
Interviews with Mandated Men Regarding the Criminal Justice Process and Calgary Counselling Centre's Responsible Choices for Men Program



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Executive Summary

The serious nature of intimate partner violence and the harm to women and their children has been acknowledged in numerous documents (Statistics Canada, 2005; Tutty & Goard, 2002). The criminal justice system is an institution that deals with a high number of cases of domestic assaults yearly (Tutty, Koshan, Jesso, Ogden & Warrell, 2011; Ursel, Tutty & LeMaistre, 2008a).

Batterer intervention programs are a key strategy of specialized community and criminal justice responses to domestic violence. They often serve as the primary intervention for first time or “low risk” offenders (in Calgary, attending a batterer program is often attached to a peace bond or a sentence imposed by the court system).

The current research was conducted as one component of a larger evaluation of the specialized court process in Calgary. It provides important feedback from 17 men mandated by the specialized domestic violence court to Calgary Counselling’s Responsible Choices for Men’s Groups. In in-depth interviews, the group members were asked about their perceptions of the partner abuse, the manner in which the criminal justice system (police, courts, probation) responded and their views of the Responsible Choices for Men program, with a focus on what was working well and recommendations for improvement.

Specialized Domestic Violence Courts

Beginning with the development of the court in Winnipeg in 1991, specialized domestic violence courts have become increasingly common across Canada, with the goal of more effectively addressing the criminal justice response to domestic violence. Calgary’s model developed in early 1999 with the input of key players from not only the criminal justice institutions such as police services, the Crown Prosecutor offices, probation, Legal Aid and the defence bar, but also community agencies that offer batterer intervention programs and support, shelter and advocacy for victims. The model was innovative, with the initial emphasis on a specialized domestic violence docket court with the aim of speeding up the process for those charges with domestic abuse offences to both allow low risk offenders to take responsibility for their actions and speed their entry into treatment. Such actions were thought to better safeguard victims, both because their partners were mandated to treatment much earlier, and to prevent repercussions to victims who, if the case proceeded to court, might be required to testify.

One of the key elements of the process is the court “team,” perceived by many as the “backbone” of the process. The team includes specialists from the Crown prosecutor’s office and probation office, a member of the Domestic Conflict Unit of Calgary Police Services and domestic court caseworkers from HomeFront, the non-profit agency that supports the court processes with domestic court case workers and other initiatives.

The pre-court conferences involve all the court team members to ensure that relevant information is provided or confirmed regarding victim concerns/wishes and the conditions requested. A major undertaking of the court team is to assess risk in order to attain or maintain the safety of victims and their children. The Crown prosecutors assess risk and recommend to the judge and defence counsel the directions that they consider most appropriate in each case. Their recommendations are based upon information and assessments provided to them during “pre-court conferences” that occur prior to case resolutions or bail hearings each day and for every file.

The evaluation of the specialized domestic violence first appearance court (Tutty et al., 2011) validated that accused receiving the option of having their charges withdrawn and given a

peace bond (typically mandating them to treatment such as intervention for batterers or substance abuse) reoffend at a much lower rate than those who receive other dispositions.

Batterer Intervention Programs

Batterer intervention programs, almost exclusively offered in a group format, were first developed in the late 1970s based on concerns expressed by advocates for abused women (Cranwell Schmidt et al., 2007; Feder & Wilson, 2005; Gondolf, 2002). Initially slow to evolve due to voluntary attendance and poor retention rates (Gondolf, 2002), today, batterer intervention programs are a key component of the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence (Ursel, Tutty, & LeMaistre, 2008b). In the 1980s, these programs received increased attention as a result of new mandatory arrest policies for domestic violence offenders. The resulting increase in perpetrators being mandated to treatment as a part of their sentencing caused a surge in the development of new batterer intervention programs (Gondolf, 2002).

The programs vary in their approach to helping batterers acknowledge and change their abusive behaviour. Approaches using narrative therapy have increasingly been offered (Augusta-Scott, & Dankwort, 2002; McGregor, Tutty, Babins-Wagner & Gill, 2002; Babins-Wagner, Tutty & Rothery, 2009). Calgary Counselling's Responsible Choices for Men program is a narrative therapy approach with a feminist perspective developed by Australian family therapist Alan Jenkins. The program invites the participants to review their beliefs about their selves in relation to the world, to challenge beliefs that are based on distorted perception, and to assist the men access their preferred or honorable selves (Jenkins, 1990).

Despite mixed results on the efficacy of batterer intervention programs, generally domestic violence researchers agree that batterer intervention programs have at least a small effect at reducing re-abuse (Babcock et al., 2004; Feder & Wilson, 2006; Feder, Austin & Wilson, 2008; Lohr et al., 2008; Stuart et al., 2007). Bennett and Williams (2001) concluded that the effect of these programs should not necessarily solely be measured in terms of statistical significance but in regards to practical significance. Research using clinical measures and qualitative studies to examine changes in batterer's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours suggest that the efficacy of the programs is practically significant.

Batterer interventions are perhaps best thought of "not themselves as a cure but a reinforcing component of a coordinated community response to domestic violence, wherein a program's success reflects on the effectiveness of the overall system in addressing domestic violence" (Gondolf, as cited in Hanson, 2002, p. 437). Batterer intervention programs need to be a part of a *coordinated* community response in which the criminal justice system, batterer intervention programs, victim services and advocates work together and inform each other, and where the evaluation of these domestic violence interventions is ongoing.

Calgary Counselling's Responsible Choices for Men Program

The Calgary Counselling Centre in Alberta, Canada has provided family violence programs and services since 1981. The agency also offers groups for women and men who have been abused by intimate partners and groups for women who behave aggressively with male partners (Tutty, Babins-Wagner & Rothery, 2009). The Responsible Choices for Men program was developed for males who use physical or psychological violence and control tactics in intimate relationships. The primary goal of Responsible Choices for Men is to assist men who are abusive in intimate relationships to become violence-free. It aims to reduce physical and non-physical abuse through

emphasizing the following: reduce victim blaming, understanding of control/entitlement, pain beneath anger and empathy and understanding for their partner's experience of the abuse.

The major objectives include: decreasing all forms of abusive behavior; accepting responsibility for one's behavior; increasing self-esteem; increasing assertive behavior; improving family relations; decreasing stress; increasing empathy towards those who have been impacted by abusive behavior; and assisting parents to cease physically abusing their children. Prior to entering the group, clients must be engaged with a primary therapist in the agency who assesses the client's readiness for change and the degree of violence, and determines treatment goals.

The Responsible Choices groups are conducted for 15 weeks, in weekly two-hour sessions. The groups typically comprise six to twelve men, both self- and court-referred and employ both an unstructured psychotherapeutic and a structured psycho-educational component. Covering the key themes is considered crucial, however the facilitators have the flexibility to focus on an alternate issue should one emerge, allowing group members input into the agenda.

The Current Qualitative Study

Seventeen interviews were conducted with men who completed Responsible Choices group for men to determine the impact of the program. The men were asked about their experiences of abuse, the justice system and the program with focus on what was working well and areas of improvement. The demographic characteristics of the men interviewed were as follows:

- Nine men (53%) were still with their partners, with the relationships lasting an average of 11.4 years ranging from 2 years to 38 years.
- On average, the men were interviewed 2.3 years after having attended the Responsible Choices Group with a range from 1.5 to 5 years.
- 76% (13) of men were fathers.
- 59% (10) men had previously attended counselling for anger and addictions.
- 18% (3) had previously attended couples counselling.
- 77% (13) had been abusive towards their intimate partner and 23% (4) had abused a child or other relative.

The Core Themes

The major themes that emerged from the qualitative interviews included: minimizing the nature of the partner abuse, the men's views of the justice response to domestic violence (police, courts, probation services), the impact of the Responsible Choices for Men group, what is working well in group and what might be improved.

After the program, I'm a firm believer for the most part; all people should take this program. High school is probably the best time for a program like this because it teaches 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. I wish I had taken this in high school. It shows so many objective points of view. How do I word it? In every relationship for the rest of your life, whether it's in business or a personal

relationship, a casual acquaintance, it gave me some more insight in how people can behave and react, including myself. So it's a good a course in human communication.

The above quote gives voice to one group member's overall impressions of the Responsible Choices for Men's group offered by the Calgary Counselling Centre. As a qualitative study, these results cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, some common themes are worth highlighting. First, with respect to the justice system, a number of the men had positive experiences with the police and the majority of men were also positive about probation services. Notably, that any men charged by the police and who had entered into the complex criminal justice system process had positive comments about either the justice personnel or the ways in which they were handled is surprising and suggests that the coordination of the criminal justice response to domestic violence and the consequential treatment services are having an impact. Those who had negative experiences primarily attributed them to what they saw as discrimination in the criminal justice system, that, in their opinion, does not take into account all of the facts and presumes that men are always guilty in domestic disputes. The men's perceptions of the overall justice response to domestic violence were that there was a bias against men in favour of women.

The participants seemed generally confused by the judicial process. The men could benefit from education around charging in domestic violence cases and how the Responsible Choices for Men group is an early intervention for first time or low risk charged men. This would help men understand the change in the justice system's approach to dealing with domestic violence.

The study participants were mandated to attend the groups. The men who got the most out of group seemed able to shift their thinking from viewing the group as a punishment to seeing it as something that could enhance their personal lives. It may be useful to explore how such shifts in viewpoint could be encouraged.

With respect to the group intervention, although the men disclosed serious incidents of assault with their intimate partners and, in several cases, children and or relatives, many reported having made important changes to their behaviours that impacted not only their relationships with partners, but with friends and work colleagues as well.

The men commented on various components of the program that were working well. Despite having taken the program several years earlier, the men remembered the program materials such as the RCM empty chair role-playing exercise as eliciting empathetic feelings about how their partner must have felt while being abused. They noted that the group helped them to accept responsibility for their abusive behaviours. The men also recalled learning how hurt underlies anger and abuse. Additionally, the social support provided by the group and that each man contributed to the learning of the group was identified. Lastly, the men recalled the facilitators as generally professional and good at their jobs while meeting goals of the group, namely ensuring they accepted responsibility for their abusive behaviours using a non-judgmental approach.

Suggestions regarding how the programs might improve included reviewing some of the materials, such as using a different video and looking at the timing of exercises. Suggestions for improving the program structure included adding follow-up groups, sharing best practices, a reduced group size and a greater focus on how to repair existing relationships.

The men also suggested that some facilitators focus on building rapport, taking a non-judgmental stance and lessening the focus on reinforcing guilt and instead, role model and explore appropriate behaviours and answer questions posed by the men. Also, rather than referring men

to DV groups whose charges were for child abuse or assaulting an individual other than an intimate partner, several men recommended developing a group specific for child abuse.

It might also be helpful to increase the men's access to treatment and support. Two men suggested follow-up groups, or drop-in group opportunities to help men who had already completed the program to maintain their focus. It may be useful to implement these options.

Even though most of the men had completed their group programs, in describing the incidents that led to their arrests, many exhibited a willingness to blame their partners, mutualise the violence and minimize their own abusive behaviour. This may not be surprising, as these narratives would have been repeated numerous times to the police, courts, probation and agency personnel and have, perhaps, become rote. While some men's lack of responsibility and accountability around the precipitating incident highlights the complexities involved in changing abusive behaviour, it should not imply that the men did not change. When describing how they had improved their interpersonal behaviours in response to the groups, the words of the majority reflect important shifts.

Jennings (1990) raises the question of whether we expect too much from men who attend batterer intervention programs. Attitudes are difficult to shift permanently and interpersonal patterns often become well-entrenched. The Responsible Choices for Men program is relatively short in length (although the individual counselling session that precede group entry are an important aspect that most BIP programs do not include), yet a number of men reported having made important changes. The significantly lowered recidivism rates noted in the evaluation of the specialized domestic violence court (Tutty, et al., 2011) support this contention.

Perhaps a better question is whether justice was served? The men were very aware that they were attending the programs because they had been mandated to do so by the criminal justice system. It did not occur to those given peace bonds that they are essentially considered not guilty. Rather, the monitoring by probation for one year and mandatory group attendance for three months or more highlighted the fact that the criminal justice system considered their actions as serious and as needing considerable societal intervention. That the Calgary specialized court model, in conjunction with community agencies, has adopted a number of strategies to better hold domestic violence offenders accountable suggests that assaults against intimate partners are being taken much more seriously and in a way that incorporates the victim's wishes early on in the process.

Chapter One: Calgary's Specialized Domestic Violence First Appearance Court

The serious nature of intimate partner violence and the harm to women and their children has been acknowledged in numerous documents (Statistics Canada, 2005; Tutty & Goard, 2002). The costs to society for charging abusive partners and providing treatment in the hope of stopping domestic violence are substantial (Bowlus, McKenna, Day & Wright, 2003; Greaves, Hankivsky, & Kingston-Reichers, 1995; Healey, Smith, & O'Sullivan, 1998).

The criminal justice system is an institution that deals with a high number of cases of domestic assaults yearly (Tutty, Koshan, Jesso, Ogden & Warrell, 2011; Ursel, Tutty & LeMaistre, 2008a). While there is no separate domestic violence offence, abusers are subject to a variety of charges, from common assault to uttering threats to murder, that would apply to anyone regardless of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Nevertheless, the dynamics and the intimate relationship between the accused and the victims in domestic violence cases, has severely challenged the criminal justice response that typically deals with crimes committed by strangers.

Batterer intervention programs are a key strategy of specialized community and criminal justice responses to domestic violence. They often serve as the primary intervention for first time or "low risk" offenders (in Calgary, attending a batterer program is often attached to a peace bond or a sentence imposed by the court system). While considerable research using quantitative methodology has evaluated such programs, relatively few qualitative studies have been published.

Qualitative methods provide the opportunity for respondents to speak in more detail about complex issues. As such, the current research provides important feedback from 17 men mandated by the specialized domestic violence court to Calgary Counselling's Responsible Choices for Men's Groups. In in-depth interviews, the group members were asked about their perceptions of the partner abuse, the manner in which the criminal justice system (police, courts, probation) responded and their views of the Responsible Choices for Men program, with a focus on what was working well and recommendations for improvement.

This chapter reviews the research on specialized domestic violence courts, describing the community coordinated response of the justice system in partnership with the agencies that offer batterer intervention programs in Calgary.

Specialized Domestic Violence Courts

Beginning with the development of the court in Winnipeg in 1991, specialized domestic violence courts have become increasingly available across Canada with the goal of more effectively addressing the criminal justice response to domestic violence. The extensive effort involved in creating such specialized justice responses should be acknowledged. To date, however, few evaluations have been published that assess whether these initiatives make a difference, exceptions being the work of Ursel in Winnipeg (Ursel & Hagyard, 2008), the Yukon Domestic Violence Treatment Option (Hornick, Boyes, Tutty & White, 2008) and some courts in Ontario (Moyer, Rettinger & Hotton (2000), cited in Clarke, 2003; Dawson & Dinovitzer, 2001), and Tutty and Ursel in the Canadian prairie provinces (Ursel, Tutty, & LeMaistre, 2008b).

Calgary's model developed in early 2000 with the input of key players from not only the criminal justice institutions such as police services, the Crown Prosecutor offices, probation, Legal Aid and the defence bar, but also community agencies that offer batterer intervention programs and support, shelter and advocacy for victims. The model was innovative, with the initial emphasis on a specialized domestic violence docket court with the aim of speeding up the process for those

charges with domestic abuse offences to both allow low risk offenders to take responsibility for their actions and speed their entry into treatment. Such actions were thought to better safeguard victims, both because their partners were mandated to treatment much earlier, and to prevent repercussions to victims who, if the case proceeded to court, might be required to testify.

Because of its unique nature, this section describes Calgary's specialized domestic violence first appearance court process¹. In 2000, the dedicated domestic violence first appearance court process in Calgary came into operation. This unique specialization was originally only in the "docket" or "first appearance" court in which the accused make their first court appearance following charges related to domestic violence. The court can perform all functions up to but excluding trial. Those functions include bail hearings, acceptance of pleas and sentencing. The specialized court hears all domestic violence-related cases charged in the City of Calgary, including violence by persons in heterosexual or same-sex couples who are in either cohabitating or non-cohabitating relationships, interfamilial violence, child abuse or elder abuse. The most common offences seen in the court include assault, uttering threats and breach of court orders, and can include attempted murder and homicide.

As noted previously, what makes the Calgary model unique is its focus on the first appearance court in which low-risk accused can have their charges withdrawn with a peace bond if they acknowledge responsibility for their behaviour and are willing to participate in court-mandated domestic violence counselling and other mandated treatments. Its goals are to hold offenders accountable within the justice system and increase the likelihood that a meaningful intervention will be imposed on the offender through treatment. It is based on the premise that a more efficient court process can take advantage of the low risk accused's guilt and shame that is usually present close in time to the offence. It is hoped that the speedy access to treatment and tight monitoring of offenders will increase compliance with court orders and maximize the effects of treatment programs.

