Partner Response Programming and the Feminist Perspective

Includes:

1. Observational Analysis Community Research Placement – Partner Assault Response (PAR) Program

2. Feminizing PAR
Final Report and Recommendations

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Observational Analysis

Community Research Placement – PAR Program

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ABSTRACT

This critical analysis of the PAR program content, Ministry guidelines and facilitator guidelines aims to highlight some areas of the programming that require positive change in order to ensure they are woman centered and informed by an understanding of the gendered power relations and social contexts in which violence occurs. In addition, this research has highlighted elements of the current programming that are feminist in principal and vital for the success of the program.

In Ontario, a number of men and women who assault an intimate partner are mandated to complete the Partner Assault Response Program, a program initiated by the province in Ontario and facilitated by community agencies such as the John Howard Societies of Ontario. The Partner Assault Response (PAR) program offered and facilitated by the John Howard Society of Peterborough has two primary goals according to the Ministry of the Attorney General (2011): to enhance victim safety and to increase offender accountability. In addition to outlining the above goals, the Ministry of the Attorney General has set out a number of principles, program delivery and content guidelines that must be adhered to by the community agencies facilitating the program. These guidelines are informed by the notion that violence is a choice, and that it is the sole responsibility of the abuser (PAR Program Standards, 2003).

Feminist principles surrounding intimate partner violence have called into question the notion of "individual responsibility" (Swan & Snow,2002; Fitzroy, L, 2001; Miller & Meloy, 2006; Johnson, 2000), and are calling for a recognition of systemic causes for violence. In order to truly address the "choices" of "violent women", we must keep women's social location at the centre of research and programming. Johnson (2000), looked at various types of intimate partner violence and suggested that the majority of violence perpetrated by women can be classified as "violent resistance", that is, violence committed to resist the power of an "intimate terrorist" partner (p.952). Also, the Nova Scotia provincial court recently recognized the importance of acknowledging the impact abuse has on women's decisions when they upheld the acquittal of a 39 year old woman who had plotted to have her violent husband killed (The Globe and Mail, 2011).

As researchers and judges are coming to recognize the importance of women's experience, it must become a priority for the Ministry of the Attorney General, and the John

Howard Societies to ensure that the women's PAR programming keeps their lived experience at the centre. This research, conducted as a collaborative project with the John Howard Society of Peterborough, Trent Centre for Community Based Education and the Gender and Women's Studies Department of Trent University, will aim to provide a critical analysis of the current PAR programming offered by the John Howard Society and make recommendations to incorporate the above mentioned feminist principles. In order to do this, I have identified a number of areas within the current PAR programming that focus on individual responsibility and fail to acknowledge the marginalized position of many women within a patriarchal society. I will provide reasoning for a shift in language and content in these problem areas and will work alongside the John Howard society to make recommendations to enhance the PAR program and ensure it's suitability for the women attending. The reference to feminist insight and principles used throughout this research is referring to a contextual social analysis that acknowledges the impact of intersecting systems of oppressive power on ordinary people's lives – men and women. It also refers to the need to include the social location and lived experiences of people into understandings of social phenomena. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for this project, it refers to the importance of empowerment and equipping people to be self-determining, allowing for a greater level of control of their life circumstances.

The feminist analysis of the program content was completed using both the material provided to PAR participants as well as the guidelines used by program facilitators, both of which were prepared by the John Howard Society of Peterborough. In addition to these documents, the Ministry of the Attorney General standards and guidelines were provided to the researcher by the John Howard Society. These documents were examined through a critical feminist lens which helped to identify a number of areas within the programming that could be

altered. Two common themes have arisen from this analysis. The first is that of *Individual Responsibility*. Throughout the document, violence is referred to as the sole responsibility of the perpetrator. While it is true that individuals choose to be violent, we must acknowledge the social context that has led to that decision in order to determine what factors influence violent behaviour, and what circumstances could be changed in order to avoid violent choices in the future The second theme stems from a failure within the literature to acknowledge the power dynamics of violent relationships, including a lack of acknowledgement of women as both victims and perpetrators of violence. The identified problem areas within the programming have been placed into one, or both of these categorized themes.

