

Evaluation of the Living Without Family Violence program

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This study evaluated the Living Without Family Violence program offered to offenders by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). Participants (N = 121) completed pre- and post-treatment measures. Research has indicated that short educational programs can significantly alter attitudes justifying the use of intimate violence. Results indicated that significant attitude shifts were made following treatment. Offenders self-reported feeling less anger and reported more pro-feminist attitudes at post-treatment.

During the last two decades there have been a number of initiatives implemented to protect women from intimate abuse. These have included temporary protection such as battered women's homes to a more long-range plan of providing treatment to abusive men in the hope that they will learn not to be abusive. Many male batterer treatment programs have been implemented in Canada since the late 1970s.⁴ Living Without Family Violence is one such program offered to federally sentenced offenders. The present study will examine participants' attitudes toward women prior to program commencement (pre-treatment) and again following completion of the program (post-treatment).

Estimates of intimate partner violence vary greatly, however a recent study in Canada found that 8% of women who were married or living in a common-law relationship during the previous five-year period experienced some type of violence committed by their partner.⁵ Men serving sentences in Canadian federal institutions reported significant levels of abuse in intimate relationships. A survey that examined federal offenders at intake indicated that 40% were found to have some file evidence of abuse perpetrated against a partner.⁶ Violence in intimate relationships has a damaging and costly impact on the victim, her children and the community. As such, offenders who have been identified as having a history of intimate abuse, or who are thought to be at risk for abusing their intimate partners in the future, should be referred to a program to address this risk.

The Living Without Family Violence program

Living Without Family Violence⁷ (LWFV) is a ten-session awareness program delivered to offenders in CSC.

The program targets offenders who have perpetrated intimate abuse or who were found to be at risk for future commission of this form of abuse.

LWFV uses a feminist theoretical model to guide treatment. Models of treatment mirror the framework that clinicians see as the causal factors of this type of violence. The feminist model views cultural norms that support and maintain violence against women as a causal agent. This theory explains that the structure of patriarchal societies encourages the adoption of men's sense of entitlement to exert power and control over their families. Therefore, the objective of treatment is to encourage more pro-feminist thinking and debunk any patriarchal sense of entitlement to control, intimidate or abuse their intimate partners.

The goal of LWFV is to teach offenders that violence and domination are not acceptable in intimate relationships. The program attempts to make the offenders aware of these issues and change their attitudes supporting the use of violence. By altering attitudes supportive of abuse, it is assumed that the subsequent abusive behaviour will be reduced. The program focuses on areas such as defining family violence and healthy relationships, power and control issues, developing alternatives to abusive control and role expectations.

Methodology

A sample of 121 offenders who completed the LWFV program in either an institution or in the community were included in the evaluation. The mean age was 36.8 years. Participants varied in ethnic origin with 59% being Caucasian, 22% Aboriginal, 14% Black and the rest listed as other or unknown ethnic origins. No comparison or control group was used. To be accepted into the program offenders must either have committed partner abuse or be at risk for being violent in intimate relationships.

LWFV was evaluated using four attitudinal and behavioural assessment instruments that were assigned at pre-treatment and again when the program was completed. The instruments were: Attitudes Toward Women Scale (ATWS),⁸ Hostility Toward Women Scale (HTWS),⁹ Multidimensional

Anger Inventory (MAI),¹⁰ and a revised version of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS).¹¹

Material

Attitudes Toward Women: Short Form

This questionnaire assessed the offenders' gender role expectations, and was in Likert format with answers on a four-point scale ranging from "agree strongly" to "disagree strongly". The questionnaire contained statements about the rights and roles of women in such areas as vocational, educational, intellectual activities, dating behaviour and etiquette, sexual behaviour, and marital relationships.

Hostility Toward Women Scale

This scale assessed a respondent's self-reported feelings of hostility toward women, and consisted of 30 true/false questions. This scale does not have discriminant validity in regards to behaviour exclusively examining aggression/hostility toward women but rather predicts general hostility.

Multidimensional Anger Inventory

This questionnaire was designed to simultaneously assess frequency, duration, magnitude, mode of expression, hostile outlook, and range of anger-eliciting situations. Overall, 38 questions addressed anger. The questions were answered with a four-point Likert scale ranging from "completely untrue" to "completely true". Responses produced a total score and five subscales scores, however, only the total anger score was used in this research.

Revised Version of Conflict Tactics Scale

This questionnaire was used to examine the extent of self-reported physical abuse perpetrated by the offender in the previous 12 months. Examples of abuse items include "threatened to hit or throw something," and "pushed, grabbed or shoved".

