

Family violence review: Prevention and treatment of abusive behaviour (R-03, 1989)

For many centuries, family violence was considered a private affair subject to treatment as a crime only when resulting in severe injury or death. It is only recently that it has been recognized as a serious social problem requiring the intervention of criminal justice, social welfare and mental health agencies.

The revelations of the prevalence of family violence and its effects on society as a whole came to light in regard to child abuse in the 1950s, wife abuse in the 1970s and elder abuse in the 1980s. Violence is produced by a range of biological, economic, demographic, cultural and psychological factors.

This review identifies those factors which are relevant to the occurrence of family violence and to the treatment of abusers, and applies this information in the context of the correctional system.

The study sets its framework by outlining definitions and descriptions applied to the wide range of abuse situations and likely to be met with general agreement. The research presented an extensive list of abuser characteristics gathered from clinical and survey sources. It also identified risk factors supported by an overview of treatment models employed in family violence based on the theoretical approaches to causation.

Conclusions on effective treatment suggest modest evidence of the success of group treatment after six months to one year and support continued effort in further research and in developing treatment models. The research report, in its recommendations for corrections, outlines program proposals and needs for both the offender and victim(s) of family violence. It acknowledges the significance of incest as an act of violence but does not address the issue as part of the study on the premise that treatment in this area would be "special needs."