

The Abusive Relationships Inventory: Preliminary Findings

The Abusive Relationships Inventory (ARI) was developed to assess the attitudes and beliefs of men who have been physically, mentally or sexually abusive toward their spouses - men who are batterers. Preliminary results suggest that the ARI measures tendencies to rationalize abusive behaviours and to project blame onto the spouse. The ARI may be useful in treatment programs to assess attitudes of batterers.

Family violence is a serious problem in our society. The majority of the perpetrators of family violence are male batterers, many of whom are convicted and incarcerated in federal penitentiaries. The Correctional Service of Canada recognizes the reduction of family violence as a programming priority and encourages the provision of treatment services to inmates with a history of battering.

Research suggests that violence against women is often associated with negative attitudes and beliefs toward women, rationalization of abusive behaviours, externalization of blame and a need to control and dominate in the relationship.(1)

Our research is aimed to design an instrument to measure these attitudes and beliefs. The measures could then be used to identify candidates for treatment and to assess changes in attitudes and beliefs as a result of treatment. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first attempt to develop a psychometric instrument to measure the attitudes of incarcerated male batterers. Method The ARI and the Marlowe-Crowne Scale(2) were completed by 195 male offenders selected from federal penitentiaries in the Prairies and Ontario regions. The Marlowe-Crowne Scale was used to measure the tendency to give socially desirable responses (i.e., making oneself look good) which could affect the results.

The average (mean) age of the offender sample was 33, with a mean educational level of 10 years. Of the total sample, half were or had been married, 40% were single and the rest were of unknown marital status. Results and Discussion The ARI was found to be internally consistent, and this was not affected by any tendency on the part of subjects to give socially desirable responses.

More detailed analyses suggest that two significant factors of the ARI are correlated. These factors measure two attributes which are tentatively labelled as "rationalizations for abusive behaviour" and "attributions of spousal blame and maintenance of gender stereotypes."

The rationalization factor measures rationalizations and excuses that batterers use to justify their abusive behaviour toward others. Examples of statements that represent this factor are: "If a man is out of a job, frustrated and feeling useless, it is O.K. for him to hit his wife," and "One good reason to hit your partner is to have good sex after the fighting stops."

The attribution of blame and sexual stereotyping factor measures the tendency to project the cause of abusive behaviour onto the spouse and the tendency to stereotype women. This factor includes statements such as: "If my partner goes out of her way to make me jealous, then she deserves to get hit," and "Most women like to get hit once in a while."

Further analyses reduced the original 50-item ARI to a 39-item inventory (with no significant change in its overall psychometric properties).

Although the preliminary results were promising, it is too early to use the ARI for clinical or assessment purposes. Further research is under way to establish the ARI's reliability over time (test-retest), its ability to discriminate batterers from non-batterers and its relationship to other constructs related to violence against women, e.g., hostility and aggression. The ARI may be revised to reflect more fully the control and domination of an abusive relationship.

The authors encourage the use of the ARI as an experimental instrument in the assessment of attitudes and beliefs of male batterers. Feedback regarding the inventory is welcomed and may be directed to D. Boer, from whom copies of the ARI can be obtained.

(1) D.P. Crowne and D.R. Marlowe, "A New Scale of Social Desirability Independent of Psychopathology," *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 24 (1960): 349-354

(2) J.C. Overholser and S.H. Mou, "Who's To Blame: Attributions Regarding Causality in Spouse Abuse," *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 8(1990): 107-120.