Additionally, victim safety is prioritized in the specialized court. Risk assessments and the victim's wishes are presented to the court team prior to docket court and are used to support and refine submissions made to the court by the Crown and defence attorneys. The addition of "real time" information improves the quality of submissions made in court and, ultimately, the decisions improve the response of the justice system to victims' safety and needs. Further, the more efficient process minimizes factors related to the dynamic of abuse and violence that impede or impair court processes, such as victims recanting their testimony or being reluctant witnesses.

Calgary is a city of one million citizens and is home to many specialized domestic violence agencies including a specialized police unit (Domestic Conflict Unit or DCU), specialized probation officers and a community co-ordinating body (the Alliance to End Violence, formerly the Action Committee Against Violence). An extensive protocol network promotes collaboration and the sharing of information across agencies, including the police, Crown prosecutors, Legal Aid, victim advocates, shelters, probation, and treatment programs.

Additionally, victims are supported by a non-profit law office (Calgary Legal Guidance), which provides the joint services of a lawyer and social worker and specializes in restraining and emergency protection orders along with various other matters related to family law. Victims and

¹ This material is taken from a chapter written by Tutty, McNichol and Christensen (2008) in a book, *What's Law Got to Do with It: The Law, Specialized Courts and Domestic Violence in Canada*, edited by Ursel, Tutty and LeMaistre (2008a) published in Canada by Cormorant Press.

their children have access to a range of counselling and treatment options and a safe visitation and access centre. Further, while their partners are under community supervision through probation, victims are contacted and offered support through the Partner Support Program, a partnership between a volunteer victim support staff and probation services.

The accused have the benefit of a fast-tracked Legal Aid appointment process and a dedicated Legal Aid lawyer attached to the specialized court. Calgary Police Services follow a mandatory charge policy and undergo extensive training on dominant aggressors and domestic violence investigations. Dominant or primary aggressor policies are guidelines for the police in deciding who to charge in circumstances in which it is difficult to determine who is the victim because of ambiguity, such as when both parties are injured or accuse the other of assault. The dominant aggressor is the individual who has been the most significant aggressor throughout the relationship (Strack, n.d.).

The Calgary DV Court Team

This section describes the critical elements of the specialized domestic violence first appearance court, including the court team that consists of domestic court caseworkers, specialized Crown attorneys, police, probation and duty counsel officers.

One of the key elements of the process is the court “team,” perceived by many as the “backbone” of the process. The team includes specialists from the Crown prosecutor’s office and probation office, a member of the Domestic Conflict Unit of Calgary Police Services and domestic court caseworkers from HomeFront, the non-profit agency that supports the court processes with domestic court case workers and other initiatives.

At the time that the research was conducted, four Crown prosecutors were specialized in domestic violence and appeared in the court on a rotating basis. Two representatives from the specialized probation office rotated daily in the docket court, while their seven other colleagues manage the majority of domestic violence offenders at a central location. Likewise, one member of the Domestic Conflict Unit sits in the court. The Domestic Conflict Unit consists of 10 investigators, a sergeant and staff sergeant. The Unit reviews all domestic violence calls responded to by the Calgary Police Service and directly handles approximately 400 high-risk and/or chronic files per year, while offering support to frontline police officers. Four court caseworkers from HomeFront cover the docket court on a rotating basis.

A major undertaking of the court team is to assess risk in order to attain or maintain the safety of victims and their children. The specialized domestic violence team exists to bring to the justice system a greater understanding of the nature of domestic violence and to bring about the best and most expedient response. The Crown prosecutors assess risk and recommend to the judge and defence counsel the directions that they consider most appropriate in each case. Their recommendations are based upon information and assessments provided to them during “pre-court conferences” that occur prior to case resolutions or bail hearings each day and for every file.

The pre-court conferences involve all the court team members to ensure that relevant information is provided or confirmed regarding victim concerns/wishes and the conditions requested. For example, the accused may be given no contact orders, orders not to drink, orders to attend counselling within a specified time period, and may have their weapons confiscated.

The HomeFront Domestic Court Caseworkers

The HomeFront court caseworkers provide two essential services. The first is victim support. Each morning, they review the police 24-hour incident reports to collect new offence information and begin contacting the victims in those cases within a day of the police laying charges. Further, they review each case before every court appearance and ensure that victims' wishes are up to date and that victims are aware of the status of the case against their partners. The workers typically inquire about a past history of abuse, current relationship status with the accused, perceived level of danger, as well as the victims' wishes with respect to what they would like to happen at court. In addition, the clinical interview is supplemented with standardized risk assessment tools such as the Danger Assessment (Campbell, Sharps & Glass, 2001).

Safety planning for victims is an essential component of the court caseworker's role. Safety is ensured by connecting the victim to other community or legal resources: counselling programs for victims or children exposed to domestic violence, immigrant serving agencies, shelters and the Court Preparation and Restraining Order programs at Calgary Legal Guidance. The court caseworkers also keep victims updated about the progress of their partner/ex-partner's case within the justice system, including such information as the date of the next court appearance and the plea entered. Court caseworkers, by necessity, may also liaise with other agency representatives in the City of Calgary, including the Child and Family Services Authority (child welfare).

The second essential service is conducting risk assessments and providing the victim's wishes to the court team. This information is often vital in supporting and guiding the decisions of the court and supplementing/balancing information provided by other sources, including the police and defence representatives.

Probation Services

Probation officers are key stakeholders in the specialized court process as they can provide considerable information about an accused's past history of criminal offences. Further, the court probation officer acts as an information conduit between the court and the accused's supervising probation officer.

In addition to case conferencing, probation officers are officers of the court and may answer questions posed by counsel, the accused or the court. The information requested often includes past involvement with probation, current orders against the accused (including pre-trial), compliance history, as well as possible treatment options and suggested conditions. To prepare for court, the probation officers preview the docket list to assess what information might be needed during the daily docket, including checking databases and talking to any assigned probation officers about whether the accused is complying with community supervision.

An advantage of having a probation officer in court is that the accused makes immediate contact with the probation officer and is directly referred to treatment services from court. This significantly decreases the delay of an offender entering into treatment. The probation offices are located on the ground floor of the provincial court building and are easily accessible. Once an accused has been sentenced, he/she meets with the probation officer to review the court order with the officer, signs it to signify compliance and receives reporting instructions about when he/she must reconnect with the supervising probation officer.

Common probation conditions include immediate monitoring of the accused and ensuring that the accused follow court orders. At this time, probation officers also complete a preliminary intake with the accused to screen for any mental health, medical or treatment related issues such as language fluency to better direct accused into appropriate programming.

Within the specialized domestic violence first appearance court, the accused are given a shorter timeframe to contact their probation officer and treatment agencies than if they were to appear in a non-specialized court. The accused are generally given seven to ten days to contact their supervising probation officer in a non-specialized court, whereas in the specialized setting, they are given, on average, four days.

The Specialized Domestic Violence First Appearance Court Process

Until recently, the specialized docket court was in session from 9 a.m., Monday to Friday, and ran until the cases on the docket were heard that day, usually ending at noon or 1 p.m. (this changed to three full days a week in 2008). The judiciary was initially specialized in domestic violence, though now all Calgary provincial criminal court judges rotate into the specialized court.

The court team meets before court is in session each day and again during breaks. The team reviews the particulars of each case with the defence or duty counsel and determines what course they will pursue. At this time, new information from any team member can be introduced. As well, members have the opportunity to request additional information they may need from other members before meeting again. Examples of information shared include: letters from victims asking that no contact orders be lifted or that the victim is fearful and pursuing a restraining order; address and employment updates from probation and police officers; verification of treatment attendance and compliance; or any changes in the perceived level of risk for the accused or the victim. The goal is to provide the court with as much information as possible in order to allow it to make appropriate and efficient decisions.

Docket court is the first opportunity for an accused to enter a plea; however, many other steps and procedures often need to take place before a plea is accepted. These procedures can include adjournments to allow an accused to make application for legal aid coverage and retain a lawyer; to allow information or paperwork to catch up to the court; or until an interpreter can be made available. Some adjournments are made for tactical reasons such as if other charges or court decisions are pending for an accused. Duty counsel, the defence or the Crown may request that the case be heard at a later time because they do not yet have all the necessary information.

In about one-third of all cases, when the accused accepts responsibility for his actions, the charges are withdrawn and the accused is given a peace bond whereby he enters into an agreement with the court to abide by conditions to keep the peace, report to a probation officer, attend and complete mandated treatment for either domestic violence or substance abuse, or attend a parenting course. Often peace bonds include conditions of no contact, geographic restrictions and abstinence from drugs and/or alcohol. In all cases, the accused are required to acknowledge before the court the substance of their actions that led to the criminal charges being laid and express a willingness to participate in domestic violence or other appropriate treatment programs.

The bulk of cases seen by the court and mandated to treatment are referred to the Calgary Counselling Centre, YWCA Sheriff King Home, and the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, with a smaller percentage going to Forensic Assessment Outpatient Services at the Peter Lougheed Hospital. Additional referrals would also be given, depending on case

circumstances, to immigrant serving agencies or first-language counsellors that can address cultural and settlement issues, First Nations counselling or culturally based services, mental health resources, brain injury resources, and others.

Key Points in the Court Process

Fast and efficient resolution of domestic violence cases is considered a central goal in the co-ordinated justice response. This is because the longer the delay until the court intervenes, the greater the likelihood that the evidence, usually hinging on victims' willingness to testify, will be lost. Further, offenders' remorse and willingness to acknowledge a problem in their lives wanes the more time passes between intervention and the original offence. Delays also play significantly into the cycle of violence and can exacerbate victims' feelings of helplessness.

Treatment is an integral and effective response to domestic violence and every effort is made to direct the accused into treatment as soon as possible following police charges and fast-tracked court dispositions. Being fast-tracked into counselling, which is monitored by probation, is believed to be an effective means of maintaining the safety of victims and families and breaking the cycle of violence. Holding offenders accountable is essential to an effective domestic violence intervention because offenders need to know that there are consequences unless they regulate their behaviour. Monitoring helps ensure the victim's safety and reassures victims that they are not solely responsible for supervising the offenders' behaviour.

Immediate screening and regular contact with victims throughout the justice process is a further means of checking on safety and offering needed support to victims of violence, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will seek support in the future.

Discussion and Conclusions

With its emphasis on the docket court, Calgary's specialized response is a unique model, different from other specialized domestic violence courts across Canada (Tutty, Ursel & Douglas, 2008b). Much of the emphasis has been on creating a speedier response to assaults in domestic violence cases: seeing the accused in a specialized docket court more quickly than previously, and having treatment available much more quickly than before. Further, crisis intervention theory has long posited that the sooner one receives intervention, the more likely the counselling will be effective (Roberts & Everly, 2006). Also, the safety and wishes of the victims are taken into consideration by the court team early on in the process, while the assault is still fresh in their minds and they are not influenced by the accused to the same extent as they might be later on.

The data from the specialized domestic violence first appearance court validate that accused receiving the option of having their charges withdrawn and given a peace bond (typically mandating them to treatment such as intervention for batterers or substance abuse) are less likely to have previous criminal records. This is not surprising since those who plead not guilty and proceed to trial are often more knowledgeable about the justice system and understand that long delays often result in dismissals. Further, pre-custody time is counted as double time and therefore substantially reduces the amount of actual jail time served in cases in which a long jail sentence may be imposed.

Even so, some advocates for victims and others have expressed concern about utilizing the outcome of stays with a peace bond (Hoffart & Clarke, 2004); since it gives the appearance of letting the accused off without a criminal record. While this remains a philosophical concern, results from the HomeFront evaluation indicate that accused who receive a peace bond reoffend at

a much lower rate than those who receive other dispositions. Further, an evaluation of the batterer treatment programs in Calgary (Cairns, 2005) concluded that those with peace bonds who attended and completed counselling had significantly lower new charge rates (6.1%) than those who did not show or complete treatment (23.7%). The lower recidivism rates for all cases concluded at the first appearance court, whether stayed with a peace bond or entering a guilty plea, provide additional support for dealing with these cases in this manner.

While noting difficulties in comparing recidivism studies because of differing definitions of recidivism and time periods, recidivism rates of 7.9% for police charges for new offences and 10.9% of charges for breaches of court orders over an average of one to two years following the first offence (a total of 18.8 %) appear relatively low when compared with other research (in fact, this percentage is likely inflated because a number of accused both breach and are charged with new offences). In terms of official reports in which the police laid subsequent charges, three studies from the United States (Maxwell, Garner & Fagan, 2001; Thistlewaite, Wooldredge & Gibbs, 1998; Tolman & Weisz, 1995) reported recidivism rates of 30% (six months to three years), 17% (one year) and 23.6% (18 months) respectively. Further, the lower recidivism rates since the inception of the HomeFront court as compared with the baseline data conducted by Hoffart and Clarke (2004) provide additional support to the premise that specialization has contributed significant improvements in the justice system response to domestic violence in Calgary.

Following the early successes of the specialized domestic violence first appearance court, the Calgary justice community instituted a specialized domestic violence trial court in 2004. One rationale for this was the recognition that the HomeFront domestic court caseworkers were not available to support victims in cases going to trial. The high number of cases withdrawn or dismissed for want of prosecution at trial is often because victims recant their testimony (Ursel, 2002), and providing ongoing support could decrease the number of withdrawals and possibly increase the number of cases found guilty or concluded with intervention conditions at trial.

If accused know that the trial court is also specialized, with Crown prosecutors and other staff that have a strong understanding of the serious nature and dynamics of intimate partner violence, some accused could be encouraged to plead guilty at first appearance or take the offer of a peace bond.

In conclusion, a significant advantage of the Calgary specialized first appearance court model is the extent to which the police and court systems are perceived by the general public, by accused persons and by victims as mobilizing significant resources to address family violence. The hope is that this specialized response will signal that these offences are taken seriously and will not be tolerated, thereby serving as a deterrent and preventing offences from occurring in the future.

Chapter Two: The Efficacy of Court-Mandated Batterer Intervention Programs

As the primary condition to which the accused in domestic violence cases are mandated by the courts, establishing the efficacy of batterer treatment programs is critical, especially as many women stay or return to potentially dangerous partners in the hope that they will change as a result of group treatment (Gondolf & Russell, 1986).

Crisis intervention theory has long posited that the sooner one receives intervention, the more likely the counselling will be effective (Roberts & Everly, 2006). Also, the safety and wishes of the victims are taken into consideration by the court team early on in the process, while the assault is still fresh in their minds and they are not influenced by the accused to the same extent as they might be later on.

Since batterer intervention is commonly mandated by both the Calgary's specialized docket court and the specialized domestic violence trial court, assessing the perspectives of those mandated to this intervention is vital. As a key intervention in addressing both the accountability of the accused and the safety of victims and their children, the current research was comprised of interviews with 17 men who were mandated by the specialized justice process to the Calgary Counselling Centre's Responsible Choices for Men program.

This chapter provides an overview of research on batterer intervention programs, highlighting the various outcomes assessed in addition to the challenges and successes of such approaches in the North American context.

Batterer Intervention Programs

Batterer intervention programs, almost exclusively offered in a group format, were first developed in the late 1970s based on concerns expressed by advocates for abused woman (Cranwell Schmidt et al., 2007; Feder & Wilson, 2005; Gondolf, 2002). Initially slow to evolve due to voluntary attendance and poor retention rates (Gondolf, 2002), today, batterer intervention programs are a key component of the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence (Ursel, Tutty, & LeMaistre, 2008b). In the 1980s, these programs received increased attention as a result of new mandatory arrest policies for domestic violence offenders. The resulting increase in perpetrators being mandated to treatment as a part of their sentencing caused a surge in the development of new batterer intervention programs (Gondolf, 2002).

The programs vary in their approach to helping batterers acknowledge and change their abusive behaviour. A pro-feminist psychoeducational approach, known as the Duluth model (named after the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota), is the most frequently used model (Feder & Wilson, 2005). The Duluth model views domestic abuse as being rooted in patriarchal societal beliefs that portray men as having the right to exert power and control over women (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004). Feminist principles are used to confront the men's beliefs, assist them to recognize their wrongful actions, and replace them with more appropriate behaviours that appreciate woman as equal partners in the relationships (Pence & Paymar, as cited in Babcock et al., 2004, p. 1026).

Cognitive-behavioural approaches to batterer treatment consider intimate partner violence to be a learned behaviour and require offenders to recognize their abusive behaviour as under their control (Feder & Wilson, 2005). Cognitive-behavioural treatment (CBT) focuses on changing the batterer's behaviour by providing him with tools and skills to deal with conflict and communicate more effectively (Babcock et al., 2004; Feder & Wilson, 2005). CBT includes a component on

anger management, although most programs address this in at least one session. Although the Duluth model and CBT are typically seen as two different approaches to batterer treatment, many programs now incorporate both methods (Babcock et al., 2004).

