence programmes has been transferred to Community Rehabilitations Companies (CRCs), which are located in the private sector. While this is likely to be of considerable significance for the delivery of programmes, and prompts consideration about how domestic abuse is understood and managed (Gilbert, 2013), these issues are beyond the scope of this paper.

Methods

The reflections in this paper are drawn in part from a research study involving participant observation, undertaken while the author worked as a group facilitator for both IDAP and BBR, between 2014 and 2016. This was combined with interviews with service users who had attended the programmes, and with facilitators who had delivered them. Some direct comments from facilitators and service users are included. These are not presented as being representative; rather, they are provided to illustrate relevant themes which emerged.

The author co-facilitated a complete IDAP course (27 core sessions) and a complete BBR course (24 core sessions). During the delivery of IDAP, 20 service users participated in the programme, with one failing to complete it. IDAP was delivered in a rolling format with men commencing and leaving the programme at each module.¹ The BBR programme commenced with ten men, six of whom completed it. Both programmes involve work with participants in 'pre' and 'post' core group sessions. This is likely to be of significance. However, a focus on these aspects was beyond the scope of this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six group facilitators. This included all members of staff who had delivered the programme in the area where the research was being undertaken, excluding two who were unavailable. Eight men who had recently completed each group were interviewed (four IDAP and four BBR). The research was undertaken in an area with limited ethnic diversity. Most participants defined themselves as white British. The youngest participant was 21 and the oldest 70. Most of the facilitators also self-defined as white British. Most of the facilitators were women. Only two of the six interviewed were men.

The choice of methods reflects the exploratory nature of the research. It rests on a small number of people and therefore no claims of generalizability are made. Nonetheless, it aims to illuminate dynamic and interpersonal processes in group delivery, and shed light on how group programmes are experienced. Participant observation is problematic for several reasons. Reliability, ethics, note taking and the lack of distance between researcher and participants are among the issues involved.² Inevitably, the researcher brings his own perspectives to the interpretation and selection of data. Nevertheless, this method was crucial in developing an understanding of how perpetrators responded to the programme material, to facilitators, and to each other, during delivery. This approach also facilitated access to participants who may have been unwilling or unable to engage with other methods of data collection. I endeavoured to maintain a reflective approach and sought to capture incidents and statements which highlighted how individuals respond to domestic abuse programmes.

Semi-structured interviews with participants and facilitators were conducted to explore perceptions that were not observable within group sessions. These included facilitators' views about the difficulties posed by some group members and the programme material. It also offered the opportunity to explore more detailed and personal reflections with men attending the groups. I was known by some of those I interviewed as a group facilitator. Mindful of the ethical issues involved, I expressed

clearly to facilitators that the interview process was not an assessment of their work, and to perpetrators that it was not an assessment of progress or risk. While there are possible pitfalls of this dual role, detailed knowledge of the two programmes enabled me to explore more aspects than an external evaluator.

The Duluth basis of IDAP

The Duluth domestic violence project has been of significance in establishing a model of intervention based on feminist principles (Pence and Paymar, 1993; Dobash et al., 2000). This programme has had a substantial influence on the development of other perpetrator programmes (Bowen, 2011). As its name suggests, the programme has its origins in Duluth, Minnesota, where it was created by Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar during the 1980s. It is explicitly feminist in its theoretical basis and views violence against women as being rooted in patriarchy and male entitlement. The programme is closely associated with the 'Power and Control Wheel' (DAIP [Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs], 2015). This was developed from support groups with abused women and is used to demonstrate how violence is located within a range of strategies used by men to exert control in relationships. The areas in which abuse occurs are included on the wheel: emotional abuse, isolation, blame, parenting, threats and intimidation, financial abuse, and the use of male privilege. These are reinforced by physical and sexual violence.