The PAR program principles and standards as described by the Ministry of the Attorney General focus on individual responsibility for violent behaviour (Ministry of the Attorney General, 2011). When behaviour is seen in an individual context, there is a failure to acknowledge the systemic and structural elements that contribute to choice and behaviour. As this relates to women and PAR programming, research has shown that women who assault an intimate partner are most likely to be taking part in an act of violent resistance – that is, responding to violence they are facing (Johnson, 2000, p.952). It has also been explained that men are most likely to engage in "violent terrorism", that is displaying patterns, attitudes and behaviours that exert power and control over their female intimate partner's (Johnson 2000, 952). When we begin to contextualize this information we recognize that the principle of "individual responsibility" may not be the most appropriate approach to addressing a group of women who have assaulted an intimate partner.   In addition to engaging in a higher percentage of acts characterized as violent resistance, women also face many economic, political and social factors that can contribute to a greater number of incidents of violent behaviour. Structural

inequalities, including lack of affordable childcare, low social assistance rates and gendered divisions of labour, place women in precarious situations that can leave them dependent on a partner. Thus, there are a number of societal inequalities that can create conditions that foster violence between intimate partner. The structural inequalities previously mentioned are paired with persistent stereotyping of hegemonic masculinity (tough guys, real men, etc.), and of normative femininity (passive, patient, caring, etc.). Our current societal make-up does not offer an environment conducive to healthy relationships and these issues must be taken into account when addressing women's violent behaviour. The PAR program standards provided by the Ministry of the Attorney General contribute to the lack of public understandings of the wider social contexts of violence directed at an intimate partner. The "Program Philosophy/Principles" highlight the key components of the program *: abuse is the sole responsibility of the abuser, abusive behaviour is a choice* and that *abuse is social constructed by individually willed* (Schechter, 1982) (PAR Program Standards, 2003). The final component has the potential to explore social circumstances, but is not elaborated on in order to recognize that particular circumstances that lead to many women's choice to use violence. The punitive undertone of "Individual responsibility" limits the possibility of developing a program that empowers women to contextualize their experiences and feel empowered to make alternate subsequent choices. The PAR program for women should acknowledge that "choice' can be an important and empowering action for women to take. In order for this to happen, the program must offer acknowledgement of the contextual social factors that have shape the circumstances of the participants lives and shows respect for their ability to analyze their own experience and make connections to wider social forces – not simply point to violent behaviour as wrong.

It can be argued that in some circumstances, abused partners are given little room for alternatives to violent resistance. As previously mentioned, in Nova Scotia in 2011, the provincial court upheld the acquittal of an abused woman who plotted to have her abusive husband killed (Globe and Mail, 2011). The reasoning for the acquittal was based on the fact that the women had endured years of violent and controlling abuse for which she was provided few others methods to escape. The woman's husband had threatened to kill her and her children if she left him. This ruling was found to be a landmark by legal scholars who believed this ruling was long overdue (Edmonton Journal, 2011). This ruling demonstrates the importance of contextualizing violence in order to address it's root causes. In order for the PAR program to begin addressing violence in such a manner, the program standards would require a shift in language and philosophy. Program principles a, c and d (PAR Program Standards, p.9), highlight the individual responsibility of abuse and should be challenged if the program is to be capable of change. In addition, the PAR Program Content (PAR Program Standards, p.19-23), highlights that *responsibility/accountability* are a mandatory part of the program content and suggests that abusers must be accountable to their victims – a suggestion that is problematic if a woman is violently resisting a intimate terrorist partner.

Furthermore, the program standards (p.23) disallow any forms of therapeutic or interactional approach to learning. The ministry suggests that this type of therapy may place part of the responsibility of abuse on the victim. In contrast to this, there has been a recent emergence of "restorative justice" programs within various social agencies that promote interaction between perpetrators and victims of crime (Centre for Restorative Justice, Simon Fraser University). Restorative Justice is a way in which perpetrators of crime are faced with acknowledging and situating their own behaviour (ibid.). Though this method may not be ideal

for couples who have displayed violent behaviour, the principles of restorative justice – situating and acknowledging criminal behaviour – may be used within the context of a PAR program to allow participants to acknowledge their behaviour on their own terms and from their personal points of view.