Approaches using narrative therapy have increasingly been offered (Augusta-Scott, & Dankwort, 2002; McGregor, Tutty, Babins-Wagner & Gill, 2002; Babins-Wagner, Tutty & Rothery, 2009). For example, Calgary Counselling's Responsible Choices for Men program is a narrative therapy approach with a feminist perspective developed by Australian family therapist Alan Jenkins. The program invites the participants to review their beliefs about their selves in relation to the world, to challenge beliefs that are based on distorted perception, and to assist the men access their preferred or honorable selves (Jenkins, 1990).

Couples therapy is less frequently used and has been criticized for putting victims at increased risk for further victimization and for wrongfully insinuating that the women are also partly responsible for the abuse (Babcock et al., 2004; Bograd & Mederos, 1999; Feder & Wilson, 2005, Johansson & Tutty, 1998). Additionally, couples therapy is considered inappropriate in most court-mandated treatment cases due to the severity of the violence that is likely present (Bograd & Mederos, 1999).

Currently, batterer programs are the most prominent interventions for dealing with men who abuse their partners. The idea of mandating batterers to treatment as a part of sentencing is supported by research that finds court-mandated batterers are more likely to complete treatment over self-referred batterers (Rosenbaum, Gearan & Ondovic, 2001). The evaluation of their efficacy is essential and has received increased attention by domestic violence researchers. Ineffective interventions may not only be doing little to change batterers' abusive behaviour but may put victims at increased risk. Gondolf found that a batterer's attendance in a program is the "most influential factor in a woman's return to her abusive partner" (2002, p. 29). This research emphasizes the critical need to evaluate batterer treatment programs.

Despite the different approaches in batterer intervention programs, three common goals are to reduce re-abuse, to change the batterer's attitudes and beliefs that justify abuse, and to provide him with the skills to change his abusive behaviour (Davis, Taylor, & Maxwell, 2000). Researchers have largely relied on quantitative studies that either used recidivism rates or clinical measures of attitudes to evaluate the efficacy of batterer intervention programs.

Additionally, several researchers have employed a qualitative approach to gain greater insight into the victims and batterers experience of treatment and its outcomes. The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of the quantitative and qualitative research that examines the efficacy of mandated treatment for batterers. In addition, research on the efficacy of different program models is reviewed. The report concludes with suggestions for future research.

Quantitative Evaluations of Batterer Intervention Programs

The research evaluating batterer intervention programs that use clinical and attitudinal measures is based on the assumption that domestic violence is linked to the batterer's belief systems. Batterers tend to hold sexist beliefs that entitle them, as a male, to use abusive behaviour to exert power and control over woman (Cranwell Schmidt et al., 2007). Therefore, clinical measure studies are aimed at uncovering any changes in the batterer's attitudes and belief systems that justify his abuse towards women. These studies are thought to provide insight into the mechanisms of change that will later translate in a reduction of future intimate partner violence

(Bowen, Gilchrist, & Beech, 2008). Most use a pretest and posttest design, with the posttests being administered either immediately following the completion of treatment or shortly thereafter.

Numerous evaluations of treatment for men that abuse intimate partners have been conducted. Canadian studies include Augusta-Scott and Dankwort (2002) in Nova Scotia; Montminy, Roy, Lindsay & Turcotte (2003) in Quebec; Palmer, Brown and Barrera (1992); Barrera, Palmer, Brown, and Kalaher, (1994), Scott and Wolfe (2000) and Tutty, Bidgood, Rothery and Bidgood (2001) in Ontario and McGregor, Tutty, Babins-Wagner and Gill (2002) in Alberta.

In 1997(a), Gondolf counted a total of 30 published single-site program evaluations, many with methodological shortcomings such as quasi-experimental and exploratory research designs. Gondolf (1997b) concluded that these methodological limitations resulted in no clear evidence of the efficacy of treatment. He did, however, note that the “success rates” of batterer programs are comparable to others such as drunk-driving, drug and alcohol, and sex offender programs.

The quantitative studies that used clinical measures generally conclude that the programs effectively increase a batterer’s personal control and responsibility for his actions (Bowen et al., 2008; Feder & Forde, 2000; Tutty, et al., 2001), reduce perceived stress by increasing coping skills (Buttall & Pike, 2003; Tutty et al., 2001), and decrease depression and anger (Hamberger & Hastings, 1988). Additionally, batterers attending treatment programs have increased their social support network (Tutty et al., 2001). Stewart et al. (2005) also found that treatment completers decreased jealousy and negative attitudes about relationships, had more positive attitudes towards achieving program goals, and increased their use of skills to prevent re-abuse.

Motivation and treatment readiness have also been addressed by studies using clinical outcome measures. The importance of being intrinsically motivated to change has been raised as an important concern regarding batterers who are court-mandated to treatment versus self-referred (Stuart, Temple & Moore, 2007). However, Cranwell Schmidt et al. (2007) found that court-mandated batterers are initially motivated to cease their abusive behaviour by short-term consequences, such as job loss or fear of arrest, but that upon completion of treatment they are more likely to be motivated by the effects of abuse on the family or a desire to improve their family relationship. Stewart et al. (2005) also found batterers’ readiness to change increased from the beginning to the end of the treatment program. This research suggests that, in general, batterer intervention programs are meeting the goals of changing batterer’s beliefs about woman and domestic violence, and encouraging the development of vital skills for more effective conflict resolution.

It is assumed that these changes in batterers’ attitudes will translate into a reduction in violence. However, research does not necessarily support this assumption. Tutty et al. (2001) did find a significant reduction in frequency and severity of abusive behaviour in their study that also found significant attitudinal changes pre- to post-treatment. However, other researchers have cautioned that attitudinal changes are not necessarily associated with significant reductions in re-abuse and more research is needed to establish the connection between them (Cranwell Schmidt et al., 2007; Gondolf, 2000).

For this reason and issues with reliability and social desirability of batterer self reports, in their meta-analysis of court mandated treatment, Feder, Wilson, and Austin (2008) chose to exclude studies that only used attitudinal changes as an outcome measure. In response to such concerns, researchers such as Babins-Wagner, Tutty and Rothery (2005) have incorporated

measures of social desirability that are used to adjust scores on the outcome measures. Such adjustments typically shift the scores into the clinical range.

Despite confounds such as those highlighted previously, pretest and posttest measures of outcomes do provide valuable information about the treatment process and batterers' progression through it. In conjunction with those on recidivism, these studies provide a more complete picture of abusers, the efficacy of batterer intervention programs and the treatment process.

Qualitative Studies on Batterer Intervention Programs

Very few studies have investigated the impact of batterer treatment programs qualitatively (Hanson, 2002). However, the value of qualitative studies should not be discounted. In addition to providing more in-depth and detailed information about, "what batterers actually take [away] from programs" (Gondolf, 2000, p. 205), qualitative research gives a voice to both the batterers and their partners, and the opportunity to share their experiences. Two studies have examined the efficacy of batterer intervention programs through qualitative means.

Gondolf (2000) conducted interviews with both the perpetrators of domestic violence and their partners to examine the avoidance methods used by the batterers. His study provided evidence that batterers attending treatment programs developed and became more skilled at using avoidance methods to cease their abusive behaviour. Additionally, Gondolf found a greater association between particular avoidance methods, such as discussion, and a decrease in re-abuse, as reported by both the men and women. A perhaps surprising finding pointing to the overall success of the programs is that the men reported needing to use some method of avoidance less frequently in later post-treatment interviews in comparison to those conducted earlier on.

Scott and Wolfe (2000) conducted interviews with nine batterers who had successfully ceased their abusive behaviour after attending a domestic violence treatment program. The semi-structured interviews gave the men the opportunity to explain how the groups had assisted them in changing their abusive behaviours. At least three-quarters of the men identified the following as being important aspects of treatment: (1) taking responsibility for past behaviour, (2) gaining greater empathy for their partners and the effects of their behaviour on the family members, (3) recognizing that they are responsible for their choices and actions, (4) acknowledging their partner as autonomous individuals with a right to her own feelings and thoughts, (5) developing better communication skills that allowed them to resolve conflicts more effectively and without violence.

Batterer Intervention Programs and Recidivism

Whether offenders re-abuse their partners has been the focus of a large body of research on batterer intervention programs, finding that the programs generally have a small but significant effect on reducing recidivism (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004). In their meta-analysis of 22 mostly quasi-experimental evaluations of domestic violence treatment, Babcock and colleagues found no differences between treatment models (Duluth compared to cognitive behavioural, etc.) but that treatment had a significant but small effect on recidivism in addition to the effect of being arrested.

The findings from these studies are overwhelming positive. Stewart, Gabora, Kropp and Lee (2005) concluded that domestic violence offenders who failed to complete mandated treatment recidivated at a rate 3.76 times more than those who attended treatment programs. Babcock and Steiner (1999) reported that only 8% of treatment completers reoffended in comparison to 23% of non-completers, a statistically significant difference. These recidivism rates are similar to those in Cairn's 2005 study of three Calgary, Alberta treatment programs (6% versus 23.7%) and of

Coulter and VandeWeerd's 2009 study of multi-level batterer treatment programs (8% versus 21%).

Another key question about batterer treatment programs is whether court-mandated offenders benefit in comparison to those who self-refer. Edleson and Syer (1991) compared six treatment conditions finding, that, at 18 month follow-up, men involved with the courts had lower levels of violence than "voluntary" group members. Similarly, Rosenbaum, Gearan and Ondovic (2001) found that court-referred men who completed treatment had significantly lower recidivism rates than self-referred men.

Other researchers have reported overall higher rates of re-abuse but showed the same significant reduction in recidivism based on treatment completion. Bennett, Stoops, Call, and Flett's (2007) study had a recidivism rate of 14.3% for batterers who completed the program, which compares favourably with the 34.6% recidivism rated for non-completers.

Other studies suggest that batterer intervention programs are associated with a greater reduction of re-abuse than incarceration for domestic violence offences. Using a quasi-experimental design, Babcock and Steiner (1999) and Ursel and Gorkoff (1996) found that batterers who attended treatment were significantly less likely to recidivate than those who were sentenced to jail. Babcock and Steiner (1999) found a remarkable 55% difference in recidivism between treatment completers (8%) and incarcerated batterers (63%).

Ursel and Gorkoff examined the recidivism rates of incarcerated individuals who received treatment in a minimum security jail with those in high security facility and no established treatment program. They confirmed that batterers who attended the established treatment program were less likely to recidivate. Caution may be needed in interpreting these findings as batterers who were sentenced to jail time versus those who were mandated to treatment may differ on other characteristics, such as criminal history or the severity of the offence, which may make them more likely to recidivate. Similarly, batterers completing jail time in a high security facility may represent more high-risk offenders that are more likely to reoffend regardless of treatment. In another quasi-experimental study, Labriola, Rempel and Davis (2008) compared attendance in a batterer intervention program to rigorous monitoring by probation and found no significant difference in reoffending between the two groups.

While these studies appear to provide strong evidence for the effectiveness of batterer intervention programs in reducing recidivism, their findings must be interpreted with caution. All utilized quasi-experimental designs. Therefore, the possibility exists that other variables may explain the difference in recidivism rates between treatment completers and non-completers. While it is promising that researchers who did control for differences in individual variables still found a significant reduction in recidivism (Babcock & Steiner, 1999 & Bennett et al., 2007), the effect of differences between completers and non-completers cannot be ruled out (Bennett et al., 2007; Coulter & VandeWeerd, 2009; Feder & Dugan, 2004; Feder & Wilson, 2005).

In fact, researchers have suggested that there are significant differences between batterers who follow through with completing their mandated treatment and those who fail to attend or drop-out. In comparison to non-completers, batterers who complete treatment are less likely to have criminal histories (Babcock & Steiner, 1999; Ursel & Gorkoff, 1996), have greater incomes (Babcock & Steiner, 1999), higher education levels (Babcock & Steiner, 1999), are more likely to be employed (Bennett et al., 2007; Cairns, 2005), married (Bennett et al., 2007; Cairns, 2005), and

be younger (Bennett et al., 2007). Additionally, Cairns (2005) found that completers show fewer signs of anti-social behaviour, mental health problems, or substance abuse.

Several researchers established support for the stake in conformity theory (Bennett et al., 2007; Feder & Dugan, 2004). Stake in conformity has been found to predict both likelihood of following through with treatment and re-offending. Feder and Dugan (2004) concluded that, “Men who are unlikely to be deterred by the consequences of missing their court-mandated SAAP sessions are also less likely to be deterred by the consequences of reoffending” (p. 8).

To avoid the affect of confounding variables, theoretically, the ideal method for evaluating the efficacy of batterer intervention programs is using a true experimental design that randomly assigns convicted batterers to treatment and control conditions. However, given the nature of domestic violence and the societal belief that some treatment is better than no treatment, for ethical reasons, the criminal justice systems may be reluctant to agree to an experimental design that assigns some batterers to a no-treatment condition. Consequently, only four studies were identified that randomly assigned batterers to receive treatment or to receive an alternative criminal justice intervention, most commonly probation. The results of these studies are mixed.

Two studies found that attending batterer intervention programs significantly reduced recidivism in comparison to only receiving probation (Davis et al., 2000; Palmer, Brown, & Barrera, 1992). It should be noted that in the Davis et al. study significant findings were based on official records of re-arrest. Victim reports of re-abuse showed the same general trend but the differences in recidivism rates were not significant.

In contrast to these studies, Feder and Forde (2000) found no significant difference in recidivism between groups of batterers randomly assigned to mandated treatment or probation only. Recidivism in this study was based both on self-reports from the batterer and the victim, and on official records of probation violations.

The fourth study using an experimental design, compared batterers who received treatment with those who were rigorously monitored by a case manager. Dunford (2000) again found no significant difference in recidivism. However, Dunford’s experiment was conducted in a military setting and may lack generalizability to other populations in addition to also focusing on participants with a greater stake in conformity.

The randomized clinical trials in Broward County, Florida and Brooklyn, NY (Jackson, Feder, Forde, Davis, Maxwell & Taylor (2003), raised serious questions about batterer intervention programs when neither found statistically significant differences between violations of probation or re-arrests in men randomly assigned to either treatment or a control condition. These conclusions, using the “gold-standard” of experimental research designs, created significant concerns about such treatment.

Gondolf (2002) responded with critiques of the implementation of the last two studies. In at least some instances, random assignment did not occur, the groups were characterized by high drop-out rates and it was difficult to access victims for follow-up reports, casting doubt on the interpretation of the findings. In his multi-site evaluation of four batterer treatment systems, with variation on whether referrals were pretrial or after trial, length (from 3 months to 9 months) and whether additional services were offered, Gondolf (1999) found no significant differences across programs in re-assaults, portion of men making threats and the quality of the victims’ lives. A subgroup of about 20% of the referrals was identified as dangerous men who continued to assault their partners despite

intervention. Such offenders need a different treatment approach, however are difficult to identify. Further, Gondolf recommends screening for severe substance abuse and psychological problems that are associated with dropping out (2002).

Rather than the cessation of violence, Gondolf (2002) refers to “de-escalation of assault”, finding that, while nearly half of the men in the four treatment sites re-assaulted their partners at some time in the nine months following program intake, two and a half years later, more than 80 percent had not assaulted their partner in the past year (based on partner reports) and the severity of the assaults were reduced. This fits with the points raised by Jennings (1990) who has questioned whether the absolute cessation of violence during treatment was a fair standard, when in treatments for other problems such as alcoholism, clients are expected to relapse, but learn from these experiences to help them resist in future.

Gondolf’s final recommendation is to provide programs as early as possible and to shift the focus from program length to program intensity (2002, p. 214). For example, as soon as possible after charges and during the crisis when motivation tends to be the highest, offenders could attend counselling three or four times per week for the first four to six weeks.

Program Factors

Most comparisons of different models of batterer intervention programs conclude that no one model is better than others (Babcock et al., 2004; Bennett & Williams, 2001). Hanson and Wallace-Capretta (2000) compared four different treatment models and concluded that what is more important than program approach is that they are implemented soundly. In a study that seems to support this contention, Ursel and Gorkoff (1996) found that batterers who received treatment from an established program had the highest reduction in recidivism as compared to individuals who received treatment from new and less experienced program facilitators.

Research on the effects of program length is inconclusive. Bennett and Williams (2001) found no difference based on length of program. Similarly, Gondolf (1999) found little evidence of the importance of program length, however there was a general trend in his study that the longer, more comprehensive program resulted in a greater reduction of severity and frequency of repeat abuse. Davis et al. (2000) found that only the longer 26-week batterer intervention programs significantly reduced recidivism, with no difference in reoffending between the batterers who attended an 8-week program or received only probation. A plausible explanation is that a certain number of weeks or sessions may be required for treatment to be beneficial but beyond that, no further gains are made.