Duluth-style perpetrator programmes are comprised of modules relating to each aspect of the wheel. Men attending these programmes are required to complete 'control logs' to identify their own abusive behaviour and recognize it as a means of exerting control over intimate partners. Men are also encouraged to explore the way in which these behaviours undermine relationships based on mutual respect and equality. They are introduced to a range of skills including 'positive self-talk', 'time outs', and 'letting go', which aim to promote self-awareness, emotional management and increased knowledge of the perspectives of others.

Men who attend Duluth-style programmes are likely to experience the exploration of their use of abusive behaviour as challenging. Some commentators, including the creators of the programme, stress that abusive men often deny their behaviour, deny its seriousness, or deflect responsibility for it. For example, men participating in perpetrator groups will often externalize their behaviour by associating it with perceived provocation from their partners. They may refer to their violence as self-defence (even in the context of significant physical injury to their partners) and they may attribute their behaviour to alcohol or emotional distress. Perpetrators may also create narratives which minimize their behaviour through the use of words such as 'only' and 'just' (Kelly and Westmarland, 2016). Furthermore, they are likely to refer to their abuse as isolated instances (Radford and Harne, 2008). In some cases, instances of physical violence may be relatively infrequent. However, these are sufficient to reinforce other methods of control by asserting the threat of violence if requests and demands are not met. For many individuals subjected to sustained patterns of abuse the 'denial and blame' exhibited by perpetrators form part of this

experience (Dobash et al., 2000) and, as such, are explored and challenged within the programme.

The Duluth model focuses on the gendered beliefs underpinning violence and abuse, and views these beliefs as 'learned'. According to the theoretical premise of the Duluth model, men with patterns of abuse often hold beliefs and perspectives which reinforce, justify and encourage the use of violence against partners. For example, men who use violence in relationships are seen to hold beliefs which are explicitly misogynistic, or are grounded in notions of innate gender differences and the legitimacy of gendered roles. Abuse is seen to occur most frequently when male authority is challenged (Pence and Paymar, 1993; Dobash et al., 2000). Within this understanding the role of the participant's identity, and its interaction with their sense of masculinity, is central. This is a recurring theme within group sessions. The Duluth model emphasizes that perpetrator programmes will be ineffective if they are not situated within a broader set of community and criminal justice responses, where the primary aim is the safety of victims (Pence and McDonnell, 2000). Those who drove the establishment of the model created agreements with other agencies, including the police, probation services and organizations providing direct support to victims, to ensure consistency of practice in holding perpetrators to account for their abuse, treating their behaviour as a criminal offence and recognizing potential risks.

Integrating Duluth into 'What Works'

While on the one hand IDAP was based upon feminist informed practice, and specifically the Duluth model, it was also explicitly a product of the 'What Works' initiative, which emerged in the late 20th century. This reflected a renewed confidence in the potential of criminal justice interventions to have a discernible impact on re-offending, where they involved specific elements. From some perspectives, these influences involved inherent contradictions (Bowen, 2011). The 'What Works' literature suggested, based on meta-analytical studies, that interventions were likely to have a significant impact where they included a number of key elements (Chapman and Hough, 1998; Underdown, 1998; McGuire, 2005). Specifically, the 'What Works' initiative suggested that effective interventions are underpinned by cognitive behaviour psychology. Deviant behaviour is seen as learnt in a social context, and reinforced by the thoughts and feelings that individuals experience. Programmes which challenge such thoughts and beliefs, and encourage pro-social attitudes, are therefore understood as a means of effecting changes in behaviour. Other key elements identified in the 'What Works' literature suggested that the intensity of the intervention should reflect the level of risk posed, and factors that are evidentially related to offending behaviour should be targeted. This is contrasted with targeting factors which the individual service user may experience as most pressing. Additionally, effective programmes were associated with a high degree of 'programme integrity', suggesting that they should be delivered in accordance with their original design and do not digress because of the theoretical or practical preferences of the practitioners, or because of the particular

agendas or priorities of service users. Effective programmes were also identified as being 'responsive' to the specific needs and preferred learning styles of service users. Arguably this conflicts with the emphasis on integrity, which requires a degree of standardization, and a requirement to focus only on areas which the current evidence base links to re-offending (Hughes, 2014).