In addition to PAR Program standards requiring a shift in thinking, there are a number of areas within the PAR programming itself that could be examined more closely. For example, session two, after defining abuse and examining scenarios of abuse, provides a handout (c) entitled "Accountability Matrix for women who use Abuse". This handout provides tips for taking accountability and even making amends with the victim. In order for this resource to be useful to participants, it must acknowledge the context within which violence took place and recognize the relational aspect of interactions – that is, that we act in relation to the person we are interacting with (Blumer, 1998). Furthermore, the worksheet provided for this session includes a checklist where participants are encouraged to check off the violent and abusive behaviour they have used towards their partner, as well as the violence and abuse used against them by their partner. This type of acknowledgement of mutual violence is useful to situating one's behaviour, though the worksheet is intended to be completed by participants on their own time, and is not discussed any further in subsequent weeks. The discussion for this week begins the dialogue about individual responsibility for violence, as well as for the need to make amends and acknowledge wrongdoing. However, the worksheets and discussions that ensue from this session may in fact provide insight into the lives of participants and explore violence as a form of resistance i.e. perhaps as a choice selected from very few options. This begs the question: Is violence ever acceptable? Is non-violence always the appropriate discourse to be using within this particular group? I believe that we must explore each woman's experience as an individual,

and look at that experience in a larger societal context before imposing a non-violent, individualistic discourse. Session Two encompasses both major themes by placing an immense amount of responsibility on the individual, while also failing to acknowledge the power dynamics within abusive relationships and how those influence levels of abuse. Similarly, Session Eight looks at the relationship between guilt and shame and suggests that these two may be responsible for abusive behaviour (p.5-10). The session proceeds by providing ways to deal with stress as a way to avoid violent behaviour. The plan includes exercise and quiet-time activities to be carried out by the participants, followed by an accountability letter to be written to their partner that explains their past behaviour and how they will best deal with their emotions in the future (p.15-18). This handout fails to recognize that the participants have likely come from an abusive relationship (sometimes mutual), and may not have the freedom to take "time-outs". Similarly, participants may not be in a situation where they must make amends with their partner, or explain their behaviour or plan of action to them. Furthermore, if a woman does in fact decide that she would like to make amends, it may be better to have her make this decision on her own on schedule, rather than be expected to complete the worksheet during session eight. The experiences of participants must remain central to this program in order to ensure their needs are being met and that the program is in fact helpful.

Session Three of the program looks at causes of violence in relationships. This session acknowledges that women often use violence as a form of resistance towards an abusive partner, or a mechanism learned over many years of abuse (p.13). However, simply acknowledging these facts does not ensure that the programming addressing these issues. The session continues to look at abuse as "choice", and explains how self-defence is problematic for a number of reasons (p.11). It is suggested that instead of using violence, participants find ways to avoid situations

where self-defence would be necessary (p.11). While this advice is likely well intentioned, it provides no tools for participants to avoid such situations. By focusing on the individuals responsibility for abuse, it fails to highlight and reiterate the factors that place women in vulnerable situations at times. Without an acknowledgment of that participant's social location, it is difficult to address the issues leading up to violent relationships. For example, if there is no acknowledgement of economic restrictions many women face, then we fail to look at the issue of economic dependence that often leaves women in vulnerable situations. This session in particular is capable of opening a dialogue for participants to explore their own understandings of the causes of violence in their relationships. It is their understandings that should inform the discussion and information that follows. When we define the causes of abuse, we fail to leave space for women to explore and relate their own experiences to the material – a process that is important in feminist research, and a better overall understanding of where the women are located and where their decisions are stemming from. Session Three has the ability to set the tone for an open and exploratory dialogue during the sixteen week program, but women must be put at the centre of this program. The program should not assume that the participants are unaware of the causes of violence, but rather should assume that each woman's story is unique and important. If the program is able to assist participants in contextualizing their own use of violence, they may feel better equipped to address other weeks topics from their own experience.

Session five of the program deals with issues of jealousy and emotional abuse. The programming does allow for women to define jealousy and explore how it has impacted their relationship, but also gives concrete definitions and tools to help curb the emotion. The definitions of, and ways to "get a grip" on jealousy are entrenched in traditional gender roles. The ways to get a grip include "learning from past experiences to help you behave better", not

"letting your imagination dictate the kind of person he really is", and "realize he chose you for a reason and there is no need for him to be so easily tempted elsewhere" (p.3). Rather than placing the responsibility of recognizing and controlling jealous emotions onto the participant, perhaps an overview of ways in which abusive partners use jealousy as a way to control and manipulate partners would be helpful. The programming also fails the acknowledge the power dynamics that may exist if a partner is using jealousy as a tool for manipulation. In the "tips for dealing with jealousy", three tactics including "act like a human, not like an animal" and "talk about your feelings" are provided but fail to explain that communication within an abusive relationship may be difficult, and could even ensue a violent reaction. Furthermore, while jealousy may be a catalyst in some relationships, it is crucial the jealousy be recognized not as an individual measure of character but as a rational response to insecurities inherent in a patriarchal society. "Having a man" in our society translates into significantly greater economic security and social status which sets all women up for a jealous response – it can be seen as a wider social control mechanism and is much more complicated than a simple character flaw. None the less, the definitions of emotional abuse are useful and the facilitators guidelines allow space for participants to define their own terms, and explore how it has impacted their relationship.