Some researchers have suggested that batterers’ individual characteristics have a considerable impact on what type of batterer intervention program will be most successful for them (Bennett & Williams, 2001; Lohr et al., 2006; Medros, 1999). Much research has identified characteristics of batterers that make them more likely to recidivate, including a prior criminal history (Hanson & Wallace-Capretta, 2000; Shepard, 1992; Ursel & Gorkoff, 1996), the duration of abuse (Shepard, 1992), substance abuse (Fals-Stewart, 2003; Shepard, 1992), and witnessing or experiencing abuse as a child (Shepard, 1992).

High-risk offenders are typically thought to be some of the hardest to treat. Hendricks, Werner, Shipway, and Turinetti (2006) evaluated a program for high-risk domestic violence offenders. They found that batterer treatment is beneficial for even high-risk offenders, who

recidivated significantly less after attending a combined psychoeducational and cognitive skills training program, 23.5% recidivism as opposed to 41.2% for program dropouts.

Therefore, the efficacy of batterer intervention programs may depend on the ability of the program to address the varied needs of batterers. Domestic violence researchers have speculated that additional interventions, in particular substance abuse treatment, may notably increase the effectiveness of batterer treatment programs (Cairns, 2005; Easton, Mandel, Babuscio, Rounsaville, & Carroll, 2007; Gondolf, 2002; Stuart, 2005; Stuart et al., 2007).

Areas for Future Research

As the results of the research on the efficacy of batterer intervention programs are still somewhat mixed and no single model of domestic violence treatment is superior, the continued evaluation and 'safe' experimentation of different treatment approaches is necessary (Bennett & Williams, 2001).

The large number of offenders who start treatment but fail to complete it is reason for growing concern (McMurrin & Theodosi, 2007). Research on batterer intervention programs suggests that those who fail to complete their treatment have significantly higher rates of recidivism. Therefore, additional research examining the predictors of program drop-out and what interventions may decrease the likelihood of batterers failing to comply with mandated treatment is warranted.

As suggested in the literature, individual batterer characteristics may not only play a significant role in program completion but also in the effectiveness of treatment. More research is needed to examine the effects of treatment duration on program efficacy and the effects of individual characteristics on the batterer's response to different treatment approaches (Stuart et al., 2007).

Lastly, the majority of research on batterer intervention programs has quantitatively measured short-term program outcomes with follow-up periods of one to two years. However, Klein and Tobin (2008) found that the average time to first re-arrest for batterers was over two years, and that just over 13% of offenders are re-arrested for the first time after three years of their initial assault and almost 7% are not re-arrested until at least five years later.

Research has also shown that even the batterers who do not physically assault their partner again tend to continue their use of psychological abuse (Johansson & Tutty, 1998; Rosenfeld, 1992). Therefore, studies using more self-report data, qualitative measures and longer follow-up periods are needed to effectively measure the efficacy of batterer intervention programs and long-term patterns of re-abuse.

General Conclusions on the Efficacy of Batterer Intervention Programs

Despite the mixed results on the efficacy of batterer intervention programs, generally domestic violence researchers agree that batterer intervention programs have at least a small effect at reducing re-abuse (Babcock et al., 2004; Feder & Wilson, 2006; Feder, Austin & Wilson, 2008; Lohr et al., 2008; Stuart et al., 2007). Bennett and Williams (2001) concluded that the effect of these programs should not necessarily solely be measured in terms of statistical significance but in regards to practical significance. Research using clinical measures and qualitative studies to examine changes in batterer's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours suggest that the efficacy of the programs is practically significant.

Batterer interventions are perhaps best thought of “not themselves as a cure but a reinforcing component of a coordinated community response to domestic violence, wherein a program’s success reflects on the effectiveness of the overall system in addressing domestic violence” (Gondolf, as cited in Hanson, 2002, p. 437). Batterer intervention programs need to be a part of a *coordinated* community response in which the criminal justice system, batterer intervention programs, victim services and advocates work together and inform each other, and where the evaluation of these domestic violence interventions is ongoing.

In summary, while there has been considerable scepticism expressed by victim’s advocates about the effects of batterer intervention programs for court-mandated clients, the research supports their utility for a relatively large proportion of those charged with assaulting intimate partners. The proviso that some repeat offenders and others with co-occurring problems such as substance misuse and psychological problems are not amenable to the models currently in use suggests the need to conduct further research on identifying these subgroups and developing appropriate interventions.

Chapter Three: The Responsible Choices for Men Group

As noted previously, across jurisdictions, the primary condition to which domestic violence offenders are mandated by the courts is batterer treatment programs. It is critical to assess how well these programs decrease any recidivism, especially as many women victims stay or return to potentially dangerous partners in the hope that they will change as a result of group treatment (Gondolf & Russell, 1986). Considerable scepticism has been expressed by victim's advocates, among others, about the effects of batterer intervention programs, especially for individuals that have been court-mandated to treatment. Since batterer intervention is commonly mandated by both Calgary's specialized docket court and the specialized domestic violence trial court, assessing the perspectives of those mandated to this intervention is vital.

This chapter documents the themes that emerged from interviews with 17 men mandated to Calgary Counselling's Responsible Choices for Men's Groups. The respondents participated in semi-structured interviews of approximately an hour in length. The interview schedules (see Appendix 1) inquired not only about the men's views of the intervention programs, but also about their views of the specialized domestic violence criminal justice response, from the police through the courts and probation. Notably however, while the interview questions for each program were similar, different individuals conducted the interviews and another two research assistants conducted the analysis. As a result, while the topics were similar, the focus of the major themes sometimes has a somewhat different perspective. This can be seen in sections where the comments are exclusively from respondents from only one of the groups.

The Calgary Counselling Centre in Alberta, Canada has provided family violence programs and services since 1981. The agency also offers groups for women and men who have been abused by intimate partners and groups for women who behave aggressively with male partners (Tutty, Babins-Wagner & Rothery, 2009). The Responsible Choices for Men program was developed for males who use physical or psychological violence and control tactics in intimate relationships and is based on a narrative therapy approach with a feminist perspective developed by Australian family therapist Alan Jenkins (1991), and differs substantially from anger-management models.

The primary goal of Responsible Choices for Men is to assist men who are abusive in intimate relationships to become violence-free. The objective of the Responsible Choice Group is to reduce physical and non-physical abuse through emphasis on the following: reduce victim blaming, understanding of control/entitlement, pain beneath anger and empathy and understanding for their partner's experience of the abuse.

The major objectives include: decreasing all forms of abusive behavior; accepting responsibility for one's behavior; increasing self-esteem; increasing assertive behavior; improving family relations; decreasing stress; increasing empathy towards those who have been impacted by abusive behavior; and assisting parents to cease physically abusing their children. Prior to entering the group, clients must be engaged with a primary therapist in the agency who assesses the client's readiness for change and the degree of violence, and determines treatment goals.

The Responsible Choices groups are conducted for 15 weeks, in weekly two-hour sessions. The groups typically comprise six to twelve men, both self- and court-referred and employ both an unstructured psychotherapeutic and a structured psycho-educational component. Covering the key themes is considered crucial, however the facilitators have the flexibility to focus on an alternate issue should one emerge, allowing group members input into the agenda.

Interviews were conducted with 17 men who had completed Responsible Choices group for men to determine the impact of the program. The men were asked about their experiences of the partner abuse, the justice system and the program, with a focus on what was working well and what areas needed improvement.

The demographic characteristics of the men interviewed were as follows:

- Nine men (53%) were still with their partners, with the relationships lasting an average of 11.4 years ranging from 2 years to 38 years.
- On average, the men were interviewed 2.3 years after having attended the Responsible Choices Group with a range from 1.5 to 5 years.
- 76% (13) of the men were fathers.
- 59% (10) of the men had previously attended counselling for anger and addictions.
- 18% (3) had previously attended couples counselling.
- 77% (13) had been abusive towards their intimate partner and 23% (4) had abused a child or relative.

The major themes that emerged from the qualitative interviews are presented in the following sections. The themes included: minimizing the nature of the partner abuse, the men's views of the justice response to domestic violence (police, courts, probation services), the impact of the Responsible Choices for Men group, what is working well in group and what might be improved.

Minimizing the Nature of the Partner Abuse

I had let (my partner) in the door. She attacked me, came at me and started throwing punches and that's why I slapped her. The police didn't even care about that at all... She didn't hurt me. She hit me but she didn't hurt me. (RCM19)

Fifteen of the seventeen men (88%) were forthcoming about the incident that led to their participating in the Responsible Choices for Men group. Of these, six (40%) admitted to previous incidents of abuse. Nine men (53%) reported using alcohol during the incident. Six men reported no substance use issues but two (13%) commented that their partners were using substances at the time of the incident after which the police laid charges.

In describing the incidents of abuse, the men often justified why they had responded in an abusive manner towards their partners or child/relative. Nine men (53%) alleged that their partners were also abusive to them and often initiated the abusive behaviour, to which the men responded by using physical force as a reflexive action, defence or to restrain and prevent further abuse. Their justifications served to minimize the abuse and, in effect, to blame their partners or child/relative.

She was throwing beer cans at my head and I was, "What are you doing?" She turned to walk away, so I kicked her in the bum, not hard. That was it. (RCM1)

It started off with the car, about dings on the door. Silly little things, it just escalated. We was in the car going home with our son sleeping in the back. She was saying hurtful things to me. I reached over and do a backhand, hit her on the chin like that. Then we're in the garage, struggling to grab the ignition key. I say, "You're not going to drive this car anymore" and she started pulling my hair really hard. I hit her so she let go of my hair. I

started going into the house. She came after me and hit me. I hit her back. That was it. (RCM3)

One individual commented that even though what he did was wrong, it was not serious violence.

I said, "Where's my money." She said, "I don't have it." That's when I lost it, I started swinging. I'd had it! It was like a boiling point. One of her sisters was telling me stories about how she (wife) tormented her as a child. People don't change! She tormented me and I let loose. I wish I hadn't done that but I was just so frustrated that I came out swinging. I hit her. That's minimized. What I did was wrong. I didn't pick up an axe or a knife, but it was still wrong because, in the end, if I had just left her alone... We tussled on the couch. I elbowed her in the head. I was hurting her because I was so livid. (RCM 6)

Interestingly, although this group member had stated that people don't change, he reported changing as a result of the Responsible Choices for Men program. Nonetheless, he identified his partner as initiating abuse towards him in subsequent episodes, further justifying his abuse towards her.

There were a couple of other incidences. She lost it, started attacking, hitting and jumping on me. I thought, "Oh my God, I really want to clock her one." So I backed off and drove off. She jumped in the car when I was driving, into the driver's seat. She kept pulling my hair, punching me and eventually, I just backed the car up and drove off and she fell out. She called the police and said I tried to run her over. She scraped her elbow and she's all pissed off. It was her fault. Anytime she starts drinking, she's very, very abusive. (RCM6)

Another man also insisted that his partner deserved the abuse for her behaviours and that she was, in fact, more abusive towards him during the incident. Again, his description of the incident minimized the seriousness of the abuse saying, "It wasn't like I held her down and choked her and beat her".

There was only two occasions that I struck her. The first time, twenty year ago, when my dad passed away, there was a wake at the house, everybody was drinking. I caught her in the backyard with my dad's stepbrother doing the nasty... I grabbed her by the arm and I was hollering. She was clawing at my face and struck me in the head with one of her boots. Out of reflex, I backhanded her. She was the one being violent that time. (RCM8)

He recalled another incident where, reportedly, his partner was more violent than he was

The other time, 1995. I was out in the bush for three days. She had supposedly left Calgary at 8:00 in the morning, in one of my four-wheel drives. She knew where to go. She didn't show up until 9:00 at night. She came up with some excuse, flat-tire on the truck. The spare was still sitting there. A verbal thing came up. She slapped me across the face and I slapped her back. Those were the only two times I struck her in 23 years. It's not good but it did happen. If my little brother was alive, he could have verified the many scars down my face, hair-pulling and verbal abuse all the time. It was more her than me. (RCM8)

Another RCM group member likewise minimized the abuse because he only "tapped" his wife on the face.

The lawyer said, "You better plead guilty or you might end up in jail." I didn't go to jail; I had to go through this group. I've got two incidents: one with my stepdaughter, five years ago. My stepdaughter phoned the police again because I was yelling at my wife and I tapped her on the cheek. I swear to God, I tapped her on the cheek. My wife started screaming, "Don't hit me!" So my stepdaughter called the police because of the incidents years before with her. The police came and, "Did you hit your wife?" I said, "No," but my wife said that I did. I swore up and down, "I didn't hit her. I just tapped her on the cheek." They said, "You're under arrest. You cannot touch anyone when you're angry." But that's the whole point; I wasn't angry when I tapped her on the cheek. (RCM10)

Another respondent similarly minimized the seriousness of the abuse because it "wasn't like he broke bones or sent her to the hospital."

Our communication was the main cause but the way I used to deal with my anger wasn't proper. I made some pretty bad choices; during heated arguments I'd become violent. It wasn't super bad, not to minimize it, but it wasn't like I broke bones or sent her to the hospital. But at the same time violence is violence and it's not right. My partner and I were drinking and that seemed to be a big part. We were drunk and she had taken off to the neighbour's house. I got pissed off and wouldn't let her in. I eventually opened the door. She was mad because I'd left her sitting in the hallway for an hour or two so she attacked me and I slapped her a couple of times. She took off to the neighbours again and called the police. That was when I got charged with domestic abuse. (RCM19)

In another interview, an RCM group member insisted that he was acting in self-defence and simply "restrained" his partner to prevent further abuse.

I thought that my ex was cheating on me. I drove home at four in the morning, drunk out of mind. She started to say something. I said, "Don't even bother bitching at me." We got in a bit of an argument and she came at me with her fists flying. I tackled her and we landed on the floor. I didn't want her to hit me again; she had cut my face open under my right eye with her rings. I didn't want any more hitting so I held her on the floor for ten or fifteen [minutes], I'm not sure, I was pretty drunk. (RCM11)

This individual described another incident during which he restrained his abusive partner. In fact, allegedly, her abuse led to his drinking.

(Another incident) was with the same woman. I was drinking, we'd gotten in an argument and we had a pit bull. The leash had a fairly heavy metal hook on the end. We were arguing and there was a shelf full of ornaments. I cleared it off and she swung the leash and hit me in the back of the head and cut me open. I grabbed her and restrained her so she couldn't hit me with it again. When I let her up she freaked out on me and I got in the car with my daughter and left. She's very, very verbally abusive. We were together again almost two years and the last six or eight months, it had gotten so bad the way she was treating me and talking to me that I'd gone back to drinking. (RCM11)

This man minimized abuse of his stepdaughter because he only pushed her around and did not hurt anybody really; in fact, assault can be as simple as pushing over a chair or lunging at someone.

But five years ago, I was pushing my stepdaughter. My intent was not to harm her but I pushed her on the mattress and she'd stand up and I'd push her back down three or four

times. She was stubborn. Finally I got her to stay on the mattress and I was yelling at her. It came out sounding like I was threatening to kill them. I said, "In my mind, I wasn't going to kill them." I used my physical strength against her. The police also charged me with assaulting my wife. But I never laid a finger on her. She just sat on the bed beside my stepdaughter. The police wrote down that I was assaulting everybody in the house. I only pushed my stepdaughter around. I did not hurt anybody really. I pushed them, scared them, and threatened them. But a slap on the wrist would have been more than sufficient for me. What I said was terrible. I threatened to kill them. I didn't mean to. My memory was they said, "Well, you want to kill us?" I said, "Yeah! I want to kill you! And if you come back here tonight, I will kill you!" I was so angry I didn't care what I said. I crossed a line. I regret it but I didn't mean it. I don't actually hurt anybody but I assaulted someone. You can push over a chair and get an assault for that. If you lunge at somebody without touching them that's an assault; you just have to look scary and you can get an assault. Technically, I'm guilty. I just feel I can challenge this, not to be innocent, but get the charges off my record. I think I can win that because I am not a violent person. It happened, what, once with my stepdaughter and once with my wife. Is it necessary that I be a criminal for the rest of my life? (RCM10)

Another group member commented that his partner was his equal in size and that whoever consumed the most alcohol received more abuse than the other; an equal opportunity activity where the most sober wins.

I came home after midnight and my wife was upset. I had her run a couple of errands for me and things did not go well for her. She was quite upset and we'd both been drinking. She started screaming at me, we got into an altercation. I hung a licking on her. She phoned the police and I left. That was the last I ever saw of her. I don't know how much damage I did. I'm pretty sure I didn't break anything but I think I bruised her quite badly. She kept fighting. She's just as big as I am. That might not sound typical but this is the case. The main reason that I got the best of her was because she was drunker than I was. I just left. I wanted to get out of there before I did any more damage. (RCM13)

Three men disclosed that the reason that they were mandated to the RCM group was having been abusive to their children.