A number of group-based interventions were developed and delivered within the probation and prison services of England and Wales during the first decade of the 21st century, under a rigorous accreditation process which aimed to integrate the principles of effective practice (Raynor and Rex, 2007). Initially, general offending programmes were delivered. These were followed by offence specific programmes, including IDAP, which became a core community justice intervention for those convicted of domestic abuse. It includes cognitive behavioural principles and other elements reflecting the 'What Works' ingredients. However, it was distinct from other accredited programmes: it was informed by a feminist understanding of domestic abuse, and stressed the role of social and cultural factors (Bullock et al., 2010). It followed the design of the Duluth programme described above, with modules based on areas within the power and control wheel, and required participants to complete 'control logs'. IDAP was also supported by a 'women's safety worker' who was required to pro-actively contact and support victims.

The development and implementation of IDAP therefore involved a set of balances and can be understood as an attempt to incorporate a feminist understanding of domestic abuse into probation practice. However, the organizational culture in which the Duluth perpetrator programme emerged was distinct from that of the probation service in which IDAP was created and accredited. The bureaucratic culture of the probation service, combined with the interpretation and management of integrity, held specific implications for how it was delivered, managed and understood (Philips, 2015).

Criticisms of the Duluth model

The cessation of IDAP was prompted by several developments. These have included criticisms about its impact, style and theoretical basis (Dutton and Corvo, 2006). Specifically, these have centred on the perceived failure of IDAP (and the broader Duluth programme) to respond to the diverse range of factors and motivations underpinning domestic violence. Critics have suggested that both are confrontational rather than therapeutic, and tend to foster a dismissive approach to the difficulties that perpetrators of domestic abuse experience (Dutton and Corvo, 2006; Morran, 2013). Arguably, within Duluth programmes, expressions of such difficulties by perpetrators are perceived as attempts to deny responsibility. More broadly, there was a decline of optimism in the potential of standardized probation group work programmes, developed under the initial 'What Works' initiative, to deliver the impact that was hoped. In particular, these criticisms have drawn on the failure of such programmes to be sufficiently responsive to individual perspectives and circumstances, combined with a more pessimistic interpretation of their capacity to reduce re-offending (Mair, 2004; Porporino, 2010).

These criticisms prompted a substantial revision of practice guidance. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) began to drive an 'Offender Engagement Programme' (Rex, 2012). This attempted to incorporate new principles into practice, based on research themes which were not given substantial emphasis by the initial 'What Works' agenda, including an emphasis on actively engaging service users. This emphasis requires sensitivity to the specific motivations, understandings and goals that they bring. While 'responsivity' had previously been identified as a key element of effective practice, initial programmes placed greater emphasis on the pre-determined content of the interventions. Arguably, a fairly dismissive approach towards professional relationships and the specific motivations of service users was in evidence in earlier accredited programmes (Burnett et al., 2007). In contrast, the Offender Engagement Programme accords significance to professional relationships in enabling service users to develop positive goals. The role of protective factors is emphasized, in contrast to only focusing on risk factors (Maruna, 2001; McNeill, 2006; Canton, 2011). In associated practice guidance, these factors have been linked with the need for professional judgement in assessing service user needs and providing them with support (Rex, 2012). Logically, such judgements are a prerequisite for an approach which is responsive and individualized. Additionally, practice revisions, drawn on research, have suggested that the construction of a non-offending identity plays an important role in encouraging a move away from offending behaviour (Maruna, 2001; McNeill, 2006).

