

TCBIP meeting

2/8/00, 10a.m. - 12 noon

Present: Paula Manley, Devorah Marbin (Centro Hispano/EPH), Maria Torres (Turning Point), Annie Neal (Mult. Co. DV), Carmen Garcia (AYUDA), David Houston (Changepoint), Geruseva Mason (TPI), Candace McElroy (MRC), Michael Davis (Changepoint), Mark Hess (Mult. Co. DV), Sandy Bacharach, Steve McCrea (CASA), Linda Arata (VOA), Songcha Bowman (Multi-cultural CS), Lilly Zable (ASAP), Teri Pierson (SCF Hotline), Bob Torres, Joey August (EPH)

**CHILDREN CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE:** How are children affected and how they are used by the perpetrator? In perpetrator groups, the manipulation of the children is disclosed less often than other types of abuse. Sexual and animal abuse are more likely to come out in perpetrator groups than is manipulation of children. It does, however, come up with people who work with the victims. Victims experience a great deal of fear as to the perpetrator's attempts to use the children.

Custody can be used by the perpetrator to stay involved in the victim's life. Research has showed the perpetrator often stays engaged by filing numerous court orders, etc. If the perpetrator's partner has a substance abuse issue, the perpetrator will often use this to claim she is an unfit parent, to gain control over her and the children. The batterer will do everything he can to make the case that he is the one fit to have custody. However, often the victim's addictions may be aggravated by or resulting from the battering.

The men may learn in group how to appear to be less controlling, so we must guard against feeding into this. Perhaps the partner has not had the educational opportunities that he has had; he can say the right words to appear to be the better parent.

Often perpetrators may allege the victim suffers from mental illness. Once the offender gains custody of the children, he then can use visitation as control issue: mother has to beg for visits, plus has to take the kids at times he wants or he will use this as "proof" of her not being a fit mother. The tragedy is that the kids are caught in the middle.

Assessment questions need to be reframed when doing evaluation, to determine what really is going on. When get information from SCF, it is important to look past the surface, to determine their validity. Do not just take it at face value. We need to stay neutral in our assessment, and evaluate all the evidence.

Static and dynamic risk assessment factors both need to be examined and considered during assessment. The sex offender or DV perpetrator can look really good and put on a good front, but there still may exist many risk factors. We need to consider the history, and not only what he says/does now. In essence, the perpetrator may use the court as a tool of abuse. He may use the children as spies.

Often right after an act of abuse to mother, the father may turn around and take the kids to a fun activity, which is really confusing to the child. The offender also may manipulate by subverting and undermine the victim's authority. He may go to great length to show "why it is your mother's fault."

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The father may want to live through his kids, and see them do everything he wanted to. He may have exceptional expectations as to homework, grades, sports. He may do this in a very controlling way, under the guise of "being a good dad." A father may also have nothing to do with the day to day care of the child, only fun activities.

A perpetrator may try to control the victim by threatening to take kids out of state or country, or with immigrants, may threaten to get the victim deported. Also, her fear of HIM being deported--thus leaving her without financial support--is an amplification of similar fear of lack of support experienced by many mainstream victims. The father may not pay any rent, child support, etc. but may buy the kids toys, take them on outings, etc. He then appears to be very generous to the children, who wonder why Mom (the caretaker) doesn't do as much as Dad does. He works to win a "popularity contest" with kids.

The man often doesn't consider where the kids were when the victim was being abused. Always ask, "When you did this, where were the children?" Victim advocates also try to help victims understand the affect that witnessing violence has on their children. Go through with the parents to look at how their children are sleeping, what is the behavior change, etc. The video, The Children Are Watching addresses this. It is available through AIMS Media (<http://www.aims-multimedia.com>). The batterer may discipline the child with violence, giving the message that the child is bad and deserves this.

With both batterers and victims, kids may be used as confidantes, which puts them in the middle and gives them information they are unprepared to deal with. Part of this may be because the batterer or victim feels socially isolated. In cases of interracial or other nonmainstream lifestyle, the party who is mainstream has a distinct advantage over the minority parent.

If a man is a parent and is not talking in group about relationships with children, he may be involved in "active neglect." You may have a man who says he was "using drugs, but still took care of his kids." They sometimes don't know what acceptable behavior is. They do not know a normal, expected standard of appropriate care. Society sees women as neglectful parents more often than it does men.