I pinned him (son) up against the wall and scolded him. There was not one mark on him. I didn't throw him against a wall, I just pinned him there. After I was arrested, the police officer acknowledged there were no marks on the boy but called it "un-permitted touch," which was really quite frustrating. It was just an effort to shock my son into paying attention to me, no injury, no abuse. I was not in any fit of rage. I thought, "My God, enough is enough. I have to shock this boy." That was my whole intention. (RCM7)

Another man similarly abused his daughter because she was not following the house rules. He called 911 because he was worried that he was going to seriously harm his child.

I slapped her. I grabbed her; made her a couple of ponytails and screamed in her face. I yelled harder, really hard and I just lost it. Because I was really going to cause the child some serious harm, I called 911. They were there in about five minutes. I was never abusive, very seldom even raised my voice. (RCM15)

The third individual who was in group due to abusing his child, alleged that his wife was abusing him and he took his anger out on his daughter.

I got there by slapping my daughter. She did the right thing phoning the police. I was having anger issues, I got aggressive and I slapped her. She said, "I'm calling the police." I was frustrated with a lot of stuff, part of it being my wife was very abusive. The next thing I knew I was putting my daughter in this situation, which I never should have. I did a bad, bad thing, especially slapping my daughter. I slapped her and she said, "Dad you really scared me." Pretty bad when a person lets their rage do that. (RCM18)

Another man assaulted his niece because she was being disrespectful to his wife; an assault that she allegedly provoked.

There was an incident with my sister and niece. She was maybe 21 and the other was 18. I was provoked into a fight with them. One of them was really disrespecting my wife. All I wanted to do was grab her; slap her and say, "You don't say those things to my wife." It escalated. I don't know how they ended up with this. I never got to her to slap her because my sister's spouse was there. He was holding me back and they were pummeling me, my two nieces. There must have been some bruising on their bodies and they called the police who they arrested me. (RCM20)

In summary, while describing the abusive incidents, the men provided a justification for why they responded in an abusive way to their partner or child/relative. Their descriptions illustrated their minimization and denial of the abuse, blaming the woman or child/relative for being equally or more abusive or simply provoking the abuse they received. The men's definitions of abuse seemed limited to physical abuse, not other forms of abuse in which they were engaging. The men claimed that the abuse did not involve picking up an axe, using a knife, choking, beating or breaking bones but instead slapping, scaring, threatening and intimidating and verbal abuse were acceptable, reinforcing the men's stereotypical ideas of domestic abuse.

Notably, though, several men seemed aware that they were minimizing the abuse, commenting that this was not their intent. The struggle seemed to be that they had a consistent narrative about what had happened in the incident that resulted in their being charged. The narrative did not change over time, but from a distance, several were aware of how their "she did it too" comments could be interpreted, suggesting that they had internalized some of the need for them to take responsibility for their own actions.

Men's Views of the Justice Response to Domestic Violence

It would be nice if they found out if somebody was actually guilty before they treated you like they do. It hurts. My reputation is screwed. (RCM5)

I looked at that court, "Okay, where are the men in this courtroom"? There weren't any, except for the security guard. Jeez, they got a female prosecutor, a female judge. What's the charge? Domestic violence against a female, so I'm going, "Have you prejudged me here?" (RCM6)

Fifteen (88%) men described their general experiences with the justice system including the courts, police and probation. This section presents the men's impressions of these elements of the criminal justice response to domestic separately.

The Police Response

The police were pretty cooperative. This zero tolerance thing really makes it hard for the police to make any justice. (RCM13)

Thirteen men commented on their experiences with the police. Eight men (62%) recalled their contact as positive, while five men (38%) had negative experiences. First, almost two-thirds of the men had positive experiences with the police officers.

The police were great. I was going to go sleep downstairs and she had the door shut. I pushed the door open and that frightened her, so she called 911 because I was ranting, raving. I went outside. The police came. They saw that I was drunk and screaming and wanted sex or something. They said "All right, let's go. You'll have to turn around so we can put the cuffs on you" and I resisted, "You don't have to do that." What the heck? So they did. I sobered up about 2 in the morning. They brought me coffee, let me go at 4:00. I took a taxi home. It was like watching a movie because I was kind of numb when it was happening, but now I relate it, those are the consequences of poor choices. (The police were) sensitive and gentle and understanding, encouraging. (RCM2).

The guy called me up and I was smart. Well, initially I wasn't. I called my wife on it. I said I was going to disappear. She said, "No you're not. You turn yourself in." The guy appreciated that, "Thanks. We didn't have to chase you down." He took me downtown, we had a good talk. He said, "Look, I do this all the time, this is my area, domestic violence." He said, "You get a peace bond. It's a first offence." I mean, this is the police talking to me. (RCM6)

(The police) were very nice, believe it or not! I got along great with them. They didn't put handcuffs on. I was cordial with them and they were nice. They didn't interrupt my (special event). They could've walked right into the middle of it and hauled me out but they said they would wait til I got home. They picked me up at my parents' house and we had a nice chat on the way downtown. (RCM10)

The police were really good. The two fellows were well trained. They really took care of (my partner) well; made sure she was OK. They checked her for bruises and they saw that I wasn't going to be a threat. I went to a motel, stayed the night, but they were good, for sure. If you're not aggressive, you're not going to get yourself in any more trouble than you're already in. Most people not under the influence of drugs or alcohol, unless they have mental issues, are pretty easy to control. They were good and they made sure (my partner) felt safe and comfortable. (RCM18)

The cops were just doing their jobs. I don't blame the two cops personally. But I think the system, that the pendulum has swung... I've been punished twice because, as a youth, I was battered by my father and the law never protected me and now the pendulum has swung the other way to zero tolerance. You do something like this and you end up going to jail. I wish I had this 30 years ago. Most people consider this additional punishment, having to come to this group counselling every week. (RCM20)

Despite a negative experience when he was being arrested, this individual understood the role of the police.

When they came to the house they tackled me. They were saying I was resisting arrest and I wasn't. I wasn't fighting back but they were digging their knees in my back. It wasn't very fun but I was intoxicated. The call they got was me slapping my girlfriend so they probably weren't too happy. They said, "Who the hell do you think you are...." (RCM19)

Five men (38%) reported negative experiences with the police, intimating that the officers did not complete a thorough analysis of the facts.

He was saying, "hands off." Without knowledge, he was saying I had done something wrong. Every moment before going to the judge; you're treated differently, not to say physically. I don't think it's right. That night there was no understanding, no looking at the problem behind the scene, just the violence itself. (RCM5)

The police are trying to do the right thing when it comes to domestic situations. They want to do what is acceptable and follow strict instructions from their superiors. They don't look at all the facts. [The police say] "This is the situation with the female partner being abused. What we have to do is serve him notice and take him to court." But every situation is different. They don't say, "Is there something that the other person's done that needs legal attention?" They totally ignore that. (RCM9)

Two of the men alleged that the police discriminated against them due to their ethnic background.

I was very frustrated. As soon as the police got involved, they asked where I come from. As soon as I say, "Southeast Asia" they treated me as a guilty partner because these are common in these countries. The whole thing turned different as soon as I mentioned I was Southeast Asian. So that is why this is happening and automatically they assume. There were other facts that the police intentionally ignored. (RCM9)

I'd always thought myself a law abiding citizen and suddenly I get a call from the police and they're going to charge me with assault. They read the riot act to me and I found myself downtown. The whole issue was racially prejudiced. It's probably because I'm black, Hispanic. Nothing was really said about what was taking place. It was, "You're getting charged with this unless you have witnesses." No one bothered to hear my side. There were witnesses and the cops didn't bother to hear the other end. So it was very racially motivated. I was never able to present my case in court. (RCM16)

Another research participant alleged that the police used excessive force and assaulted him.

The police escorted me into the house. I went to phone my lawyer, to grab the phone. They bounced me off the fridge, threw me on the floor, handcuffed me and said they were charging me with assault. I said, "What about her?" The police officer said, "There are no charges to be laid there." I had blood coming from my eye where she had cut me with the ring. They put me in sitting sideways and seat belted me in with my hands behind my back and my back facing the driver's door. When they opened the door, they ripped me out by the handcuffs, slid me half way under the car. One cop held the handcuff where my arms were behind my back and grabbed my hair and held my head up. The other, I counted his glove hitting me, punching me five times and his outline of his boot six times. They took me upstairs. When they picked me up there was a pool of blood, about two feet by two feet, after I was cut open. They took me upstairs to book me and the desk sergeant said you can't book him like that. They took me to the clinic. I got seven stitches under my left eye

from being punched and kicked. I didn't deserve to get beat up. They could have restrained me another way. I was just being mouthy; I wasn't trying to hit them. (RCM 11)

Two men were of the opinion that the police assume men to be guilty even before they attend the incident.

That was the third time I'd phoned the police. They walk in the door, it's never the woman that's the abuser, always the man. They're right in my face and I'm holding my face, black and blue. They don't look at it like, "That's not possible. You been drinking?" "No, I haven't been drinking." But even though I had phoned, I'm the one that did it, right? (RCM 18)

The police assumed I was guilty because I was a male and drinking. Both times I restrained her and I was charged with assault. They should get both sides of the story whether the man is drunk or not. When I asked the officer, "What about her hitting me?" He said, "There's not going to be any charges; I didn't see any marks on your face." They weren't even willing to hear me because I was drunk. So there's a little bit of unfair treatment. I can understand them being cautious but, to assume that the man is automatically guilty, I don't agree with at all. (RCM 11)

In summary, the majority of men who commented had positive experiences with the police, particularly when they were cooperative with the authorities. Those men who had negative experiences attributed them to police discrimination, perceiving the officers as not taking into account all of the facts and presumed that all men were guilty. Nevertheless, the details of the one group member's allegation of police assault were concerning.

Perceptions of the Court

Considering the criminal justice response especially in the courts, nine men (60%) perceived that the justice response to domestic violence is biased in favour of women. These men claimed that they did not get fair treatment in court because they were declared guilty without the assumption of innocence, as any other criminal charged with an offence.

The system sucks; it's totally against men. If there's a woman involved they arrest the man. A lawyer told me, if she's hitting you and you hit her, you're both going to get arrested. If the woman hits you and you did nothing, you still both get arrested. That's the way the system works. The system sucks! I don't have a record because I did the peace bond. I did my one year with probation and I took that course. But it's still in their system. Anytime you have anything to do with them, they've got notes on you. The quality of justice doesn't make sense. (RCM6)

(The justice system treated me) very poorly. It was one-sided. Nothing against females but the females are always right. That's the way the system is set up, which is wrong because abuse happens both ways as I found out in my last anger management class. It comes down to who had the better lawyer. As far as I'm concerned, the system let me down. I played by the rules. (RCM8)

Like most of the group members, another individual believed that women could falsely claim abuse and the police will not know the difference.

I would not say it's biased but there are certain assumptions when there is a complaint from a female partner. Okay, you're guilty. That is where you start the process. I didn't

really care if the system believed that I was guilty or not. There was no obvious verdict, it was a negotiated settlement. But right from the start there was an assumption that you are guilty and they don't want to look at the other facts. (RCM9)

They went from the information in police reports and my partner's testimony. I didn't get up and say anything. I gave my statement to the police and that was what the judge read, my statement. I didn't actually testify because I pled out. (RCM11)

She didn't hurt me; she did attack and hit me. I question the justice system. I'm sure more often than not that the woman won't even get in trouble. I'm not trying to say one gender is dominant over the other, I think it should be both ways. If you are going to hit somebody you should have to deal with that. (RCM19)

Five men perceived that they were treated fairly by the courts and that the sentences reflected the severity of the abuse.

I think it was fair. They can't charge me with hitting (my partner) because they didn't find a bruise. She was embarrassed; she didn't want to go to court because she didn't have anything against me. That's why the judge gave me a peace bond. It means they can't charge you but you have to take the program. I can't go near (partner) for 100 yards for one year. (RCM12)

Number one was entering a plea, get there and make sure you have the right judge. Try to make the lawyer make proper arrangements ...started a peace bond. So we had to play the game and please the judge and the Crown prosecutor. My lawyer was able to negotiate a conditional sentence. To me that fit what I was charged with. The punishment certainly fit the crime. (RCM15)

I was treated really well. I was given a good swift kick in the ass. The judge was good, he made sure that I understood, "Look pal, follow through with this or you and I will be meeting again." That was good. (RCM18)

For most of the guys it was an isolated incident. With the system the way it is, zero tolerance, you end up in jail and in the program. I suppose if you are a repeat offender you would be dealt more harshly. We were all first time. Something happened and we snapped and that was it. (RCM20)

One man was of the opinion that he was treated leniently by the justice system.

I was treated fairly leniently. I don't know exactly what my wife told the prosecutor or what she wanted. I was prepared to plead guilty and the sentence I received was about as minimal as you could possibly get under that circumstance. A \$35.00 fine and a year's probation was not unusual. The restraining order was initiated by my wife; she had the option to make it permanent. So she was looked after too. If it was me looking in from the outside, I would say that I was treated very leniently. (RCM13)

Two men commented that the court process went well. One was surprised that Calgary's specialized DV first appearance court was so efficient.

In years past, I was amazed that, when I was released on recognizance, it'd be two to three months before you had to make an appearance. So the domestic violence court process now is very smooth and efficient, probably the only part of the court system that is. The efficiency is very good. The way this matter was dealt with by court appearance, remand

etc. Don't leave it dragging on. You were in court in very short order to make an appearance; makes you get your affairs in order right away. (RCM15)

One individual who went through the specialized docket court commented that the judge's comments served to deter him from further partner abuse.

The judge heard everybody and he wasn't impressed. He told me that if I ever appeared again in that courtroom, I was looking at five to seven years. It scared me; I was scared I was going [to jail] the first time because I was just doing weekends. I'm never going to get involved in a situation again where I'm charged. (RCM11)

Three men mentioned that having a criminal record had prevented them from obtaining employment and had restricted their travel to other countries.

I'm finding that all of my best jobs want a criminal record check. I've lost a couple already. If I want to go to the States, I have to pay \$500 for a criminal record check every time and there's no guarantee they'll admit you. It's going to ruin me. (RCM10)

My understanding of conditional sentencing is these are based on one year. Two years and that's supposed to disappear. In the meantime you can't get your passport. I can't leave the country and my sister is in California. (RCM 15)

I did lose my job. When I applied for a new job, I didn't get it because they did a check and I had this conviction on my record. I didn't know it was going to come up or I would have said something. The next time I applied for a job and knew they would do a security check, I told them about it. Because I was upfront, they had no problem hiring me. So I went through a lot. It wasn't just a night in jail, having to go to court and getting convicted and all the court fees, paying my lawyer. I lost my job, then another job. I could have problems travelling to the U.S.. (RCM20)

The men identified several other issues with justice system response to domestic violence. One man did not see the courts as an effective way to deal with the underlying factors in abusive relationships. Another man asserted that the justice system should respond as they did thirty or forty years ago with the police giving a "stiff talking to" to the man. Multiple adjournments involving the specialized docket court was identified as a barrier to processing domestic violence cases. One man commented that going to court was a scary process due to the uncertainty of the outcome.

Probation

Eight men (47%) commented on their experiences with being on probation and dealing with probation officers. Six men (75%) reported positive experiences with their probation officers while two men (25%) recalled negative experiences. First, the majority of men had a positive experience with their probation officer.

Probation was good. I had two probation officers and they were really good to me. I was always on time; always made my appointments. I did everything I had to do like AADAC. Considering what I was charged with, I had women both times, and they didn't treat me any differently than anybody else. They didn't look down on me or say, "You're a woman beater." There was no judgment. It was like, "you're on probation, it's my job. Show up, do this and we'll be fine." So that's what I did. (RCM 11)

I found her supportive. I honestly think she had my interest at heart. I think she was somewhat disappointed in me; think she was used to dealing with a lot tougher cases. But she was very professional and interested in my well-being and me not going to jail, which is what she's paid to do. (RCM 13)

There are people who need to be supervised. I consider myself responsible and reliable. I was proven pretty much through all this and I'm not that bad an individual. But it's part of the process and this is how they keep in touch with people. (RCM15)

They were pretty good. The guy more or less understood; he didn't treat me like some hardened criminal. "You screwed up. What are you going to do from here to make it better?" As long as you are honest and show up when you are supposed to, they treat you a lot better than the police do. (RCM 19)

Two men recounted negative experiences with their probation officers. One man hadn't realized that probation was associated with the peace bond conditions.