IDAP and the broader Duluth model of intervention has been subject to specific criticisms based on a perceived lack of attention to 'offender engagement' and individualized understandings. For some, this explains why research evaluations indicate a lack of impact (Dutton, 2006). Critics have claimed that the Duluth programme's rigid feminist theoretical premise has prevented recognition of the individualized difficulties of perpetrators, and treats them as a homogenous group. Recognition of these considerations is regarded as essential for developing a personalized approach which engages perpetrators in a process of change, and targets the specific factors that are related to ongoing abuse in each individual case. For many critics, the Duluth model's identification of 'control' as the central motivation for abusive behaviours results in other explanations being excluded and a failure to consider some of the complex circumstances which can underlie abusive behaviour (Cavanaugh and Gelles, 2005). For example, abusive behaviour may in some instances be associated with personal trauma, poor attachments in childhood, fear of abandonment and low self-esteem, and substance misuse, rather than simply reflecting patriarchal attitudes (Morran, 2013). Within this understanding, it is possible that men may invest in patriarchal beliefs to justify their abusive behaviours, but this does not necessarily mean that patriarchal beliefs are the fundamental cause. Related to this, the denial or minimization of abuse may not indicate beliefs which support abuse. Instead, 'denial' may reflect emotional difficulty and shame which individuals experience in coming to terms with the harm they have caused. On this basis, there is likely to be scope for further consideration of practice responses to denial (Sykes and Matza, 1957; Scott and Straus, 2007).

The efforts to develop interventions based on these themes have been described as in juxtaposition to the feminist principles underpinning the Duluth model. As Morran (2013: 307) has articulated:

In brief, the Duluth model programme regards men's violence and oppression largely as a consequence of patriarchal conditioning. It is not greatly concerned with men's underlying issues; indeed its protagonists are arguably at logger heads with those (particularly in the USA) who advocate the need for more therapeutic interventions with men.

Building Better Relationships

The BBR programme marks a shift away from the feminist understandings on which IDAP is based. Emphasis is placed on developing an understanding of the circumstances in which aggression can occur, through application of the General Aggression Mode (GAM) (Anderson and Bushman, 2002). This model encourages a sophisticated analysis of the complex and interrelated factors involved in relationship aggression. The GAM accommodates the role of individual learning history, circumstantial factors, substance misuse, emotions and thoughts in the development of an understanding of interpersonal violence. The BBR programme includes therapeutic techniques to promote emotional management, such as 'mindfulness', with practical exercises to provide participants with the opportunity to develop and practise this skill. BBR attempts to incorporate within its design research evidence which highlights the role of offender engagement and the development of a positive non-offending identity. For example, through the completion of 'identity maps', men are encouraged to consider various aspects of themselves in relation to others. BBR also supports the development of professional relationships by encouraging designated facilitators for each participant and integrated one-to-one sessions.

The BBR programme consists of four core modules. The first introduces some of the overarching concepts on which the programme rests, such as the 'General Aggression Model'. The second explores the role of thoughts, the third looks at emotions, and the final module looks more directly at aggression in relationships. Ostensibly, the programme responds to some of the criticism of IDAP and Duluth. The BBR programme material is far less direct in confronting participants or encouraging them to explore previous abusive behaviours and its effects. It seeks to address a range of factors which research suggests are related to abuse. These elements have potential, but their application in work with domestically abusive men lacks a clear evidence base at the time of writing.

Perceptions of BBR

All but one of the six facilitators interviewed were largely positive about BBR, citing the greater diversity of learning materials and, for some, the 'gentle' approach. All

identified that one of the main challenges in facilitating IDAP had been dealing with the defensiveness that some of the material prompted, and they therefore felt that BBR reduced some of the barriers to engagement with some men. One of the key challenges that facilitators identified was the heavily structured content of the programme, and the substantial amount of material to be delivered (the manual often has more than 20 pages per session). As one facilitator described in interview:

There is a lot to get through in each session, and you end up having to shut the men down to try and get through it. It is a balance to deliver the programme while at the same time letting them have their say. (Facilitator 1)