Session Six explores the effects of abuse. The programming is a little confusing in that it acknowledges the detrimental effects of abuse, and provides tools to help leave abusive relationships safely. These acknowledgements are crucial in developing a woman centred program, yet they are not built upon throughout the rest of the program. The section explores the long term effects of abuse, including dependencies that were previously mentioned (i.e. financial). The effects discussed are most commonly associated with heterosexual relationships where the man is the abuser (Johnson 2000, p.953). This section also fails to look at violence as

an effect of abuse. Since we know many women use violence as a counter measure to violent behaviour, it would be useful to include this information into the analysis. Also, this section emphasizes the role of a victim, and leaves little agency for those experiencing abuse. While it is important to acknowledge and contextualize the violence, it is equally important to focus on the causes of abuse and explore how best to overcome these obstacles. The PAR program must acknowledge the factors that have influenced the violent relationship and attempt to provide supports for the participants. Acknowledging social factors that place participants in marginalized position is not entirely helpful unless resources are provided to allow women the ability to choose to make changes. For example, handout (e) looks at obstacles that partners face when leaving abusive relationships and explains that individuals leaving must "deal with threats, feelings, shock, emotions, etc" (p.12). While it is likely true that these issues must be dealt with, it would perhaps be more useful to provide resources such as counsellors or community agencies that could assist with the process.

Session Eleven looks at anger as a feeling that is often used to justify violent behaviour. This session, much like session Eight, provides tools for dealing with anger that fail to locate the participant's situation. Anger management tools are not always accessible to those living with a violent or abusive partner. It is also important in this section to look at anger management and violent resistance in relation to one another. It is important to recognize that in certain situations, violence may be a final resort. While not promoting violence, it is important to allow participants a chance to tell their story and perception of why they acted out in violence. Also, this session could benefit from emphasizing the difference between anger and aggression. Anger is a rational and healthy emotion and that should come through within this session. How one deals with anger can be problematic, but the anger itself is a useful emotion. The facilitator

guidelines outline an activity that allows participants to draw anger and to define what anger means to them. These steps are important in ensuring the participants shape their own understandings and use their own knowledge to do so. This session, in its current form, provides some useful tools in allowing the women to define, acknowledge and identify with their abuse. It is the anger management tools provided that fail to contextualize abusive relationships.

Session Thirteen is another critical component in understanding abuse and women's social location. The overview of stereotypes may allow some participants to relate some feelings and behaviours to societal influences. The process of strengthening self-esteem is important for participants in order to recognize their position within relationships, and perhaps alter current or future relationships and recognize early signs of abuse. It remains crucial to allow space for participants to identify their experiences with stereotyping and their understanding of how these influence their identity and behaviour. In combination with session sixteen – health relationships – women can discuss their interactions with social pressures and how those influence the interactions they share with their partner.   It is this information that should provide the foundation for the rest of the program. These two sessions combined acknowledge that women often face societal pressures that have detrimental effects on their behaviours and relationships. They also characterize healthy relationships in such a way that places both partners equally within the partnership – something that is not reflected within Canadian society economically or politically and is an unrealistic goal for many individual couples.

Conclusion

The analysis of the PAR program had aimed to highlight both useful elements of the program, as well as indicate areas which could be altered in order to be more feminist in principle and participant centred in practice. As is currently stands, the ministry guidelines present a challenge for the PAR program, and for this research by emphasizing individual responsibility and neglecting to look at systemic causes for violence. The challenge that will continue to exist throughout this research will be to make positive changes to the program material while continuing to adhere to ministry guidelines.   It is through working alongside the John Howard Society of Peterborough that we will find creative ways in incorporate women's experience as both perpetrators of, and survivors of violence in domestic relationships.

