

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting Minutes January 12, 2016

Present: Chris Huffine (Allies in Change), Matt Johnston (Domestic Violence Safe Dialogue), Diana Groener (Allies in Change), Chelsea Penning (Multnomah County DCJ), Sarah Devine (Lifeworks), Guruseva Mason, Kendra Harding (Lifeworks NW), Liberty Martinez Bird (Central City Concern Eastside), Jacquie Pancoast (Eastside Concern), Chris Enquist (Multnomah County DCJ), Linda Castaneda (Castaneda Counseling), Kate Sackett (Portland State University), Rachael Paris (ARMS), Yesenia Carmolinga (Cedar Counseling). Jennifer Hopkinson (Clackamas Women's Services), Jessica Stanley (Clackamas Women's Services), Rachel Smith (Portland State University), Sarah Van Dyke (Clackamas County DV coordinator), Phil Broyles (Teras)

Minutes by Rachel Smith, edited by Chris Huffine

Topic: Sexual Abuse by Abusive Partners

Presentation by Diana Groener with additional contributions by attendees.

Chris Huffine suggested that with regards to sexually abusive behavior, abusive partners fall into one of four categories:

- 1. "typical" levels of sexual abuse common among abusive partners (e.g., badgering, pressuring, making her feel guilty)
- 2. abusive partners who also display unusually high levels of sexual abuse (usually still primarily towards their partner)
- 3. abusive partners who are also sexual offenders and need both services
- 4. High risk/psychopathic abusive partners

We have previously talked how to work with group #1 (see minutes from 2/11/14, 3/9/10, 9/19/06). Some sex offender programs are beginning to offer specialized groups for group #3, including one run by Diana Groener. It is also quite common for psychopathic abusive partners to be quite severely sexually abusive as well (see minutes from 5/13/14, 6/9/09), although they should not be seen/remain in regular abuse intervention groups. The focus of today's discussion, and Diana Groener's presentation, is on group #2. Diana designed and ran a specialized group at Allies in Change for those group #2 men, described as Sexually Abusive Domestically Violent men. That group is currently on semi-hiatus due to limited referrals.

Diana distributed a hand-out of stats/recommendations related to sexually abusive DV offenders (see attachment).

What do these offenders need that is not a part of the typical BI protocol? These individuals tend to do more extreme forms of sexual abuse, to their partners and others, relative to most abusive partners. As a result they either choose not to share them out of concern that others won't relate or, if they do share them, others may be put off and struggle to relate. Also, at least some of these behaviors won't be mentioned or adequately discussed in routine group conversations about sex. While not true sex offenders or appropriate for sex offender services, these individuals need a more intensive focus on their sexually abusive behavior than most abuse intervention groups typically offer. An enhanced curriculum would involve bringing in sex-related topics more often than in the "regular" group (e.g., about working with sexual desires in non-abusive ways). This is a group where, while we are going to talk about abuse and control every week, we will also be talking about sex to some extent every week, creating a norm of talking about sex all the time. This enhanced curriculum does not require that much additional training for providers. When the topic of sex comes up in regular BI groups, it has led to participants opening up about some of their core issues, which has revealed issues of entitlement, coercive control tactics, etc. (e.g., use of cheating or threat of cheating used as a control tactic). Men talk about dating other women while they are not able to have contact with their partner.

There are sexual behaviors and tendencies that are typically more common among all abusers, such as manipulation and coercion, than among non-abusers, but what distinguishes the sexually abusive subgroup of domestic violence offenders is a prominent pattern of sexually-based abusive behaviors. It is important to work with the men in a specialized group to really get to a deeper analysis of their abusive behaviors, beyond just that which got them caught. It is also important to recognize that a subgroup of this subgroup is actually psychopathic, which is what the fourth tier of sexually abusive offenders captures.

Screening Considerations. There are some useful research-based assessment tools related to sex-offense, but not so much domestic violence. One strategy is to screen over time by monitoring participants' behaviors and what they say during the "regular" group and placing men who stand out from the rest of the group, in terms of sexual behaviors, into a group specialized to the second category, such as the one currently being offered by Diana Groener at Allies in Change. Some screening questions can be folded into the intake process (e.g., questions that get at pornography use, level of sexual activity, age of first sexual activity, etc.). There are a number of significant behaviors that can be "red flags" and can be asked about during the intake process to help determine the type and level of treatment an offender needs. These include having multiple affairs, unusual sexual aspects to the arresting incident (or other prior arrests, even if not prosecuted), indicators of sex addiction or other sexually compulsive behaviors, or a more extensive sexual abuse perpetration history. Other "red flags" include men whose partners are sex-workers and men who demonstrate a pattern of seeking out women who have histories of sexual violence victimization.

Conversations about sex in "regular" groups

We need to have conversations about discussing sexuality in the men's relationships, including discussions about their sexual agreements in their relationships. Bringing up sex and having candid conversations can be useful and lead to rich group discussions. There is a [YouTube channel by Laci Green](#), one of her most popular videos is "[Wanna have sex? \(Consent 101\)](#)", which might be helpful in thinking of ways to integrate these topics into groups. Another good topic to bring up is "make-up sex" and making sure that the partners actually wanted the "make-up sex". Stalking also comes up in small levels for a lot of the regular guys and can be a red-flag when it comes up as a pattern of extreme and obsessive stalking.

Pornography usage is an important topic to bring up. More than average use of porn is often indicated by edgier types of porn (e.g., younger characters, etc.) and indicators of porn addiction. Dissociation is another useful topic to discuss because many abusers not only fail to notice it but often intentionally do not acknowledge these behaviors with their partners. One way to bring this topic into the group is talking about fight or flight, and educating the guys about it actually being fight, flight, or freeze.

There were a couple loose ends mentioned related to these issues. One is that just because a man self-identifies as a sex addict doesn't mean he is one. Some men with high sexual shame will mislabel sexually healthy behavior as "addictive" (e.g., masturbation, viewing sexual material).

So it is important to determine that the actual behaviors being done are consistent with addiction. Keep in mind that for individuals who report interest in BDSM and related practices, it is important to understand how they actually practice those behaviors with other people. Such behavior may or may not be abusive, depending on whether there was true non-coerced informed consent.