That's what bothered me! I didn't realize [with] a peace bond, I had one-year with a parole officer. That was the worst punishment. That was the worst guy I've ever dealt with. Maybe that's why I got him. He had the personality of a soggy cauliflower. I hated going. I would just sit there and not say anything. He would say, "Did you move?" [I'd say,] "No." [He'd say], "So did you?" I'd say, "No. No. No. No." Then I'd be out of there. I did not see the benefit of talking to him once a month. It didn't mean anything, absolutely nothing. (RCM 6)

She didn't give a shit. She believed my ex when my ex told her I was manipulating the system. "Don't believe a blood test because he'll manipulate that too." The probation officer's supervisor took control after I was breached and I was reassigned. The probation officer I had from then on, for six or seven months, had a completely different attitude about me, my situation and my ex. (RCM 7)

One man commented that probation was good for first time offenders and another asserted that it was unnecessary for first time offenders.

It's a good tool. Probation is probably the answer if you're not a threat to the general public. I'm not violent with anybody else. (Int.: You were never that kind of guy to get in a fight in a bar?) Well I'm not saying it never happened. I'm just saying if I want to survive I probably wouldn't do that. If you remove the person from whatever is causing the problem then probation is probably a good tool. (RCM 13)

Probation is long-winding. For first time offenders, probation is unnecessary because that person is not a risk. For repeat offenders, probation would be really big. (RCM 16)

In conclusion, the men generally believed that the justice response was biased towards men in favour of women. The RCM group members claimed that domestic violence crimes were treated differently than other crimes in that they are presumed guilty with no burden of proof. The men expected a "trial" to establish who was telling the truth and did not understand when the police had sufficient evidence to lay a charge. Importantly, in contrast, a few men mentioned that they believed that the courts treated them fairly and that the sentence fit their crimes. The majority of men had a positive experience with the police and probation services.

The Impact of the Responsible Choices for Men Group

You've got to get out. Walk away for a few days. I like my grandchildren. I see them a lot. I'll walk a long distance just to catch your breath and don't be afraid to go back home after. That can happen; you're in a crappy mood and you've said something you shouldn't have but you've got to go out that door or down your basement, on your treadmill or, whatever. I walk to try to clear my head. (RCM 18)

Thirteen men (76%) commented on the impact of the group on their abusive behaviours and anger problems. The men learned to take time-outs, were more able to control their anger, and were less confrontational and more calm and sensitive. First, eight men (61%) noted that they learned to leave the situation before the abuse began.

When I get to the point where it's going to get scary, I just leave. I get in the car and drive. I was the one who wanted change and I got my change. The end result was very positive. I was very pleased. It made a huge commitment; one of the sessions was on Halloween night. That's the first time I wasn't out with my kids because I had to be in this class. I was really there to learn and I did learn. (RCM 06)

I go for a walk, watch TV, listen to music, go to a happy spot, try to think out of the cycle. Something they did teach me, the triangle [Karpman's]. I get out of the triangle and I go to a different place. I shouldn't say I do every time. I try to. Time out. If you want to rant and carry on, go ahead. Does that make somebody mad? Sometimes. You don't have to pay attention. I choose not to fight or play the game. I can voice my opinion and be angry but I don't have to be angry to you or anybody else. I'm not going to be verbally abusive or physically abusive. I'm still mad. I just try to do something else to take my mind off of it. (RCM 08)

I don't push issues as far as I used to. I'm not saying I don't argue anymore, but once I realize that we're both hurt, both angry, it's time to stop. If we can come back at it later, we're more relaxed and issues are solved almost immediately. (RCM 10)

I tried time-outs; talking with her more instead of arguing. Many occasions, I asked her, "Just quit, that's enough, stop." But it helped me identify some signs of my anger. I even told her a couple of times, "You're pushing it too far, leave me alone." Usually I ended up leaving because she wouldn't leave it alone. But I knew where my pressure points were. Enough was enough and I had to get out of the situation because she wouldn't quit. Lots of times she'd push me and say, "Come on, let's go" and I said, "No, I'm not going to do that. Let me alone." The group helped me realize that because this last time we were together, she was throwing lighters at me and I didn't react. I didn't let it piss me off to that point where I was throwing stuff back at her. It's hard to say what exactly made me stop. Some of the experiences of the group, the stuff I'd heard, made me stop and think. When the lighter was thrown at me my first instinct was to pick it up and throw it back at her. Then I stopped and thought, no, remember what that guy said and you know that's going to lead to that and you played out the scenario of what was going to happen if you did throw that back. So I didn't bother. It helped me think ahead, like playing chess, two or three moves ahead. (RCM 11)

(The group taught us) how to calm yourself. Now, if I get angry, I walk away, get calm. It's hard but when you're used to it, it's not that hard. The first time I see my sister, she

kept, "Why you did this to Mom." I was angry at her so I walked away. I come back and talked to her a bit. It works... They help. (RCM 12)

The biggest thing about group was teaching patience. I've certainly lost it a couple of times but group taught me to deal with frustrating situations. Before, I would just have gone, "It's my way or nothing." Now I step back, look at it and say, "I've been down this road before". Whether I step away for a half hour or half a minute, it was,, "Stop, this isn't working. What do we need to do?" You don't have a solution right away, separate. It took away the instant reaction. (RCM 15)

My fiancée wants to confront the situation head on. I have to sit down and think about what I am saying. So for me it was really important that I came to a conclusion in my mind before I came to that conclusion in my heart. Sometimes, I just walk away. Sometimes I try to deal with it as best as I can while she's there because sometimes I'm able to deal with things straight away, it creates less friction. Sometimes, I have to think about things before I talk to her. Not saying going overtly but you've done a little bit of thinking beforehand. Then when I go and I talk to her there's an understanding. (RCM16)

Five men (38%) commented that they had learned to better control their anger and abusive behaviours and used a more deliberate calm approach to resolving conflict.

I'd take the time to think about what I was going to say to her before I said it. Maybe write her a note, what I was feeling at the time, and see how it looks on paper. Then I can change it before I actually talk to her. Keep a calm voice, and don't be in somebody's face. It's pretty easy. Don't get all excited, jumpy, and don't get the big voice going. I'm a better person as far as that goes, more cool headed, calmer, I handle situations a little better, I handle bad news better. I know it in my head now, what I have to do, and I do it. I don't have to think back on the group all the time. Now it's more like that's just the way it is. More natural. I haven't had any real confrontations in a long time. Maybe when I'm just having a discussion with someone, we might be talking and I just have to stop myself from saying a word that might be hurtful to them. You stop in mid-sentence and go, "I shouldn't say that." (RCM 01)

If some guy cut me off in traffic, before it would've been the finger and me swearing at him. I got to a point where I was realizing, "Who is actually getting the brunt of the yelling and the blood pressure and the angst and taking your attention off what you're supposed to be doing to let somebody else know you are pissed off." Who actually withstands the worst of that? I withstand the worst of it. I constrict my blood vessels. I put stress on my heart; my blood pressure goes up. So taking your attention off what the importance of this present moment. So it's okay to be angry. It's like, "I'm angry, that's interesting. What happened"? But now it's all contained within this flow and tapping into the energy of now, let's direct that energy. So in the past, absolutely, I had a problem with anger. Like every other human being on the planet. (RCM 02)

Sometimes I still can't help get loud or express frustration. But I won't let it escalate to a point where we have to get physical. I put a stop to that. My wife and I, we still get into arguments. We can't be perfect and have no more arguments. But one thing that's always bothered me about my wife is sometimes when she gets mad she will slam the door on me. She knows I don't like that and that's how things can get going. But I won't let it, and say, "Just because you try to get me all worked up." I just won't let it go further. If somebody

starts something and you just follow it gets worse and worse. If I do my part not to get deeper into entangling, then it helps and it seems it won't get any worse from that point on. This group goal: control of yourself, it's pretty difficult. They must have told me something to say; just go by my normal voice or I'll still go on the same track. Now, it's better. I'm not being caught up that way. I just put my foot down, and refuse to go there. So far it is working. Overall it's helped me to control myself. It definitely helped me to come out and talk instead of fight or get loud. It's helped me to admit when I do things wrong, to apologize because in the past, long long back I've been labelled as well, "You never admit you're wrong. You never apologize." (RCM 03)

How to understand anger. Everybody has anger; I deal with it every day. Everybody does unless you are living in Utopia. I mean all you have to do is drive down Deerfoot and you see anger all the time. You go to the first red light and you see anger. Everybody should be in anger management. As soon as you get your driver's license that's the first thing you should do. It should be part of the regimen to get a driver's license. Road rage is one of the biggest things. I still get mad, but I don't play the game. They can push my buttons but I don't race ahead to cut them off. It's worked. But sometimes you fall into the same trap. Do I still get angry? I always will. That's what I learned. It's okay to be angry, it's how you deal with your anger. That's what I got out of it and if that's what I was supposed to get out of it, the class worked for me. (RCM08)

I've changed quite a bit. I think in a different way. I notice things a little more than I used to, the signs. I think I'm a bit better person, I have a better understanding of what's going on around me, of myself and how I'm going to react in certain situations. I have the ability to stave them off instead of run right into them like I used to; a little better control of my anger now. (RCM 11)

Two men stated they have become more sensitive as a result of the program.

I'm being careful about what I say and do. I'm more sensitive to the other person's feelings. I used to walk away, to say, "It's not going the way I want it to go" and just drop the whole thing and no resolution. Then get angry and walk away. The bad thing is that the issue is still there. Nothing will be resolved. Now if I do that to situations to ease the tension, I come back and restart in a different tone. I did not realize before that in a way that raising my voice was abuse. It sounds horrible but I did not know that before. Now I do and because of that I try not to do that. (RCM 09)

I don't take it personally anymore. That helped. What goes on at home helps me at work, it helps me deal with other people better; helps with my road rage. People cut you off not because they're trying to cut you off; they're just not watching what they're doing. They didn't mean it. They're just bad drivers. So getting angry at them just makes them angrier at you because they didn't know what they did. Like all people, they don't realize what they're doing. Just like me when I was angry with my family. I didn't know what I was doing. I thought I was doing something right but I was doing it for another reason that I didn't even realize. (RCM10)

One man stated he learned to better communicate with his intimate partner as a result of the program.

I try not to get angry at all. It's not worth it and I've quit drinking in the meantime so there have been many positive changes. I think that (my partner) and my communication is at a completely new level. That was the whole problem. If you can't get across to people, it is easy to get frustrated. If something is bothering me I'll tell you right away before it gets out of hand. Before I'd be just miserable to everybody but now I can communicate that, especially to (my partner). Like, "I'm pissed off because of this and it has nothing to do with you." There is an understanding there. She's not pissing me off without knowing what she even did. I didn't do that before, I just kept everything inside. We don't fight as often and if we do it's normal argument stuff, it's nothing abnormal that can get you in trouble or that hurts (my partner). We are happy, I guess you can say.. Somebody flips you the bird driving, cuts you off; things you can't control don't let bother you. It's almost better just to laugh it off. I never used to be like that. Every little thing would bother me. (RCM19)

In summary, the men claimed the program had a significant impact upon their abusive behaviours because they know how to identify their triggers, communicate their frustrations, know when to walk away when they are losing control and generally were more insightful into the source of their anger and how to control it.

What is Working Well in Group

I needed somebody to talk to about it and it was going to be a group of men who had maybe been through some of the same things. It was like a sounding board; and that's what it was for everybody. (RCM 11)

Pretending to be her and taking that role on opens your eyes to try to empathize with the other's position. To think from their point of view versus your own point because most people think of their own point of view versus someone else's. People say, "Try to see it my way." So that's the picture we get. (RCM 06)

All seventeen men identified several components of their experience that worked well including the social support men gained from being with men in similar circumstances. Program material and exercises identified as working well included role playing, triangle, family tree, iceberg and social roles theories. Lastly, the skills of the facilitators conducting the group and counsellors in individual counselling were identified as positively impacting the men's experiences.

Social Support

Going through the program [Responsible Choices] definitely helped me to change. I had the chance to see not just myself or what I come up with, but what other people go through and problems other people face. It could be a lot worse than it is. (RCM 03)

Ten men (59%) commented on the social support provided by the group and that each man contributed to the learning of the group. Men commented that they learned about different types of abuse and self-awareness of their abusive behaviours through sharing and listening to experiences of others. Overall, the men stated they felt less alone in their experience

Listening to different people's problems, seeing how they were dealing with it or what they had done in the past. Different ways of dealing with things, how you've dealt with things, maybe things I could avoid. I'm sure it was vice versa. Some people were talking about

psychological abuse, maybe those are things you do without even knowing. It made me think about times that I've possibly done that. (RCM 01)

It helped to sit around with a bunch of strangers. You were able to share your feelings that way. I think that's beneficial. Looking back, it was probably easier to express yourself when you don't know somebody. For me it's easier. (RCM 03)

We helped each other; that's the dynamics of a group. We each helped ourselves. When you're sitting around the circle and you're yakking and then one guy says something and another guy kind of interjects and says, well. We couldn't swear in that [group] but he would say, "You're full of shit." But we'd say, "No. It's not like that." And they'd go, "O-oh!" or they'd think about it and come up to you at break and, "You said something right on there." So that really worked. (RCM 06)

Talking with the guys and listening to their experience. I always knew that the signs were there before, I just didn't pay attention. The group was kind of a wakeup call; the little lights are flashing, time to stop, and do something. Most of us knew when the point was when we should have got out or done something different but didn't, which is what put us in the position we were in. (RCM 11)

When it comes to looking at other men and saying, "I can see that I'm not the only guy who's found himself in this set of circumstances." Maybe that has some value. But as far as the group is concerned, it's good for one thing; for men to realize that they're not the only ones in that particular predicament. (RCM 13)

I mean some things in my opinion were still way too personal. But I still was able to talk about certain things I guess some of us; I mean group was helpful in itself like all the experiences other people had gone through. And you could see some of the changes in the men had gone through while we were at group... I learned to be a little more open with my thoughts... I learned that some things you can share and that you can't be uncomfortable about it and that's pretty much public domain. (RCM16)

Probably the best thing I've done for a long, long time. You find out a lot about yourself when you're a little more mature. There were quite a number of younger fellows in this course. You're able to share without saying, "You shouldn't do that!" By sharing your experiences they pick things up and see where they're headed, like, "Do you want to be here when you're fifty years old? Smarten up now and get fixed." The diversity of group, it just wasn't ethnic, it was age, too. That was interesting, the diversity was really important. If you've got a whole bunch of young guys, they're going to go outside and smoke ha, ha, ha and carry on. That is my take on it. What's the point of having some old guys, we're all going to sob and, we know we did wrong, but you need these young guys to, what the hell are you still doing that for? What's wrong with your head? You work off each other. (RCM 18)

It was good. I learned a lot; a lot of support to help me through my problems. They are genuine people who are going through the exact same thing that I was. It was really scary at times joining a new group and speaking in front of the group. As you get to know them, it is good. (RCM 19)

It was kind of a chore at the beginning but I bonded with the group and it wasn't such a chore anymore. It felt sort of therapeutic; I actually looked forward to it some weeks. The

best thing was to get things off your chest. It provided me a forum to do that. I shared a lot of the things they were saying about the justice system, the police, how they were treated. I related to all that and court. We all had to do the same thing. (RCM20)

This man stated the group was helpful because men realized they were not alone and provided an opportunity for self-analysis through analysis of someone else's experiences.

It was a learning experience that you are not alone. I realized that I'm not that bad. I'm just saying that no matter how bad I am there's always someone worse or someone better than me. (RCM 10)

It's easy to analyze someone else's life compared to your own. When you're by yourself, you don't realize that there are people out there with the same situation and you can't analyze yourself very well. It's human nature to look down on other people. So if you look down on other people, you go, "Wait a minute. That's like me. Why am I looking down? Is that me?" and it might put a twist on how you think of yourself next time it happens, next time you get angry. (RCM 10)

Program Material Strengths

(I learned) how to deal with my anger, how to communicate, compromise, I learned a lot on the other side of the boat too on how like (my partner) must have been feeling. You know putting her through all that wasn't fair to her. And I was able to kind of have an insight on her emotions and stuff because it wasn't something me and her were talking about. (19)

Eleven men (65%) remembered specific program material that had an impact upon them. Sixty four per cent (7) of these men remembered the role playing exercise as eliciting empathetic feelings about how their partner must have felt while experiencing the abuse.