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Feminizing PAR

Final Report and Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

The Final Report of Feminizing PAR provides recommendations for potential change within the current PAR program offered by the John Howard Society of Peterborough. The goal of the report is to highlight some areas of the programming that require positive change in order to ensure they are woman centered and informed by an understanding of the gendered power relations and social contexts in which violence occurs

Introduction

The Partner Assault Response (PAR) Program, a collaborative effort between the Ministry of the Attorney General and community agencies such as the John Howard Society of Peterborough, is a "specialized counseling and educational service provided to individuals who have assaulted their partner" (Ministry of the Attorney General, 2011). The program is offered, in some areas, to both men and women, in single sex groups. In Peterborough Ontario, employees of the John Howard Society have identified a need to analyze the current PAR programming in order to receive suggestions on how to better frame the program content through a feminist lens. In preparation for completing a final report putting forward suggestions, a preliminary analysis was completed in order to highlight current problem areas within the programming. The bulk of that analysis suggested that the current program manual failed, at times, to contextualize women's experience of violence within their lived experiences. For the purpose of this research, a feminist lens (or prospective), has been defined as a framework that acknowledges the lived experiences of women participating in the program. Furthermore, a feminist lens contextualizes current societal values and practices in order to underline the marginalized position of many women. The preliminary analysis provided examples of current research that highlighted a number of differences between men and women's use of violence towards a partner (Miller & Meloy ,2006; Swan & Snow, 2002; Johnson & Ferrero, 2000). For example, Johnson & Ferrero (2000) suggests that within domestic violence, women are most likely to use violent behavior in relation to an abusive partner, whereas men are more likely to exhibit "intimate

terrorism" behaviors such as exerting total control over a partner. Further research (Miller, 2006) emphasizes that domestic violence is gendered, and that women most often use violence in what they consider self-defense. Thus, in analyzing the current PAR program through a feminist lens, I have attempted to maintain women's social location at the centre, aiming to make recommendations that create an open space for women to not only acknowledge their use of violence, but to contextualize and understand the greater social implications that affected their decision to use physical violence. Keeping this purpose in mind, it is crucial to acknowledge the difficulties in initiating appropriate change within the PAR program content while also adhering to Ministry Guidelines that fail to acknowledge gendered power relations.

Difficulties within contractual Ministry Guidelines

The John Howard society of Peterborough is contractually bound by the Ministry of the Attorney General to comply with the rules and regulations set forward by the Ministry (Ministry of the Attorney General, 2011). It is important to acknowledge some of the issues which exist within these guidelines that limit the John Howard Society's ability to change certain aspects of the program. First, and perhaps most troublesome, is that the Program Standards were initially intended to guide the men's PAR program. The standards have not been altered to accommodate the differences between men and women's use of violence. As a result, the standards fail to acknowledge women's experiences as pertinent to their understanding of

abuse. Furthermore, the standards specifically caution against exploring "family of origin issues" (PAR Program Standards, 2003, p.22), an element that may be crucial to a woman's understanding of her history and experience of violence, and subsequent use thereof.

Also, the PAR program standards strongly recommend using a male and female facilitator for the group (PAR Program Standards, 2003, p19). Having a male facilitator present during the PAR program ignores the possibility that a female participant may not feel comfortable – depending on her experiences of abuse. Furthermore, the presence of a male facilitator takes away the element of a "safe space" where participants could feel comfortable sharing their experiences.

Finally, the cost, length, and the open concept of the group – that is, the group is not a closed group and women are able to join in at any week – pose considerable difficulty for participants. Participants are expected to pay a weekly fee to attend the PAR program. According to John Howard Society employees, the cost for the program is based on income level, and is done on a sliding scale basis. In addition to the cost, the length of the program (16 weeks) can be problematic for women who are single parents, who work precarious part-time jobs or who are struggling with drug or alcohol difficulties. Women are able to be absent from no more than two sessions before they are removed from the group. Furthermore, the fact that the group is not closed means that women are joining the group on any session. This is problematic for a number of reasons. First, a woman joining on week 4 (Jealousy) has not been able to explore concepts of violence and violence within relationships

that may assist her understanding of jealousy as a possible control tactic. A possible solution to this problem could be developing an orientation session that ensures all women starting the program are equipped with the same level of information. While these concerns are significant, they are not feasible within the context of this research as they would require changes to the Ministry guidelines; a component the John Howard Society of Peterborough is currently unable to change.

General recommendations

It is important to note that this report makes reference to the Preliminary Report conducted in December 2011. The report can be located by contacting the primary researcher, or the John Howard Society of Peterborough.

