

TCBIPN

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network
(503)235-7118

Differentiating Men Who Batter From Those Who Have Committed Discrete Acts of Abuse

-Battering is typically defined as a "pattern of coercive behavior used by one person to control and subordinate another in an intimate relationship." The implication is that there are a number of episodes of abusive behavior that have occurred, although not necessarily all of them need to be physical abuse. This raises the possibility that there might be the rare instance when a man commits a truly isolated act of abuse, which is an arrestable offense, without the larger pattern/history of abusive and controlling behavior. How should these rare exceptions be addressed? Do they even exist?

-It is important that a good behavioral history be gathered. That is how a pattern of abuse and control can be established. It is often difficult to get such a thorough history just by interviewing the perpetrator. It can also be more difficult to quantify acts of abuse and control. Denial of any past abuse or much past abuse is common among batterers, so self-report is certainly not sufficient.

-Two additional avenues of getting information were suggested. One is utilizing collateral contacts. These may include the probation officer, referral source (if not court referred), police reports, psychological reports and other clinical records, and the partner, or other friends or family. If there are consistent indications that there is not a pattern of abuse present, then it seems especially important to contact the victim. If the other information that there is no history of abuse is correct, then there should not be any safety concerns in contacting the victim. If the information is not correct (i.e., there is a history of abuse), it may only be the victim's report that alerts others that there is a larger pattern of abuse. Obviously great care needs to be utilized when contacting the victim to minimize any danger to her.

-A second source of information besides the self-report is the way information is shared by the batterer as well as the victim. The word choice, tone of voice, and the way responses are provided can be very informative, more so than the actual content. High levels of defensiveness, blame, argumentativeness, and other behavioral styles are all flags of control issues even when there is no explicit admittance of abusive behavior. Over time and doing large numbers of intakes, such behavioral cues become more apparent and can be utilized as circumstantial indicators of control issues.

-There was agreement that even with so called "non-batterers"--men who have only committed discrete acts of abuse--some sort of intervention is still relevant and appropriate.

-One identified group of "non-batterers" are some people who have a major mental illness such as schizophrenia or are developmentally delayed. Some people with these diagnoses can have isolated incidents of abuse related to their psychological condition without having the larger pattern of control.

In that case the primary issue and target for intervention needs to be the mental illness. In the case of developmentally delayed men, more traditional anger management may be appropriate. However, just because a man carries such a diagnosis does not mean he may not also be a batterer.

-There was some discussion of how to trust your own judgment, since there is always a danger of colluding with the man's denial and "buying the story."

-Two ways of intervening with "non-batterers" who are court mandated. One is to have at least two different tracts. This is a format used, for example, by ASAP and Therapeutic Alternatives. Another option is to have "competency based" goals, which are used at Men's Resource Center and ChangePoint, which lead to varying lengths of enrollment in the program. Presumably the non-batterers will meet such goals more quickly than the other men.

-Another suggested approach is to ask the man at intake "Why do you need to be here? How are you going to not make the same mistake again?" Presumably those are questions that every man should be able to answer, and become the basis for their involvement in the program.

-In response to someone inquiring "What should be done with a man who has only been abusive one time?" the following response was suggested: "What does 'one time' mean? The first time they were arrested? The first time their physical abuse was observed by a third party? The first time they were physically abusive? Or the first exercise of power and control ever?"

-If a judge raises this question it could be suggested that their role is not to evaluate, but to provide appropriate sanctions for the crime, regardless of whether the defendant is a batterer or not.

Summary by Chris Huffine of a discussion of members of the Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network.