It was pretty good, quite informative. It's more or less understanding, the feeling of the other person and then certain things that it's okay to get into and how it can affect their partner. The thing I found quite informative and very interesting the different situations. It was somewhat neat. I found group session more productive than individual sessions. (RCM 09)

They had a session where you would act out what was happening, what made you angry. Everybody's story was similar, getting to that anger point and wanting to control the situation and make it stop. No matter what everybody was thinking, all they wanted was to make it stop. I didn't realize I was losing a battle. My wife helped too. She would say, "You can't yell at me." She wasn't trying to win a battle, but she was scared. I can understand that, I'm bigger and stronger... Being put on the opposite end of that is an experience that I never thought that I would have. I didn't realize that I was being a bully. As much as I was trying to defuse a situation, even if I'm right, it doesn't matter. If I do it that way, it's wrong! I can't win because they won't believe me. If I can do it kindly then my wife is more receptive. If I am right she will believe me, not necessarily right away. (RCM 10)

There was that one exercise where you had to pretend there was two of you. There was another guy and you had to pretend that was your ex; it was almost like a skit. I learned a lot from that. I learned a lot from the guys who were there. It made me understand where

she was coming from because the other person's role was to pretend that they were the spouse. They started you off with you shouldn't have been doing this or you should have been doing that or it led into kids. It made me feel a little bit of what she was feeling; it gave me a better understanding of what she was saying to me. I got a perspective of some of the stuff I was saying to her. It wasn't her sitting there but some of the stuff that was being said clicked in my brain and kind of reversed it. It was like it was being said to me. (RCM 11)

I can't remember the young fellow or the lady's name but they were good. Sitting in the chairs, where you had to act yourself and then sit in the other chair and act as the abused person was fantastic. One fellow in class could not do it, he wasn't ready. You sit there as the one that's being abused, like holy crap. You can really see what you've done, it's amazing. You got tears running down, everybody did. Tears running down your face and most of those young men were really honest. You could see the ones who were being evasive. Just a couple of them. Most of them were so forthright. (RCM 18)

I remember the chair exercise. That was a good release. Even though it would have been good to actually have my (victim) in that empty chair I got to say a lot of the things that I want to say to her. It was kind of a release for me. Most of the guys would say the same thing. Just about everybody had to participate. I wish we would have done this earlier because there are other exercises that I found really useful but I can't remember anymore, But that stood out; the empty chair. (RCM 20)

Three men also mentioned that the group helped them to accept responsibility for their abusive behaviours.

Her whole mandate was to say we're the ones with the problem. Because in every group, it would be so funny, but we'd always be blaming the other party. It's always their fault. They taught us to take responsibility for our own actions no matter what someone else did. It's not like an action, reaction. They have an action and you don't have to. I found that kind of helpful. Some of the guys broke down and cried, which somewhat made others uncomfortable. It doesn't bother me to see anyone cry. That was a turning point because they were kind of admitting what they did was wrong. (RCM 06)

I'm right and the other person is wrong and it has to be my way. We all seem to think that we're all right and the other person is wrong. The people who conducted the class always pointed out, "What if the other person is right?" or "What is your partner's opinion? Are you going to take that into consideration?" I can't really put my finger on a particular issue but it would always come to that point of, "No, I was right." They'd think the partner was wrong because we are right in the first place. It was a simple thing but those kinds of things should come to us automatically. They are really basic but because of the emotions there are certain issues that are rather obscured. Now, I think of those things (RCM 09)

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 just by controlling your own temper. Then your partner calms down too and that's what you wanted. So you are taking control. Rather than force; you're leading by example. (RCM 10)

Two men identified Karpman's triangle as useful in understanding the dynamics of abuse.

Some of the theory, like the victim or the triangle. To tell you the truth, just how you're shifting from one role to another, how you act under the circumstances. If I didn't go through the group and learn...Like it's something you'd have to go to college to learn. It is to our advantage to learn, not to go school but to go to sessions to learn about these things. (RCM 03)

I learned that it's ok to just let it go, leave well enough alone. Since then it's gotten really well, that triangle. Not being sucked into it has been huge. I just keep reading that triangle and trying not to be drawn into it. (RCM 18)

Two men commented on the value of the family tree exercise in understanding the roots of their abusive behaviours.

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 you one of them was an alcoholic and take their parents, was one of them alcoholic? Well, yeah. I'm not talking about me but the family tree. Or physical abuse, if you abuse your spouse, chances are one of your parents abused the other. (RCM 07)

You get more and more deep and some are really good, some of the reference they give you to deal with things. When you look back there's a definite family history and those people on the family tree, how it affected you. When you look back and see certain people in your family tree that you, bottle of rum in my hands, bottle of scotch on the other side of the family, a lot of things about my dad that he never ever told me. So I had to discover. I used to believe that people out there having fun but that was his way. We were certainly able to identify a lot of different role models and I could see my interaction with my dad and how it affected me. But the family tree allowed me the opportunity to see some of the interactions with myself, my parents, how it affected myself, my spouse, and my kids. (RCM 15)

Two men remembered the discussion about social roles theories.

They talked about our roles and how to treat your partner. 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. Do you force her?" He was giving us a realistic situation that we've all come across. They talked about those roles. They gave us a couple of films. They defined too, that today in Calgary, there is no room for violence at all. That's today's standards. There is no room for any violence, no matter if it is if it's a guy or a girl. You have to find other ways to vent your aggression. (06)

I learned the difference between men and women. Men want to solve the issue now. Women want to talk about it. They'll talk about brushing their teeth in a way that expresses how they feel. That's something else that men don't do so you have to meet them half way. Women's brains are wired differently. They're more social whereas men are more get it over with and solve this problem right now so we can have a laugh. It's important to know. It doesn't matter what the past was. My dad and I could have an argument one minute and the next minute we would be happy as larks talking to each other because the problem is solved. (RCM 10)

Two men remembered the iceberg discussion that explored how hurt underlies anger and abuse.

Something I learned, I'm actually hurt. Everything I've ever done: pushing people is simply because my heart was broken. It sounds ridiculous, a little bit like a spoiled child but I expected more from them. I was hurt and I wanted to hurt back in a way that was inappropriate. If I had just simply had told them, I didn't want to hurt them. It's instinctual. I'm trying to, "You don't care about me. I don't care about you!" I don't mean to hurt you, I was just trying to prove to them that I was hurt. It's a bit wacky. Kind of a primitive way of thinking about it. It's sunk into me now. Hurt leads to anger. If you stop and let them know that you're hurt and you do it nicely enough then they don't want to hurt you anymore than you want to hurt them. (RCM 10)

Simply put, our psychological makeup is like an iceberg. The underlying emotions that drive us are buried beneath. So if we are abusive, what are the underlying emotions and what do we feel that can make us become abusive. Do we feel inadequacy? Do we feel fears? There are all sorts of things, anger, or frustration? Do we feel rage; do we feel that we were cheated on? Do we feel misled, mistreated? The iceberg thing, that's incredible; it tells me a lot. Now when I'm dealing with a person at work behaving in a certain way, I always give them the benefit of the doubt. There are emotions that are driving this terrible behaviour that they are presenting. So I'm not just going to react, I try to find out what the root of it is. (RCM 07)

Two men mentioned that the program helped men focus on the future and how to identify triggers.

Another thing I learned from the group is try not to live in the past. I'm trying to move forward and leave the past in the past and that's where she likes to live. I'd like to get on with my life. Whatever mistakes are made, whatever's happened in the past, I was charged with whatever, I've done my penance for that. (RCM 11)

Its triggers. That's one of the things that I learned through the fourteen weeks. It could be anything, the lid off the toothpaste, how you're chewing your food. When you let these little things turn into great big things, boy there's problems. So you watch for those triggers and try to deal with them a little differently, that's part of that training is just get the heck out. The biggest thing is keeping your hands busy. If you're keeping your mind busy, whether it's walking around the block, painting, needlepoint, whatever... You've got to learn to control that aggressive making excuses for your behaviour. One of the things I learned in that course was I'm the one that made that decision. I'm the one that hit or punched back and I'm just as much to blame as that other person. (RCM 18)

RCM Facilitators/Counsellors

The facilitators made sure that everybody participated. Some people more actively than others and others not so much but that's up to you. You were given a chance. I'd never seen it before so it was a positive experience actually. (RCM 20)

Eight men (47%) commented on the group facilitators and counsellors in the Responsible Choices Program. Five men stated the facilitators were good at their jobs and meeting the goals of the group, namely ensuring they accepted responsibility for their abusive behaviours using a non-judgmental approach.

We had a male and a female facilitator. The female facilitator kept hammering us with "You're abusers." She kept pushing and pushing us. Finally I said, "This is enough.

We're all here because of one incident. It's not repeated and you keep tagging us." At one point the male facilitator said, "If you keep acting this way we're going to have to ask you to leave," because I challenged their authority, which I have a tendency to do. If I have some point to make I don't care who it is, I'm going to make my point. After that session, she kind of quieted down and we moved on because her whole mandate was to say we're the ones with the problem. (RCM 5)

(The female facilitator) was more willing to bring her life experiences to the table. I guess that's probably what we needed as opposed to the male facilitator. She wouldn't mention things per se but she'd bring up examples or things would come up and she'll discuss them to a certain extent. She'll ask us questions, she'll poke around. That's the way in which you can get discourse going. (RCM 16)

They were really able; their training must have been very good. They were really able tell where to go with each person to get the best out of them. The facilitators were able to see that. The female would come up with some very good points, because she could see it from the lady's side, of course. Good questions she would ask and it made those guys pay attention to her, especially with a lady there. One or two started beaking off and she drew that out to make them realize that these little trigger points could make them react in an angry manner. So they were able to spot things and they worked together well as a team. They were good judges of character, whatever notes they took and however they handled it was good, it was good. They were good readers of personalities. You have to be responsible for your actions. The toughest part with that course was getting people to be responsible and that share thing worked really well. Those facilitators spotted how to bring each person's guilt to the front. It was tough to get all of them, including myself, to admit that they've done wrong. (RCM18)

The counsellors in the group were really nice and understanding. They didn't push anybody to talk if they didn't want to. There were certain things you had to do but if you felt like being quiet for a day that was fine with them and just listen to everybody else. I did learn a lot though in the group. I don't know it helped me a lot. The facilitators seemed really understanding and they didn't judge people. I think that is the scariest part is being judged especially when you did something like super wrong. They just treat you like normal human beings. It helps you get through because if they are going to treat you like scum it's not going to make it very easy. (RCM 19)

Individual Counselling Experience

Five men (29%) recalled positive perceptions of individual counselling prior to attending the group. The men stated the counsellors helped open their eyes to their abuse and highlighted what they needed to change.

It was all right. She was good to talk to. She put things in front of you, maybe things you were doing that you thought were right and maybe weren't right. Opened my eyes, made me think that maybe this isn't the right way to go. It was pretty helpful. Talked about a few things that had bothered me, pretty much everything that was happening at the time. Some of my dislikes about her family, things that set me off, made me angry. She was more of a good listener and mostly things that I really didn't like and mostly talked about why I had been drinking, a bit of family history, and things that set me off. (RCM 01)

I saw (counsellor) a number of times on my own. I liked it better. I could talk about my everyday stuff easier. At group, we didn't really talk about everyday stuff because some days are good and some days aren't, but sometimes you don't have a problem to discuss. Everything went pretty good, it's nice just to talk about that. (RCM 05)

I got something out of it, when I dealt with (my counsellor). He was the first guy I seen down there and he was a cool, reasonable person; a psychologist. Just the way he talked to me and the way I read him, that's how the door was opened, for me. I learned, I won't say a lot of stuff, but I learned some valuable stuff that will be with me forever. He was a nice guy. I liked him. He's good at what he does, he didn't show emotion. He was straightforward with me, but he was honest. He was right to the point. He said, "If you ever want to see your son, you're going to have to..." He said, "I do hope you get to see your son one day, but regardless if you think you need this or not, if you just sit there and be a bump on a log, you won't get anything out of it." He said, "If you actually participate in the group, you'll learn something." The first five visits nobody was participating. But once everybody started participating, some participated better than others. It was amazing. (RCM 08)

Once a month I got to talk to her (my counsellor) and I got to get rid of the little bit of I wouldn't say anger but the stress. She didn't pull any punches. I didn't like her at first. I thought she was rude to me but she was just being honest. I came to realize that after about the fourth session that she was just telling me how it was. She pulled stuff out of me; she'd ask me a question about something I was kind of hem and haw about it and she'd ask me a different question and then she'd go back to another question and kind of pull stuff out of me that I needed to say, I guess. I came to trust her; she was really good at her job. She treated me like a human. (RCM 11)

The one-on-one counselling was good. It was like a warm up to group and we discussed a lot of the things that I needed to work on. She gave me ideas on how to do that. When she felt that I was ready, I went in to group. (RCM19)

In summary, the men stated social support from other men contributed to the learning of the group. The men stated they felt less alone going through the group with men who had similar experiences. The men learned from others about abuse, how to verbally express themselves, helped provide hope and provided opportunities for self awareness and growth.

The men also remembered specific program material which affected them including role playing, which was meant to elicit empathetic feelings about how heir partner must have felt while experiencing the abuse. The men also mentioned that the group helped them accept responsibility for their abusive behaviours. The triangle, family tree and iceberg exercises and discussion of social roles and how hurt underlies anger and abuse served to help the men understand abuse from their partners' perspective. The men also claimed that the facilitators and counsellors in the program were good at their jobs which contributed to their learning and growing self-awareness. Other valuable components of the program were the future focus of the program and how to identify triggers.

Opportunities for Change

There was the sense that "let's have something good happen." But then there would be these little flashes of things that would go on, the way the material was handed out, or how

the instructions were given, I got the feeling, "You know, I'm not in Grade Three." I'm here voluntarily, so treat me like an adult. That was just my experience. I don't know if anybody else felt that way. (RCM 2)

Twelve men (70%) provided feedback on the program and identified opportunities for changing the program. Specific recommendations were regarding changes to the program materials, the group structure, and the approach of the facilitators/counsellors.

Program Material Changes

Nine men suggested the following changes to improve the program, including the material, video, arrangement of exercises and filming of the sessions. One commented that the material focused on "why" versus "what" questions, which is past focused. A second man was of the opinion that the material was too deep.

When I look at the material, it caused me to go back to the past. It also asked me to answer "why" questions; why questions lock you into an untenable position that you can't change. It does you no good to focus on the past; why it happened. So shift the emphasis from the past and into, "What can you act on now." What is the now? If you say "what" instead of "why" you get much more useful information. The material, the way it was handed out made me feel like I was less of a human being. It wasn't an invitation. It wasn't a connective experience for me. I felt disenfranchised in the group, because of the way it was done. (RCM 2)

They were almost too deep.. Some of it was a little hard to follow at times because they are getting it out of a book. In the real world sometimes the book isn't right. Sometimes I'd catch myself daydreaming and I'd be thinking "Shit, what are my dogs doing?" because there was lots of Freud's stuff, which to me is hard to understand, unless I had the book right in front of me. (RCM 8)

Two men were of the opinion that the video was inappropriate for first time offenders in the group.

Why are they showing me this video and wanting me to relate myself to this monster in this video? I had a hard time with that. Calgary Counselling Centre seems ready to treat me as a violent terrible monster, like that individual in the videotape. There was no grey area with this guy. This guy is a vicious monster. So this is the monster that I was tagged to be. I was treated with complete disregard and disbelief whenever I seized the opportunity to stand up and maintain it's nothing like it. "Why am I here"? [Facilitator said], "You're going to just have to look within yourself to try and make parallels." That was the best answer I had received through that whole program. (RCM 7)

There's a particular movie called, Prince of the City or something like that. It's about an abusive household and the dynamics involved. That one I'd seen before and I didn't particularly want to see it again. I found it very disturbing. I don't think it's reflected my situation very well because it was a family and we didn't have any children. (RCM 13)

One man suggested changing the scheduling of the exercises.

When you acted out your situation, this is at the end of the group. You didn't do it at the beginning. Maybe if they brought it towards the front, everybody had a chance to talk to

that person about what his experience was and it helps. But they didn't until near the end. (RCM 10)

One man stated filming of the sessions was uncomfortable.

They filmed it and I don't know what actually happened, if it went anywhere or is it deleted? They may use it, was all that was said. So I don't know if there are students or if anybody looks at it. (RCM 20)

Suggested Changes to the Program Structure

Suggestions for improvements to the program structure included incorporation of best practice reviews, changes to the group room, smaller class sizes, changes to rules around being late for group, and use of refreshments throughout the sessions. The men suggested follow up sessions and specialized groups were needed. Lastly one man suggested an assessment of the benefits of group versus individual counselling be incorporated. First one man suggested best practice literature relevant to the group is shared.

Maybe take a moment out of the group and talk about the latest developments, maybe the a recent paper on why women are different from men, something from a current medical, just so it keeps us thinking that this is innovative. We're trying to learn and this is something that they're finding through their clinical studies: women are doing this because or men are doing this stuff because, it kind of helps with the thinking of what we're talking about. Maybe talk about other studies about why men are getting angry, just so it seems more scientific, more accurate. . (RCM 10)

One man suggested changing the physical environment in which the group takes place.

To me it was like sitting in school; it was tough to keep paying attention and that's what I seen in everybody else. I wonder what's on TV or? Just your environment, maybe some plants, water trickling. Just something so you don't feel like you've done something wrong, regardless of whether you did or you didn't, just more an understanding, less of the library and less of the principal's office and more of the park. How about the classes smaller just like when you're in school the teacher spends more time with the 'special' kids. Maybe four people, maybe four and two instructors. (RCM8)

One man suggested refreshments throughout the sessions would make the group more relaxed.