For the purpose of this research, not every session has had changes recommended. Sessions that already adopt a feminist principle have not been discussed at length, but merit recognition. Session 10 *Assertiveness,* Session 12 *Parenting after abuse,* Session 14 *Self Esteem,* Session 15 *Stress Management and Self-Care* and Session 16 *Healthy Relationships,* have not been discussed further because they acknowledge the importance of focusing on the participants well-being. These sessions help draw connections between healthy minds and bodies to healthy relationships – and ultimately to ensuring space for women to make better choices. The recommendations that have been made are based on four general recommendation guidelines:

1. Recommendation One: Acknowledge and validate women's experiences of victimization – accepting the differences between men and women's experiences of violence and abuse
2. Recommendation Two: Leave space for women to tell their stories and make their own connections.
3. Recommendation Three: Shifts in Language.
4. Recommendation Four: Reorganization of sessions to allow for some continuity within programming.

The above mentioned are recurring issues within the program content that should be kept in mind in order to better serve the women enrolled. These will be explored at length through this report and serve as the basis for recommended changes to the program content.

First, the acknowledgment of differences between men and women's use of, and experience with violence. The preliminary research for this report demonstrated a significant difference between women and men who use violence towards an intimate partner. The notion of patriarchy and the inherent position of power many men hold within society should confirm that need to acknowledge the unique experiences of women who use violence.

Second, the need to allow space for women to narrate their own stories is integral to adopting a feminist prospective. The participants will all have their own perception of the incident that lead to their assault charges. It is crucial for these women to make their own connections between their experiences and their use of violence. When the women are not given sufficient room to explore their own understandings of their use of violence, it is less likely that they will be able to engage in the program material. The program describes a particular type of violence, portrayed

by a particular type of person – one that the women may not relate to until they have made their own connections and formed their understandings of how they perpetrated violence.

Third, the language used within the programming is at times ridden with punitive undertones. The program refers to the participants as "abusers" and to their partners as "victims" in a manner that suggests the woman is always the abusing partner. Because we know that this is not the case, it would be helpful to recognize the shifting role participants have played within their relationship. It is important to remember the difference between acknowledging and justifying. Allowing women to explore how their experience as a victim influenced their violent behavior does not justify their behavior: it simply allows them to contextualize and better understand their actions.

Finally, despite the closed nature of this group, the session could be reorganized in order to create a sense of continuity. This could also allow the women to follow up with their experiences of engaging with the previous week's material.

Recommendations by Session

Session One – Anger Model

Session one explores the anger model and stages of change. This session is based on two problematic assumptions: the first is that the women participating in the group are angry, and the second is that they need to change. The reason these assumptions are problematic is that they make assumptions about the women's

identities and behaviors without asking the participants how they feel. It is possible

that the incident that caused a woman to be charged was her first outward

expression of anger, or that she felt being aggressive was a way of protecting herself

against a partner. Exploring how the women feel about their anger will not provide

justification for their actions, but it may help them to understand how they came to

make the decision to act outwardly aggressive. Each woman's experience with anger

will be different, but in taking the time to explore the role of anger in their life, the

participants will likely have an easier time relating their experience to the "anger

model". Do not assume that the feeling that led to the participant's use of violence

was anger; allow her to determine the feeling. For example, the handout "*what do I

want to change*" (session one, handout C) is based on the assumption that the

participant feels angry, and asks her to identify how she would like to change.

Perhaps a handout that allows for a more in depth exploration of her feelings as

they pertain to the particular incident that lead to a charge would allow for more

insight. Also, looking at the anger model may be more helpful if anger is

contextualized and defined (as it is done in session eleven).

Session Two – Defining and Identifying Abuse

Session two aims to identify various types of abuse, help establish the

significance of non-physical abuse, and assist participants to identify the types of

abuse they have used and experience within relationships (John Howard Society of

Peterborough, PAR facilitator notes 2009, session two, p.1). The definitions of abuse

are well done and cover a wide range of scenarios. The lack of programming

designed specifically for women is obvious in this session as it uses scenarios where