Results

For each of the four instruments in the assessment battery, the participants' total score was summed and

a two-tailed, paired-samples t-test was used to compare the pre-treatment and the post-treatment total scores. Results from a pre-treatment post-treatment comparison indicate significant differences in reported pro-feminist attitudes (ATWS). Significant differences were found in self-reported anger levels at post-treatment, as indicated by the MAI. Results from the HTWS and the CTS were not significant (refer to table 1).

Discussion

The LWFV program was based on a feminist framework that views the abuse of women as the product of a patriarchal society which creates and maintains the domination of women. Treatment based on this premise introduces men to pro-feminist, egalitarian principles, and encourages them to reject patriarchy. By shifting offenders' attitudes to be more consistent with pro-feminist views, it is assumed that it will reduce the risk of them engaging in abusive behaviour. The results indicated that the program was successful in significantly changing attitudes. Program participants adopted more pro-feminist egalitarian views.

Treatment gains were also found in self-reported levels of anger, as reported by the MAI. One of the goals of the LWFV program was to increase participants' awareness of personal patterns such as pre-violence cues and how to express anger and control issues in constructive ways by developing alternatives to violence. A post-treatment reduction in reported anger suggested that the offenders learned ways to control their anger. One of the program sessions focussed on the time-out skills. Offenders are instructed that when they are in a dispute with their partners and get angry, to call a time-out, leave the situation, and discuss the problem once they have calmed down.

Results from the HTWS were not significant. The author of the instrument found the HTWS did not correlate exclusively with aggression against women, suggesting the scale is a general hostility measure rather than a measure of hostility toward women, as the name implies.

Table 1

Assessment Battery Pre-treatment/Post-Treatment Results					
	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	Significance (2-tailed)
ATWS pre-treatment results	81.36	121	8.38	-5.67	0.001
ATWS post-treatment results	85.09	121	9.06		
HTWS pre-treatment results	7.88	121	5.59	1.05	0.30 (ns)
HTWS post-treatment results	7.34	121	4.97		
MAI pre-treatment results	91.88	121	19.50	2.55	0.012
MAI post-treatment results	86.96	121	20.74		
CTS pre-treatment results	3.72	103	4.93	-0.13	0.90 (ns)
CTS post-treatment results	3.81	103	4.76		

The results from CTS were non-significant indicating that offenders reported the same levels of abuse at pre-treatment than they did at post-treatment. However results approached significance, with offenders increasing the reported amount of abuse at post-treatment. The program was delivered over a two-week period and many of the offenders were incarcerated at the time of treatment. These offenders would not have had the opportunity to have been abusive to their partners between pre-treatment and post-treatment. Therefore, this increase is thought to be the result of an increased awareness of abusive behaviours. Offenders were made aware of a range of abusive behaviours during treatment that they perhaps did not consider to have been abusive prior to treatment. At pre-treatment offenders may not have thought some of their behaviours were abusive but learned to recognize them as abusive through the course of treatment.

Limitations and recommendations

This study examined only changes within the treatment group and did not have a control or comparison group. Without a control/comparison group in place, it is difficult to determine whether the attitude change of program participants is the direct result of participation in the program.

The assessment battery did not include a measure of attitudes specifically toward the abuse of women. Research has found that batterers held attitudes supportive of violence towards women but did not typically hold traditional anti-feminist attitudes towards women and gender roles.¹² The literature suggests that holding patriarchal values, in and of themselves, does not directly lead to violence. It is the man's willingness to reinforce his role as head of the household by his use of violence that leads to abuse of intimate partners.

The assessment battery used to evaluate the program did not contain an assessment of impression management or self deception. Offenders can "fake good" on self-reports measures. Given the measures used in the LWFV were all self-report measure without collateral information, a social desirability index would have been useful to assess various response biases.

The ultimate goal of the LWFV program is to change attitudes in the hope of reducing further intimate violence. A recidivism follow-up study would be able to determine if this goal was achieved. If this recidivism follow-up study were to occur, research would be able to indicate whether the attitudes changed by the program had any result on intimate violence recidivism.

When the LWFV program was developed in 1992, feminist theory was one of the most dominant theories driving treatment interventions for intimate violence. This awareness program was considered an appropriate intervention for low-risk offenders. However, research conducted since this time has found that using cognitive-behavioural based interventions would perhaps be more appropriate to target offenders thinking and behaviour patterns. Cognitive-behavioural programs designed to treat intimate abusers not only inform offenders on the issues of intimate partner violence but they also teach offenders skills to prevent them from falling back into antisocial behaviour patterns and teach them to recognise high-risk situations.

In conclusion, the program was successful in changing the attitudes the program sought to change. That is, there was a significant shift toward more pro-feminist attitudes. As well, the program participants reported feeling less anger at the time of program completion than they reported at pre-treatment. ■

¹ Abstract from Allegri N. (2000) *Evaluation of the Living without Family Violence Program*, Honours Thesis, Ottawa, ON: Carleton University

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