All facilitators shared concerns about the quantity of material and its impact on devoting time to the perspectives of participants or attention to group processes, such as group members establishing working relationships, and giving attention to resistance. A key concern of all facilitators was about deviating from the material, because of the need to maintain programme integrity. All the facilitators reported that they found some of the material in BBR complex and intellectually demanding, and therefore had difficulty delivering these parts to some service users. The BBR programme involves some abstract constructs (such as the GAM) and problem-solving skills involving detailed steps. Nevertheless, facilitators displayed skill in explaining and illustrating the material, relating it where possible to the individual circumstances of participants. Four of the six facilitators described concerns that the BBR material did not sufficiently 'challenge' men attending the programme about their abusive behaviour, and was superficial in encouraging the perpetrators to explore their own attitudes, beliefs and backgrounds. As one facilitator described it:

It feels like we can go through almost the entire programme without actually getting to know them that well, or look at the reasons why they are here. It doesn't really confront them and get them to acknowledge their own behaviour. (Facilitator 2)

All four service user interviewees, who completed BBR, referred to an increased self-awareness. They reported that they felt more able to keep calm, and were better able to respond appropriately to conflict within intimate relationships and manage negative emotions. Such sentiments were expressed with consistency during review sessions of the programme. The men who had completed the BBR programme also described a sense that their own perceptions and understandings were not undermined, and that they did not feel that assumptions were made about them. Notably, one perpetrator, who was very resistant, had previously commenced IDAP. During IDAP, he felt that assumptions were made about the reasons why he was angry, and that his own understanding was dismissed:

The bloke [the facilitator] said to me, your anger has got nothing to do with your mental health. If I had carried on with that I would have ended up lumping him, so I walked out. This programme [BBR] is different, and I've take a lot of stuff from it. (BBR Service User 1)

Similarly, those interviewed, and other participants in the programme, expressed appreciation for not being excessively criticized for past mistakes. Interestingly, however, during the course of the BBR programme two service users expressed surprise that they had not been required to disclose their behaviour at an early stage, and were eager to do so. During the delivery of sessions, the completion of identity maps, although requiring careful explanation by facilitators, was an activity that service users responded to positively.

Though the service users attending the programme were positive about the overall experience, all four had difficulty recalling specific details of the material. Similarly, most participants expressed difficulty recalling the previous week's material during group sessions. Nevertheless, there were some elements that the participants who were interviewed could recall. 'The helicopter view', which is taught on the programme as a tool to encourage participants to consider a range of perspectives, was cited by all four who were interviewed. Although they didn't recall the specific steps involved, it was described as a helpful means of interrupting aggressive thoughts and feelings, and preventing a loss of emotional control. Similarly, this model was frequently recalled by group members during the delivery of group sessions, when they were asked to identify specific learning points.

For service users, the most important ingredients associated with a positive group experience were mutual support from other men on the programme, and the non-judgemental approach of the facilitators

Perceptions of IDAP

All of the facilitators interviewed expressed positive views about IDAP, although two were pleased to see that it had now been replaced, and explicitly preferred delivering BBR. The other four expressed a preference for IDAP, although this may have resulted in part from the greater familiarity with this programme. Specific challenges, which all facilitators shared, were that some of the materials in the programme prompted defensiveness among the men: some of the wording on the 'control logs' were identified. These contain fairly frank statements, which invite the men to identify their own abusive behaviours. For example, for 'module one' the subheading of the control log men are required to complete is: 'An incident when you physically abused your partner'. For module eight, the subtitle is: 'An incident when you used issues about children to manipulate your partner or ex-partner'.

Facilitators identified that men would sometimes respond with hostility to these kinds of statements and refute that they had engaged in the behaviour described. Related to this, all the facilitators described challenges in getting men to acknowledge that they had behaved abusively in the past. Nevertheless, facilitators described service users as becoming more willing to complete and share control logs as the programme progressed. This was evident during delivery of the programmes when 'control logs' would often prompt reflective discussions, where men were able to acknowledge their previous abuse, consider the context in which it occurred, and recognize that it did not support their relationship goals.

