

Minutes from Tri-County Batterer Intervention Network Meeting  
April 1, 2003

Members Present – Stacey Womak (ARMS), Chris Huffine (Men's Resource Center), Courtenay Silvergleid (Portland State University), Elsie Garland (Multnomah County Community Justice)

Minutes taken by: Courtenay Silvergleid

Topic for today: Issue of risk assessment and lethality assessment

This is a continued discussion from last month's meeting. Courtenay briskly reviewed the highlights from last month's meeting and then the following discussion ensued.

One member offered that risk assessment involves both static and dynamic factors. Probation is more likely to have information regarding the static factors; they have better access to criminal history, victim history, etc. While providers are more likely to have information regarding the dynamic factors; his emotional state, drug and alcohol use, his emotional dependence, etc. Subsequently, it is really important that providers and probation officers work together and share the information that they do have with one another to better monitor and assess risk.

Group members seemed to agree that providers do have some responsibility for risk assessment. One of the providers reported that once s/he had a voluntary client who left her/his program and was concerned about risk for recidivism. The particular provider took it upon him/herself to write the court and suggest that this particular man might benefit from having mandated intervention. Along similar lines, one provider mentioned that if s/he becomes aware that an abuser is violating his restraining order, she/he might suggest to the perpetrator's probation officer that a lie detector test might be useful. In this way, s/he works collaboratively with probation. This particular member stated that her/his impression is that probation officers have been really responsive and talking with them gives him/her a chance to also ask what probation needs/desires from her/him.

Group members concurred that it is important that providers know about recidivism and lethality risk factors so that they are in a position to look for and recognize them, preferably flagging them for the probation officer or the referral agency.

Here is the current list of risk factors being proposed for inclusion in the statewide standards:

#### SAFETY SCREENING FACTORS

The factors listed below are not ranked according to risk, but provide a guide to evaluating risk of recidivism. The absence of these factors does not necessarily indicate that the batterer will not recidivate.

Safety concerns expressed by the victim;

Prior assault against intimate(s);

Violent criminal history, including prior assaults against strangers;

Criminal history, including prior non-violent offenses;

Prior violation of conditional release/restraining order;

Ongoing relationship conflicts/problems/marital dissatisfaction (especially, victim's report at time of intake);

Lifestyle instability (e.g., employment, housing);

Substance use, abuse, addiction;

Personality disorder, including "borderline personality organization" (i.e., personality disorders increase risk for violence; it is assumed that this is due to poor emotional regulation, failure to grasp the consequences of violence, unstable relationships, suspicion of others intents, impulsivity and negative emotionality, which are all factors commonly found in those with personality disorders);

History of exposure to family-of-origin dysfunction, violence, etc.;

History of psychological abuse/stalking;

Attitudes that condone or support domestic violence;

History of weapon use (both in history and current offense);

Credible threats of harm/death/suicide;

Lack of accountability/minimization/denial of domestic violence history in applicant;

Mental health history, history of past treatment, hospitalization;

Current acute mental health symptoms (e.g., depression, sleep disturbance, anxiety, mania);

Negative peer associations (i.e., peers condoning domestic and other violence);

Extreme isolation/dependency on partner;

Negative response to prior services (court ordered, drop out, lack of motivation, resistance to change);

Poor emotional regulation/low constraint (e.g., impulsivity, desire for novelty, rejection of social values regarding constraint, hopelessness, depression);

Sexual abuse;

Demographic factors: Youth at time of offense, single, low verbal I.Q., short relationship (duration) with initial victim.

Also consider: access to the victim, applicant is in crisis, applicant refuses to utilize intervention strategies, or cannot identify alternatives, change in custody arrangements)

One of the problems for providers with regard to risk and lethality is liability. There is concern that providers may be asked to make a judgement about level of risk. Obviously the fear is that a provider might say that someone isn't a risk and then the abuser goes out and does something.

In addition to contacting probation officers and referral agencies, one member said that occasionally s/he will contact the victim in addition to contacting probation.

In addition to being aware of currently accepted correlates of recidivism and lethality, it is useful to pass on other kinds of information to probation officers as well. For example, if a man who is completing a program doesn't appear to be "getting it", this could be passed along. When it seems clear that men are not shifting in their attitudes about power and control during the course of the program, it may be useful to share that. The group members present were very clear that the reverse of this is NOT true. In other words, it is not helpful to pass along information about men who appear to be "getting it" since appearances can so easily be false.

The group reflected on the question of what is recidivism and is all recidivism the same? Is there a difference between a man who never accepted his power and control, his responsibility for his violence and commits more violence post-intervention and a man who fully engaged the program, accepts his role and responsibility for change but from time to time struggles to remain non-abusive?