the male partner is abusive as examples to demonstrate and create discussion around types of abuse (session two, Handout (b) 2 of 6). While the scenarios used are likely to engage women who have been victims of abuse, it is problematic to use these scenarios then fail to recognize and validate the participants experience as victims of abuse. In addition to reworking the scenarios used as examples, *Handout C – Accountability Matrix for Women who Use Abuse* needs significant changes in order to be woman centered. In it's current form, the handout suggests that the woman needs to "make amends to her survivor" and "recognize the survivor's fear". These statements fail to recognize the power dynamics that are likely to exist within a relationship if the woman was the abused prior to abusing. The focus should not be on encouraging contact between the woman and her "partner" – taking into account that they may no longer be together, or that she may have faced abuse as a result of her use of aggression. Rather, the focus needs to be on the participants themselves and allowing space for them to acknowledge their behavior. By asking women to make amends with their "victim", this component may place participants in vulnerable situations with abusive partners by encouraging the women to outwardly acknowledge their wrongdoing to a person who may abuse them. Furthermore, worksheet (d) asks women to acknowledge the abuse that they have used, and the abuse their partner has used against them. This recognition of mutual violence may be crucial to a woman's understanding of her experience. However, there is no follow-up that allows women to discuss this worksheet further – in addition to adding confusion, this process could re-victimize women who have experienced severe abuse. This worksheet could be followed up with a discussion

that allows the women space to explore with their experience of violence has meant to them and how it has shaped their identity.

Session Three – Causes of Violence in Relationships and Cost and Benefits of Abuse

This session does an excellent job at exploring the reasons men use violence in a relationship at length. Only one handout, (handout C) explores the motivations for women to use violence in relationships. This handout clearly acknowledges the significant differences between men and women's use of violence, and acknowledges that the majority of women use violence in response to a partner's abuse. This acknowledgment demonstrates the problematic nature of the PAR programming in its current format. This handout inadvertently supports the need for programming that is specific to women's needs and programming that recognizes the systemic way in which men carry out violence that often leads to women's use of violence. The information on this hand out should be further explored with the participants and should become the focus of a group session – allowing women to explore how their experiences are unique to them as women.

Session Four – Jealousy and Emotional Abuse

Session four of the program deals with issues of jealousy and emotional abuse. The programming does allow for women to define jealousy and explore how it has impacted their relationship, but also gives concrete definitions and tools to help curb the emotion. The definitions of, and ways to "get a grip" on jealousy are entrenched in traditional gender roles. The ways to get a grip include "learning from past experiences to help you behave better", not "letting your imagination

dictate the kind of person he really is", and "realize he chose you for a reason and there is no need for him to be so easily tempted elsewhere" (p.3). Rather than placing the responsibility of recognizing and controlling jealous emotions onto the participant, perhaps an overview of ways in which abusive partners use jealousy as a way to control and manipulate partners would be helpful. The programming also fails to acknowledge the power dynamics that may exist if a partner is using jealousy as a tool for manipulation. In the "tips for dealing with jealousy", three tactics including "act like a human, not like an animal" and "talk about your feelings" are provided but fail to explain that communication within an abusive relationship may be difficult, and could even ensue a violent reaction. Furthermore, while jealousy may be a catalyst in some relationships, it is crucial that jealousy be recognized not as an individual measure of character but as a rational response to insecurities inherent in a patriarchal society. "Having a man" in our society translates into significantly greater economic security and social status which sets all women up for a jealous response – it can be seen as a wider social control mechanism and is much more complicated than a simple character flaw. By including the above concerns into the program content, this session would be significantly more feminist in principle. Alternatively, if the recommendations and issues stated above conflict with Ministry guidelines, the session could be removed from the program, and concepts of jealousy could be inserted in a number of different areas within the programming (i.e. Session 2-*defining and identifying abuse*, session 10 *assertiveness*, Session 14 – *Self Esteem).*

Session five – The Cycle of Abuse and Identifying Cues

In session five, the explanations of the "cycle of abuse", are typical of male to female abuse cycles. As recently acknowledged, and examined in the preliminary research, women's experience of and use of abuse is significantly different than men's. The cycle defined in this session may help women identify as victims of abuse, but may not succeed in helping with their identification as an abuser. By allowing space for women to explore their own use of violence, they may define their own cycle. Also, this session aims to help define and identify "cues" that should help participants detect when they are about to behave abusively. This is problematic because it assumes that the women often act abusively towards their partner. If this is not the case, the women may have a difficult time relating to this part of the session. Alternatively, using the "cues" as a way to identify recurring problems areas in their life (i.e. financial difficulty, relationship issues, difficulty addressing past issues), may allow women a space to recognize why they acted outwardly abusive (at least once), and create a space for thoughts about change.