Two facilitators identified frustrations with what they perceived as the repetitive nature of the programme, resulting from the same structure of each module. In some cases, this was illustrated during the sessions, when some participants would refer to the same piece of behaviour for every module on the programme.

Though all the facilitators identified challenges in the delivery of IDAP, all were positive about its value. All described observable changes in the attitudes and beliefs of the service users as they moved through the programme. Specifically, facilitators identified that IDAP had a degree of flexibility, creating scope to use discretion and professional judgement to engage in dialogue with the service users. Two explicitly contrasted IDAP with many other accredited programmes, including BBR, where there was a much more prescriptive structure. While acknowledging the IDAP was challenging for service users, all but one of the facilitators commented on the scope of IDAP to inculcate in-depth reflection, an acknowledgement of responsibility for past abuse, and a commitment to non-abusive behaviour.

As with BBR service users, the perpetrators who attended IDAP referred to a greater sense of self-awareness and a greater ability to manage negative emotions. They specifically referred to the value of skills such as 'time-out', 'letting go' and 'positive self-talk'. The men who attended IDAP also described an increasing ability to acknowledge their past behaviour, and commit to avoiding it, in a space where they felt confident that they would not be judged. The perceptions among service users, that they were surprised by the extent to which they found themselves engaging in reflective discussions about their own beliefs and past behaviour, frequently emerged. As one participant stated within a group session which explored 'sexual respect':

I thought this would be challenging when we started talking about sexual stuff, but the way it has been discussed it makes sense. My offence was around sexual boundaries and sexual disrespect, and I've been able to talk about that. (Service User 4)

Service users observed the space within the programme to explore their own current concerns. One service user, who had previously attended a general offending behaviour programme, gave an illustration to this notion of 'space' and the development of 'openness' during a session where he summarized the programme to a new member:

I know I was a nightmare at first but I have got a lot from this programme. It's not like 'Think First'. With this you get to talk about stuff, and you have to be honest. (Service User 5)

Reflecting this theme, another participant drew a direct parallel between IDAP and AA, reflecting the shared elements of group dynamics and reflection:

Why this group works is because it gives me time to think, just like my AA meetings. In day-to-day situations I tell myself just think, think, think. (Service User 6)

As with BBR, the most significant elements of the programme for service users were the positive relationships that were established with facilitators and other men attending the programme. Service users referred to the presence of mutual respect, sharing concerns, offering and receiving encouragement, and on occasion being challenged.

The following interaction illustrates some of the regular themes within IDAP delivery, where group dynamics and interactions can foster a reflective dialogue which, in contrast to some criticisms, is not dismissive of the difficulties that men have experienced. In this exchange, one participant, who had been relatively confrontational at the start of the programme, and reluctant to relay any emotional difficulties he had experienced, described to the group the context of an incident where he had behaved abusively in the past:

I was suicidal and drank loads and took loads [of] prescribed medicine. But I am different now. I love my work and I see my boys. I'm less aggressive and I let things go. (Service User 7)

The participant received praise from other members of the group with one participant articulating support:

It was good to hear a traditional man being so open. I think he has come a long way on this group, like we all have. (Service User 8)

While it is important to maintain caution in accepting accounts as indicative of concrete changes in behaviour or attitude, such exchanges do indicate participation in a reflective dialogue among participants, as well as some implicit consideration of the constraints of traditional forms of masculinity in managing emotional difficulty.