Seeing children as a commodity is common. The man may have a kid here and there, but doesn't understand that financial AND nurturing is part of being a responsible parent. "She's the mom--she takes care of the kids" when the man comes home from work. He doesn't understand that having involvement with kids is more than a financial responsibility.

We need to encourage fathers when they do what is right. Roles of immigrant fathers may be different. For example, a father may view being a man as only certain things--he may have blinders on. In group, we can help restore his vision.

How can you teach fathers what is "normal" without helping them use this as standards to manipulate and look good to authorities? We need an integration of different perspectives: 1) What is the tradition, 2) What is common sense, 3) Inclusion of emotional/affective reality (being emotionally available vs. shut down) and 4) What is the law.

We can examine with parent, "What are your values?" Need to establish what are the goals. If he can't identify what his values are, he won't be able to be a good parent. However, often a batterer may have overly-idealistic values.

We should discuss with a perpetrator: who are you and where do you come from, where are you now, then where do you want to be and how can you get there? If you get past the bravado when a client discusses, "when I was a kid," you can remind them how they felt about it as a kid. Perpetrators' general attitude is "power over." This applies to kids. Any attempt to assert one's

own identity will be seen as a threat or challenge. Until they can change their view of children trying to overpower them, their partners trying to manipulate them, etc. they will continue to manipulate and control.

The men feel that whatever their child does is a reflection on them. We can help perpetrators see what adult discipline was modeled to them, but also look at who they admire and why-- their positive role models. Look at the values of the person they admire. It might be they were nice, or might be that the person was available. We can help them realize it's great to be strong and a good provider, but is important to have empathy as well.

One opinion is that we have to challenge men to stop the violence, not to teach them to be good parents. However, the violence can get in the way of a person being a good parent. If a man has the value system of being a man in his society, the values around being a man lead to partner and children being an extension of himself. We need to focus on the personal value system before going into his personal psychology. But we have to address the SOCIETAL values. If he is violent mainly within the family, and keeps his cool elsewhere, this is a male privilege issue.

Most men are acculturated to some extent to feeling that they are the boss of the family. That can be demonstrated in a sense that the family is his to provide for. This does not in itself cause violence, although it is not the healthiest environment for women and children.

In social history, we can look at whether the perpetrator feels he has a big hole in his life. How does this impact his desire for power and control now? How open are they to looking at their behavior?

#### WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IT?

Identify control tactics--providers need to be aware. We can then directly challenge them. We can hold batterers accountable in this aspect as well. We can then challenge their manipulation through the court.

Restraining order hearings are often used as a manipulation tool. Victim often does not have the same power at the hearings. Also mediation is against the DV protocols, yet how often is this used as part of divorce proceedings?

Courts should become aware as to the difference between a person's rights; if a person is doing something to abuse, control and manipulate, they need to start challenging this. Even the repetition of taking a victim back to court wears down the victim. Usually the judges schedule hearings on request--rather than look at whether action is warranted. One way to avoid unconscious collusion is to include in completion report, "Observed behavior should not be taken as a guarantee that they have been violent or will remain nonviolent."

There is now a (rebuttable) presumption that the non-abusing parent is the person with sole custody. The perpetrator therefore may try to file a restraining order first, before their victim has a chance.

When the perpetrator has kids, he may badmouth the victim. Also, may--intentionally or unintentionally--present the entire "victim role" that the kids pick up on. When perpetrators are doing their own expressing or venting, they may badmouth the mother to a friend on the phone and the child may overhear. A child may misbehave only with the mother. While a perpetrator may attempt to use this as "proof" he is the better parent, this can be because the child is fearful of what the father would do, and feels safe with the mother.

Some religious parenting classes reinforce the perpetrator's controlling behavior. While the offender may use attendance at these classes as "evidence" he is a good father, the focus of the classes may be obedience, and may include spanking. The church and scriptures may be used to

classes may be obedience, and may include spanking. The church and scriptures may be used to support the power and control of the father. Some groups are really hooking vulnerable perpetrators. There are some materials available that confronts these controlling beliefs.

If anyone has questions or concerns about SCF (Services to Children and Families), or a caseworker, etc., call Teri Pierson or Erica Strauss, Domestic Violence Consultant Child Abuse Hotline 731-3383x239, pager 301-9089.

Resource: Batterer Intervention: Program Approaches and Criminal Justice Strategies (Feb. 98)  
National Institute of Justice: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij> NCJ 168638