<u>Session Six – Effects of Abuse</u>

This session describes effects of abuse that are typical for women who experience intimate partner terrorism (Miller and Meloy, 2006). That is, a partner who exerts significant power and control over their partner. According to research (ibid), men do not experience the same effects of abuse as women. Due to physical, economic and social privilege, men are less likely to live in fear of an abusive partner, and are much more likely to defend themselves against such a partner (Miller and Meloy, 2006, p. 94). The content in this program does not make these distinctions. Male privilege should be kept at the forefront of this session and could generate

discussion about the differences between women's and men's experiences of being victims. The effects described could be helpful to allow the participants to explore how the effects of the abuse they experience contributed to their decision to be abusive. Acknowledging that outside factors exist should not justify a participant's actions, but is certainly useful in forming a better understanding of the incident. The facilitator's notes for this session encourage an exploration of women's experience as victims. In addition to having facilitators open discussion, an acknowledgement within the participant handouts may foster a better understanding between the effects of being a victim of abuse and the use of violence.

Session Eight – Shame and Guilt

This session ultimately is aiming to encourage participants to take responsibility for their actions. The use of "shame" and "guilt" as two separate emotions is slightly complicated, and the definitions of these terms are not universally agreed upon. A move away from these terms is recommended. For example the handout "journey out of shame" is looking at ways to help participants take ownership for their choices. Emphasizing the importance of accepting past behavior and moving forward is crucial. The language of guilt and shame is problematic because participants may not feel these emotions. Also, if they do feel them, it may be for reasons other than having acted violently towards their partner. A shift in language that allows the women to define their own emotions in relation to their violent action will ensure this component of the programming offers a woman centered approach. Furthermore, in this session, the participants are asked to write an "accountability letter" to their partner acknowledging the ways in which their abuse

has affected him/her. This fails to acknowledge the power dynamics that exist within abusive relationship, and could potentially be harmful to the women if their partners are abusive. Rather then write a letter to their partner; perhaps writing a letter to themselves is recommended as a more appropriate activity. The focus of this session should be encouraging women to take ownership and be accountable to themselves, thus ensuring the they can safely acknowledge and explore how their behavior has affected their lives.

Session Nine – changing self-talk

This session is well done and encourages the participants to change their thoughts about themselves. It makes connections between feeling confident and making positive choices. The use of certain language is one of the only elements of this session that is not feminist in perspective. The word "irrational" is used throughout the session to describe thoughts that the participants might have. Using this word fails to acknowledge that our thoughts are shaped by our experiences and that they may be valid to us, even if they are not accurate. Perhaps the use of the word "unhealthy" or "problematic" thoughts could replace the word "irrational" which delegitimizes women's thought processes.

Session Eleven

This session should follow session 1. Even though the group is not closed, there are likely to be a number of women who are in both classes. Looking at the "Anger Model" in session one without contextualizing and validating anger fails to

legitimize women's experiences of feeling angry. That being said, this session assumes that the participants have a problem managing anger, which fails to recognize that their violence incident was likely done in response to an abusive partner. The "do's and don'ts for Dealing with Anger" give advice for how to express anger in a healthy way. However, the handout fails to take power dynamics of abusive relationships into account; it is possible that the women are unable to speak-up or engage in a discussion about their feelings with their abusive partner.

Session Thirteen – Stereotypes

This session explores the prevalence of certain stereotypes within society. It allows women to explore and define stereotypes they feel have played a role in their life. The missing component in this session is the link between dominant perceptions of men and women, and the unequal power dynamics within abusive relationships. The link between women being subordinate and passive stereotypically serves as a basis to help women understand how they came to be the victim of abuse in a relationship (if that is the case). Making the connections between widely held societal beliefs and women's victimization can allow a space for the women to explore their own understandings of how they feel pressure to behave and act in certain ways. Understanding and discussing this societal pressure can allow women to reassess their understanding of their role within their relationship.

Conclusion

The John Howard Society of Peterborough has taken the first step towards better serving the needs of women charged with assaulting a partner by initiating this

research project. The PAR program in its current form acknowledges the inherent differences between women and men's experience of using abusive behavior, but fails to keep those differences at the forefront of the women's programming. The changes recommended throughout this research, if applied, can ensure that the PAR program is woman centered and validates women's experiences as both victims and perpetrators of abuse, while still adhering to contractual ministry guidelines. However, in order to truly have a program that is substantially gender aware, the program Standards provided by the Ministry of the Attorney General must be rewritten and made specific to women's programming. It is important to keep in mind while making changes to the PAR program that acknowledging and validating women's experiences of abuse does not need to allow a deflection of responsibility. Rather, the exploration of past experiences as influencing current behavior could better ensure that women complete the program with a better understanding of why they used physical violence, allowing them to better create a plan to reduce the possibility of recurrence.

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