The learning points

At first glance, IDAP and Duluth could be understood as contrasting with BBR, with the latter's emphasis on a non-confrontational approach and a complex understanding of domestic abuse. The feminist principles underpinning IDAP and Duluth insist that the beliefs and behaviours of participants are challenged. For many participants, this is a difficult experience and prompts shame and defensiveness. However, this need to 'challenge' is balanced with an emphasis on a flexible and non-judgemental approach, which is responsive to the perspectives of participants. Rather than being counterproductive, 'challenging' destructive behaviour can be effective when it is done carefully and skilfully. Arguably the requirement to 'confront' and 'challenge' is an important component of any therapeutic intervention which seeks to change destructive or damaging behaviour. As Gondolf (2007: 5) suggests:

... the question about confrontation is not should it be done, but how it is to be done. If confrontation is antagonistic, hostile or accusatory it can, for sure, be detrimental or

counterproductive. However, most experienced counsellors 'confront' in a more subtle and encouraging manner, but they still expose and redirect the rationalizations that underlie abuse.

IDAP participants are encouraged to explore the contradictions of their beliefs and aspirations, and the gendered nature of their identities. Similarly, participants are given a degree of space to develop their own concerns.

There has been a tendency to criticize Duluth-style programmes as being driven by ideological imperatives rather than empirical evidence (Dutton and Corvo, 2006). However, these criticisms have failed to sufficiently understand the dynamic and therapeutic elements of these programmes, and have tended to caricature their feminist theoretical premise. These considerations are relevant in understanding a number of other programmes developed within the 'What Works' era. Critics who suggest that 'What Works' based programmes are unresponsive fail to take into consideration the manner in which facilitators have interpreted and delivered the material in a way that seeks to engage those attending, using a complex skill set revolving around a non-judgemental approach and motivational skills (McGuire, 2005). Facilitators, as well as service users, bring narratives and individualized understandings to programmes of intervention. Many discussions regarding the relative merits of different approaches of working with service users in groups tend to implicitly depict staff as fixed variables who deliver interventions in a standardized and automatic manner. As such, the dynamic interactions between service users and facilitators are overlooked. There is considerable evidence that these interactions, and the relationships between service users and practitioners, are at least of equal importance to the content of a given intervention (Maruna, 2001; McNeill, 2006; Hughes, 2014). It is of significance that IDAP provided a considerable degree of space within its design structure to allow for these dynamics. Seen in this context, the Duluth style of intervention can be recognized as part of a therapeutic approach in which men are encouraged to explore their thoughts, feelings, concerns, and masculinity. They are not simply confronted or challenged in a counter-productive way.

While a review of re-offending outcomes is not the focus of this article, a brief consideration of data is helpful in contextualizing some of the criticism of Duluth-style programmes. There is consistent evidence that Duluth-style programmes of intervention can have positive impacts. For example, Dobash et al. (2000) conducted a three-year review of two feminist-based perpetrator programmes in the UK. The findings suggested that where these were managed with care and sensitivity, they were more effective than other forms of criminal justice interventions in reducing abusive behaviour. A more recent evaluation of Duluth-style perpetrator programmes focused on their impact when participants are not referred through the criminal justice system (Kelly and Westmarland, 2015). The research employed a multi-layered approach, involving data collection from stakeholders who included men who attended the programmes and women who had been subjected to abuse. The research sought to include within the measures of impact the key expectations of women whose partners were attending the programme. This not only included

ending physical violence, but also other measures, such as respectful communication and space to act independently. Additionally, the perpetrator programmes were considered in the context of the broader community responses in which they took place, with the acknowledgement that male perpetrator programmes do not act independently. While the authors are tentative, the findings indicate a positive impact across almost all the measures employed, and some measures being marked by substantial improvements. This evaluation highlights that there is a lack of data regarding the broad impact of specific programmes. Previous evaluations have tended to focus on a straightforward assessment of whether programmes 'work', or 'not'. Such an approach obscures the capacity of interventions to inculcate a reduction of abusive conduct across a range of measures, acknowledging that they are unlikely to result in a complete cessation of abusive behaviour.

