

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes-7/14/2009

Present: Chris Huffine (Allies in Change), Stacey Womack (ARMS), Alisa Wilson-Coleman (ARMS), Johnnie Burt (ARMS), Regina Rosann (ARMS), Teri Doyle (West Women's), Jennifer Warren (Men's Resource Center/Women's Counseling Center), Guruseva Mason (Choices), Samantha Naliboff (VOA Home Free), Sarah McDowell (Raphael House of Portland), Dean Camarda (MRC, Allies), Paul Lee (MRC), Clanssa Antinez, Sara Windsheimer (Choices)

Minutes by Chris Huffine

Meeting Topic: Female Perpetrators of DV

-ARMS, Choices, Women's Counseling Center, Allies in Change, and Domestic Violence Resource Center all offer groups for female perpetrators of DV. 4 of those 5 agencies were represented at this meeting (there was no one present from DVRC). All of the providers present are running or have run groups for abusive men as well. There was also one graduate of a women's group present at the meeting. In addition, Choices is currently offering a co-ed batterer intervention group for perpetrators of same sex abuse. The discussion below is intended to be most relevant for single sex groups for women who have been abusive.

-There appeared to be a generally high level of agreement among the providers (as well as the one women's program completer) with the various points made during the discussion.

Assessment

-Most of the women don't deny their abusive behavior anywhere near the extent that male perpetrators do. Typically women are asked about their histories of victimization as well as their history of perpetration.

-Northwest Network in Washington has developed a tool for assessing abusive behavior in same sex relationships. With same sex violence it can be trickier to identify who is the primary aggressor early on because the victim can be so angry about the abuse that has been done to her. Typically it isn't until later in the process (in group) that it become apparent who is the primary aggressor in same sex relationships.

-It was suggested that most of the women in the groups fall into one of three categories. These categories, from most common to least common:

- secondary aggressors (further defined below)
- women with Borderline Personality Disorder who occasionally become abusive
- women with true power and control issues similar to many abusive men

-In addition to the above three categories, there is also a small group of women who have done virtually no abusive at all, even as a secondary aggressor. These women have typically only been the victims of abuse. There was agreement that there should be strong advocacy for these

women to not be mandated into a women's abuse intervention group, but rather be referred to a group for women who are victims/survivors of DV. Working with the referral source can help address this. If that doesn't work, a provider could also refuse to place such a referral into a women's abuse intervention group.

-Secondary aggressors are defined as individuals who are being abused in their current relationship and on one or more occasions become abusive themselves. Their abusive behavior is less frequent and (usually) less severe than the abuse being perpetrated against them. The abuse they do is typically not about being dominant or imposing their will, rather is in response to the abuse being done to them, although it may not occur immediately after having been abused. Most secondary aggressors are females. A subgroup of these women see themselves as "fighters" rather than victims and would be offended by that term. Some secondary aggressors can be pretty angry that the primary aggressor was not arrested/mandated.

-A hand-out developed at Allies in Change was circulated on how to differentiate between primary and secondary aggression.

-Female perpetrators run the spectrum of power and control issues from those who are truly solely victims to those who are primary aggressors and every thing in between. However, true primary aggressors are rare, with one provider saying she hasn't seen any female primary aggressors. Many have been abusive out of a desire to be *heard*, rather than to control.

-Ideally it would be best if the primary female aggressors could be in their own group, separate from the secondary aggressors. However, the low numbers typically make that impractical. As a consequence perpetrators and victims are being mixed together, but that does not appear to be a major issue/concern, although it can occasionally be disruptive. In part this is probably because all have been both perpetrators and victims.

-Some of the women mandated are mandated based on strange arrests/reasons. For example, one woman was charged with Interfering with a 911 call when SHE was the one calling the police and he was trying to interfere with the call.

-There appear to be an increasing number of women voluntarily seeking out services. Most of those women do have some issues with abuse, although most still do not fit the classic power and control profile common among abusive men. A significant number of them have been told, prior to referral, that they have power and control issues when, in fact, they do not.

-One subgroup of abusive women equate being strong with being like a man and embracing traditional masculine values including being abusive.

-There also appear to be an increasing number of women showing up with serious mental health issues.

Differences from men's groups

-What are some common differences between male and female perpetrators?

-In general, women are more likely to “act in” their abuse--to direct it to themselves or keep the thoughts/desires to themselves than are men. One provider talked about presenting in group the concept of the “inner mugger”--how women can beat themselves up and internally oppress themselves. She believes it is important to discuss this particular form of oppression with women.

-Guilt is more widespread among the women.

-The women tend to be more interactive and do more networking among themselves. They tend to be more supportive and helpful with each other. They are more likely to interact outside of the group which can lead to better interactions inside the group.

-Men seem to be quicker to rationalize and justify their behavior than the women. There is generally less resistance to the information being shared. They seem to be harder workers in learning and applying the material to their own lives. The women appear to generally get the concepts more quickly. The women seem to be quicker to move into accountability and with greater enthusiasm.

-Confrontation with the women needs to be done more carefully and gently. The men tend to be thicker-skinned, which brings its own challenges, but also means they can be confronted pretty directly or with a heavier hand without consequence. The women, on the other hand, tend to be quicker to take offense as well as to offend each other in their confrontations.

-One provider observed that because women are typically more emotionally expressive, there tend to be more emotional outbursts and tears in women's groups relative to the men's groups.

-Children and parenting are a bigger pull with the women.

-The women's groups tend to be more queer friendly and women who have done same sex abuse appear to be more welcome in the group than the men's group response to queer men.

-One female facilitator said that she feels more challenged to be accountable herself by the women than by the men. She also gets more intimidated by the women than by the men.

Content of women's groups

-There are presently no state standards for working with female perpetrators. The state is just beginning to examine this, although a timeline for coming out with such standards has still not yet been established.

-Because many of the women are already fairly respectful of men and able to engage in

appropriate interactions with men, there is much less need to have co-ed co-facilitation in a women's group. However, having a male co-facilitator can be a positive thing, provided he has the right personality style.

- It can be challenging to offer a group for female perpetrators where most are typically secondary aggressors. It means finding a balance between addressing the victimization issues with their own perpetration of abusive behavior.

- Just like abusive men, women may not be aware of their own beliefs and behaviors that are abusive or support being abusive and controlling. So time needs to be spent educating them on types of abuse and control as well as various pro-abuse beliefs.

- Empowerment, assertiveness, boundaries and conflict resolution get more attention with the women than with the men.

- Safety planning and recovery work is an important part of the curriculum, especially for women who are still with their abusive partners. Because some of the women have been abusive with their children, parenting gets a fair amount of attention. One example was a group agreeing to have a "whispering day" where the women agreed to only whisper to get their children's attention.

- One provider uses The Anger Workbook for Women which encourages self-examination and also examines female specific issues such as hormones and oppression. It can get a bit "touchy-feely" in places. It is also more body focused. The same provider also uses Love and Logic (for parenting issues) and The Verbally Abusive Relationship.

- Should there be outreach to the women's partners? There was no consensus on this. If outreach is done, it needs to be done carefully, since some of the partners are the primary aggressors. One provider observed that as the women set clearer boundaries, their partners are more likely to be open to becoming involved in services themselves.

Outcomes

- Even secondary aggressors appear to benefit from attending a group, based on the self-report of many as they are leaving the program.

- Women in the group typically leave the group/program feeling more empowered as they learn to be more in control of themselves and accountable for themselves.