They brought in pizza the last day. I'm not saying they should bring in pizza everyday but they could make that option available. If everybody brings in extra money to have pizza or pop and leave it in the middle of the group so people can reach it. More relaxed, like a social gathering, a party, not so rigid. (RCM 10)

Another individual suggested reviewing the rules around being late.

One of the rules, if you were late you couldn't get in, they locked the door. I didn't think it was right. I could see if you were late every class for three or four weeks at a time. But there were certain circumstances, you missed your bus or were held up at work or in traffic. You can't always judge what's going on in the outside world. (RCM 11)

Two men suggested a follow up group while two others stated that specialized follow up was needed.

It could have gone on. It was somewhat an abrupt end, cry, have some pizza and go home. Maybe a couple more sessions to wind down, not with the pizza so much but right at the end. I can't remember what they called it, with the two chairs and yourself. The empty chair at the very end is the most heart-wrenching part. Everything leads up to that and then it's time over. I don't know whether you would go after that, just so there was a couple more sessions where you can unwind a bit or look back at, did I miss something. maybe one or two of those sessions where we ask each other, "what did you think of how I did with the empty chair." But maybe I'm wrong. Maybe once you've done that it's too gut wrenching to sit down and have somebody tell you how they thought you did. Maybe a follow-up in a shorter period of time (Interview like this one). I really love that this has happened. You get to self-evaluate again. Even a couple of these short period of time leading up to this I was, I felt pretty good about it and I looked in the mirror this morning, and I went like, "You're alright. Give myself a hug." (RCM 18)

Did they follow-up on the guys with admitted alcohol violent tendencies? There should be a follow-up with those guys. Once that's ingrained, it's really hard to break. You're an alcoholic and it's for the rest of your life. This one guy just about killed his girlfriend. I hope he's still doing okay. I hope you did a follow-up with him. He almost killed himself. It seemed to have a real profound effect on him, the group. (RCM 7)

One man suggested extreme methods to engage hard-core men that did not participate in the group.

Maybe you have to be hard with these guys. I don't know how far you can go, but say, "If you're not going to tell us about your situation, we're going to tell everyone what your situation is." It would bring them to the boiling point, which sometimes helps because they talk more when they're angry. If they say, "You don't have to say that," and he starts swearing, "You're not allowed to swear here." I don't know. Maybe they're just hard-core cases. Maybe those guys should have their own group. If they're going to be like that, have policemen around. If they are going to go out and do something worse, you're going to have to hit them harder with some truth. Truth is what will set you free. If their truth is that they want to strangle every white guy that walks down the street because they don't treat them fair or they're not nice, that's what should be brought out. They should find out why he's so angry. If it takes violence to get him to bring it forth, it's better in a controlled situation than to have him out in the street and hate the group so much that the first guy that looks at him wrong he strangles. If getting him angry is how he'll talk than it might be what you have to do because I found many guys at work say, "You have a big argument, you get into a big fight with some guy and then they respect you." Sometimes they're your best friend after that. It's kind of a bonding thing. (RCM 10)

One man suggested a section needed to be incorporated on acceptable behaviours in relationships which is significant considering 53% of the men were still with the same partner years after the group ended.

There was no discussion on what's right and what's wrong or what kinds of behaviours are we expected to tolerate. Where do we draw the line? I've been through courses where they said, "When you're angry what do you do? How do you stop"? They didn't address that at all. They were more into, "What was your role in this dispute or what did you have to do with creating this abusive behaviour"? I found it very one sided... I don't see a

whole lot of effort in trying to repair that relationship that a person's already in. I'm not going to say they're all repairable but ours I felt was. They were interested in piling on the guilt and making us all feel sorry about what happened and saying the next relationship, we don't want you to do this again. (RCM13)

Facilitators/Counsellors

The facilitators need to be impartial. That's a really key component. It's hard to be impartial because after a certain stage you get a little prejudiced about things. If they can get impartial, they would move forward in leaps and bounds. Many of the men would be more likely to listen and understand things if you're impartial. But if you're not, it's a very different scenario. (RCM 16)

Six men commented on areas for improvement for facilitation of the group including the importance of building rapport and being non-judgemental. The men commented that the facilitators needed to present a united front, be responsive to questions, role model appropriate ways of dealing with anger and generally reduce the emphasis on reinforcing guilt for what the men did.

There's not time sometimes. You have to get to the bottom line with people quickly. There has to be a way for you to allow their story to emerge. The more I'm willing to ask certain questions, because it's the question behind the question that's important for the person that needs to tell their lie. If they don't actually hear themselves telling the lie it does nobody any good for them to go, "You're lying." All that does is built resistance and an adversarial relationship. To be silent, to encourage and nurture the stillness of what the answer is for that person to tell their lie, when they hear it, and then to say, "That's encouraging, how about writing that sentence down." They get it because it was there all along. They own it now. It's that act that creates the rapport for them to know that they have trust in themselves. It's that trust they can take out into the larger world in confidence. But unless that happens, there's no shift, no change. The real gift is the silence. It encourages them to tell the lie aloud and then to capture that. (RCM 2)

I wasn't comfortable with the facilitators at group there. I just didn't like them. I've been to some groups where the facilitators were much more realistic and much better. I've been to about three groups over the course of our marriage. (RCM13)

One respondent suggested ensuring that the counsellors ensure that they are not objectifying the group members throughout the sessions, finding that this was a barrier to building rapport.

When you're so distant from the patient that the patient's an object, that can be dangerous. It can be dangerous because then there's no connection between you and the members of the group, which is what ended up taking place. Not quite, but he ended up treating us like objects, like we're all case studies. He didn't know anything about our backgrounds, our history. He didn't know anything about where we grew up, the kind of things we've seen. He didn't realize that all of us had life experience. Some had had very difficult times. It would have changed the attitude of the men around him. Many of those men weren't violent, that's my understanding of them. I have to interact with them over a period of time and make connections. One or two of those men I still talk to today. They were just in a position whereby it was an extreme where they really got upset, they blew their lid and that

was that. If he [facilitator] had altered his mind set with those men it would have changed a lot. Some of those men are never going to change right away. It's not that you're going to see results ASAP, but there will be a change in their mentality or they'll be more open to finding ways not to internalize their anger. (RC16)

Two men stated they felt judged by the facilitators and manipulated at times when they would not answer questions from the group.

Did I feel judged? Everybody did. They're taking notes and they're looking at you and they're trying to pick at you. In return of course, we're doing the same. I had nothing against the instructors. They were just doing their job. I forget their names. The female was the psychologist. The gentleman was the social worker. They were taking notes. To me, it was too clinical, too regimental. Be more understanding because everyone is different; every situation will be different. Mine was the strange case, in my opinion. Everybody's case is different and strange to me. To me it was a nightmare to sit there, a punishment. But it was punishment that I learned to accept and obviously this is something I can use for the rest of my life. (RCM 8)

They were manipulative, the coordinators, in how the discussions went. They would not answer if you give them a direct question. You could not, even the next session, they would not answer. (RCM 13)

One man stated conflicts between the facilitators at times were evident and made the group feel uncomfortable.

How uncomfortable people looked like they felt. That got better as we knew each other better. But you could still tell that the guys were very uncomfortable. We usually had two people [facilitators] in the room. I don't remember their names. But they didn't always get along so well. There were some conflicts there. Us guys would look at each other and go hmm. Interesting what we're talking about, how they are speaking. It was really interesting to talk to everyone. (RCM 5)

One man stated they needed the facilitators to role model how they dealt with anger.

Teach how you guys deal with it. I mean it wasn't just us 10 guys sitting in the class. I imagine there were guys the next day and the next day and the next. But when you go home, you don't remember about Joey beating up his wife and there was my boo-hoo story. I mean, you did, but I already learned that. But if you could teach how you people deal with it being the people you are. Not touchy feely but more feeling, more understanding, more caring. I know it's just a job, but maybe more. (RCM 8)

One man stated there was an overemphasis on feeling and expressing guilt.

A gender equality thing they were pushing was only one-way. They used it to make the men feel guilty especially that group. Man could they pile the guilt on... "I pleaded guilty. What more do you want?" She had no answer for that. I did plead guilty and I was remorseful and that was all six months before the Responsible Choices Group. They wouldn't notice the fact that some guys have already dealt with it. Heaping guilt on them wasn't doing any good at all. They had already had their remorse and had already done their grieving over the situation. There's a certain amount of grief involved in owning up to what's transpired. (RCM 13)

Lastly, three men identified other areas of opportunity for the program including incorporation of children in counselling in cases of child abuse and appropriateness of individual and/or group counselling.

One of their techniques was a reverse therapy role. I had no problem playing the role of (my partner), but let's stick to a truthful scenario. As soon as you are commanding or demanding, threatening me that you would report in my file that I was resistive, if I don't play ball with you, how do you expect me to play ball? You expect me to lie? I did not abuse my wife! The reason I'm in here to begin with was an assault on my son. So let's address the assault on my son. The whole program was entirely geared toward spousal issues, entirely. I had hard time with that because every week I would have to make some kind of acknowledgement of being a spousal abuser or face the scorn of the facilitators. My children should have been called in, counselled together with me because obviously it was me as a father was the reason I was on the hot seat to begin with. A lot of things could be learned because a counselling centre should actually help people in the stress they are currently in. (RCM 7)

One man suggested an assessment of whether group and/or individual counselling may be beneficial while another man suggested that individual counselling was also needed in addition to group therapy.

You have to train social workers so that they learn how to deal with people differently. You have to get them to talk to people way before and it's not a case of techniques. Talk to this person about it, that person about. It's about what would work best because some people might not benefit from the group. It might be a case where the person would better benefit from dealing with psychotherapists as opposed to doing the combination of both or just doing group itself. (RCM 16)

As your primary means of changing behaviours and attitudes I don't think is the best. These guys also need one-on-one counselling. Group isn't enough. I'm not going to say that group is useless; they have to see there are other men in their circumstances who are trying to improve their lives also. That is one benefit. But when you have seven or eight guys sitting around; they're all from a little different situation. Their past, their history is different, there may be different ages. Their home life growing up as children was different. They have different issues. They just can't be dealt with and some things can't be dealt with in a group setting as far as I'm concerned. But as far as improving their behaviour in the future or doing something that's going to work in the long run either with their current partner or with a new one, the only thing you can do is one-on-one counselling because you have to deal with those other issues, the moral issues and the underlying issues that were involved and you can't do it in group. (RCM 13)

Overall, program changes identified included changing the program material to reflect content that all men can relate to and understand, including the video, which was more geared towards repeat offenders versus first time offenders. The men also identified concerns with filming of the sessions and not having an understanding of how the film was used. Program structure changes suggested included incorporation of best practice reviews, changes in the room, smaller class sizes, relaxation of rules on being late and use of refreshments throughout the groups' sessions.

Additionally, it was suggested that an assessment of the benefits of group versus individual counselling be incorporated. The men also recommended a follow up group for participants as well as a specialized group for men with substance use problems and hard core men.

The men suggested the facilitators needed to build rapport, be non-judgemental and lessen the focus on reinforcing guilty and instead, role model and explore appropriate behaviours and answer questions posed by the men. Also, counselling was needed for children of men mandated to group for child abuse.

Conclusion

After the program, I'm a firm believer for the most part; all people should take this program. High school is probably the best time for a program like this because it teaches 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. I wish I had taken this in high school. It shows so many objective points of view. How do I word it? In every relationship for the rest of your life, whether it's in business or a personal relationship, a casual acquaintance, it gave me some more insight in how people can behave and react, including myself. So it's a good a course in human communication. (RCM 07)

As a qualitative study, these results cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, some common themes are worth highlighting. First, with respect to the justice system, a number of the men had positive experiences with the police. The majority of men were also positive about probation services. Providing the men a place to talk and to explore their experience with the justice system, as well as to expand on the circumstances that brought them to group, could give opportunities for the men to examine their responsibility and accountability. Indeed, Waldman (1999) contends that when men blame systems it impedes their ability to examine their own responsibility. His stand is that, by creating the opportunity for men to explore these issues, they are more likely to examine their own behaviour and take responsibility for their abusive behaviours.

Notably though, that any men charged by the police and who had entered into the complex criminal justice system process had positive comments about either the justice personnel or the ways in which they were handled is surprising and suggests that the coordination of the criminal justice response to domestic violence and the consequential treatment services are having an impact. Those who had negative experiences primarily attributed them to what they saw as discrimination in the criminal justice system, that, in their opinion, does not take into account all of the facts and presumes that men are always guilty in domestic disputes. The men's perceptions of the overall justice response to domestic violence were that there was a bias against men in favour of women.

The men spoke about their experiences with the justice system as if they had been taken advantage of, or had been victimized. None of the comments from the participants acknowledged that their contact with the justice system was a consequence of their abusive behaviour.

The participants seemed generally confused by the judicial process. While it is reasonable that men with no previous contact with the judicial system would be unfamiliar with the process, the participants with conviction histories did not seem to be any better informed. In the descriptions of court experience from the men, it was clear they did not understand the differences between conditional sentences, peace bonds, rules of charging and consequences of further

offences. The men could benefit from education around charging in domestic violence cases and how the group is an early intervention for first time charged men. This would help men understand the change in the justice system's approach to dealing with domestic violence. Basic fact sheets explaining terminology, and providing practical information about the court process and community services that might be of use to them could be useful, as well as information about the role of HomeFront.

The study participants were mandated to attend the groups. The men who got the most out of group were those who were able to shift their thinking from viewing the group as a punishment to seeing it as something that could enhance their personal lives. It may be useful to explore how such shifts in viewpoint could be encouraged.

With respect to the group intervention, although the men disclosed serious incidents of assault with their intimate partners and, in several cases, children and or relatives, many reported having made important changes to their behaviours that impacted not only their relationships with partners, but with friends and work colleagues as well.

The men commented on various components of the program that were working well. Despite having taken the program several years earlier, the men remembered the program materials such as the RCM role playing exercise as eliciting empathetic feelings about how their partner must have felt while being abused and noted that the group helped them to accept responsibility for their abusive behaviours. The men also recalled learning how hurt underlies anger and abuse. Additionally, the social support provided by the group and that each man contributed to the learning of the group was identified. Lastly, the men recalled the facilitators as generally professional and good at their jobs while meeting goals of the group, namely ensuring they accepted responsibility for their abusive behaviours using a non-judgmental approach.

Suggestions regarding how the programs might improve included reviewing some of the current materials, such as using a different video and looking at the timing of exercises. Suggestions for improving the program structure included adding follow-up groups, sharing best practices, a reduced group size and a greater focus on how to repair existing relationships.

The men also recommended that the facilitators focus on building rapport, taking a non-judgmental stance and lessening the focus on reinforcing guilt and instead, role model and explore appropriate behaviours and answer questions posed by the men. Also, rather than referring men to DV groups whose charges were for child abuse or assaulting an individual other than an intimate partner, several men recommended developing a group specific for child abuse.

It might also be helpful to increase the men's access to treatment and support. Two men suggested follow-up groups, or drop-in group opportunities to help men who had already completed the program to maintain their focus. It may be useful to implement these options.

Even though most of the men had completed their group programs, in describing the incidents that led to their arrests, many exhibited a willingness to blame their partners, mutualise the violence and minimize their own abusive behaviour. This may not be surprising, as these narratives would have been repeated numerous times to the police, courts, probation and agency personnel and have, perhaps, become rote. While some men's lack of responsibility and accountability around the precipitating incident highlights the complexities involved in changing abusive behaviour, it should not imply that the men did not change. When describing how they

had improved their interpersonal behaviours in response to the groups, the words of the majority reflect important shifts.

Jennings (1990) raises the question of whether we expect too much from men who attend batterer intervention programs. Attitudes are difficult to shift permanently and interpersonal patterns often become well-entrenched. Both Calgary group programs are relatively short in length, yet a number of men reported having made important changes. The significantly lowered recidivism rates in the previous chapter support this contention.

Perhaps a better question is whether justice was served? The men were very aware that they were attending the programs because they had been mandated to do so by the criminal justice system. It did not matter to those given peace bonds that they are essentially considered not guilty. Rather, the monitoring by probation for one year and mandatory group attendance for three months or more highlighted that the criminal justice system considered their actions as serious and as needing considerable societal intervention. That the Calgary specialized court model, in conjunction with community agencies, has adopted a number of strategies to better hold domestic violence offenders accountable suggests that assaults against intimate partners are being taken much more seriously and in a way that incorporates the victim's wishes early on in the process.

In conclusion, the groups did not largely affect the attitudes of men in terms of blaming women for their abusive behaviours, specifically with nine men elaborating on their partners' abusive behaviours. Men provided detailed justifications for their abusive behaviours while minimizing the impacts of the abuse. It was clear from the descriptions that the men's definition of abuse was limited to stereotypical ideas of abuse being physical in nature.

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