Significantly, there is some evidence to suggest that while the community programmes referred to in the evaluation described above are attentive to the issues of programme integrity, this is interpreted more broadly than is the case within the probation and prison settings. For example, rather than referring to a rigorous delivery of the content, integrity is also understood as referring to the style and approach adopted, which includes a recognition of the need to be adaptable with the material and responsive to the perspectives and needs of the participants (Phillips, 2015). Additional evidence supporting the effectiveness of IDAP has emerged in a large-scale evaluation involving 2645 individuals who had completed the programme, with a control group of 1605, over a two-year period. A two-year follow up indicated an 11 per cent reduction in domestic violence re-offending compared to the control group. While the authors acknowledge that this impact appears to be modest, it is nevertheless significant (Bloomfield and Dixon, 2015). At the time of writing, comparable data on BBR are not available.

Conclusion and summary

This paper documents the move away from IDAP as a central community justice intervention for abusive men, driven by the view that it is unresponsive to the diverse perspectives and circumstances of participants, that it is excessively confrontational, and that it has a rigid theoretical basis linked to a feminist perspective. Such critiques overlook the therapeutic elements implicit in IDAP and the complex interactions and interpretations involved in group delivery, as well as the skill of group work staff. The evaluations available do not give sufficient consideration to how and why programmes work, and which ingredients produce positive outcomes. Relationships between facilitators and service users, the style of delivery and group interactions are likely to be important. Where appropriately facilitated, both IDAP and BBR can prompt the participants to consider their individual backgrounds, beliefs and identities, and their masculine roles. They contain considerable scope for the men to engage in an individualized experience, where they become more self-aware and more skilled in avoiding abuse towards intimate partners.

The move away from IDAP took place amid a general revision of accredited programmes which has had the aim of making them more engaging and sensitive to

a diversity of needs (Travers, 2012). Reflections on these themes are important for acknowledging the complexity of domestic abuse, and prompt ongoing consideration of the need for interventions to be responsive and individualized. However, the apparent dichotomy between IDAP being intervention and BBR being a therapeutic approach overlooks the therapeutic elements involved in IDAP and obscures some of the elements of BBR, which run counter to developing an engaging and responsive approach. While BBR contains many therapeutic elements, its structured nature risks diverting attention away from developing skilled staff practice. It was evident during both the interviews and the completion of observations that skilled practitioners can create a therapeutic environment and are able to adapt programme material to the needs of the group they are working with, within both BBR and IDAP.

Ensuring that facilitators are given confidence to develop professional relationships and consider the role of style, over content, within a wider understanding of programme integrity appears to be important for the success of BBR. Equally, acknowledging that 'confronting' and 'challenging' the beliefs and behaviours of service users is a valuable aspect of practice rather than inherently counterproductive appears to be important. There is likely to be benefit in a greater focus on identifying the specific skills required to foster effectiveness, and how staff who facilitate programmes can be supported in developing these. An acknowledgement of effective elements of IDAP, including its relatively flexible design, its feminist attention to masculinity and gender roles, as well as its emphasis on confronting and challenging service users, is important. It seems likely that the important ingredient of both programmes consists of the tools they provide to facilitators to create a safe space for reflection. These elements require an understanding of programme integrity, which balances the need for a structured approach with the need to be sufficiently responsive, and which emphasizes the importance of facilitation style and group dynamics.

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Notes

1. The 'rolling format' required facilitators to continuously deliver each of the nine core modules on a rotational basis. Men attending the programme would join the group after completing the necessary pre-group work, when the next module started, irrespective of

which module this was. At any given point, there would be men who were at various stages of the programme in one group. Men were not permitted to commence the programme with the 'Sexual Respect' module because of the challenging nature of the material covered.

2. The data collected during participant observation of the programmes was done so without disclosing to group members that research was being undertaken. The decision not to inform them was to enable observation of group processes in a natural setting. All data was carefully anonymized. The research was carried out with the approval of the relevant probation agency and the supervising university's ethics committee.

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