



Users of Violence

Key Factors for Effective Intervention Programmes

Literature Review

July 2024

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Published

2024

Acknowledgements

Presbyterian Support Northern warmly acknowledges those that provided input and feedback on the literature review.

Conflict of Interest Declaration

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Executive Summary

Intervention programmes that work with perpetrators of family violence are crucial for reducing reoffending and protecting people who have experienced violence. This literature review can help inform both the design and delivery of positive behaviour change programmes and the support needed by individuals who use violence. It will help ensure the application of evidence-informed best practice and provide effective and practical support for those using violence, while also contributing to broader efforts to keep families and communities safe.

Key Findings

- Theory can provide service deliverers and practitioners with essential knowledge and insights, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of clients' backgrounds and situations, which can support more tailored programme delivery.
- Tailoring programmes to individual needs can greatly improve the effectiveness of intervention programmes, especially when considering comorbid issues such as trauma, mental illness, alcohol, and substance abuse. In addition, high-quality pre-screening can ensure perpetrators are assigned the appropriate treatment.
- Participants could be more motivated to engage in a programme and utilise broader services if the programme components cover parenting skills.
- Practitioners and programme facilitators should be well trained and supported as they have considerable impacts on client motivation and the overall effectiveness of intervention programmes.
- Fostering partnerships with cultural advisors and iwi can support the development and implementation of culturally responsive intervention programmes. This will help drive improvements in programme effectiveness, particularly for Māori cohorts.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of intervention programmes should extend beyond reductions in physical violence.
- Overall, existing research remains uncertain on the general long-term effectiveness of perpetrator programmes. In addition, further research is required to substantiate which treatment methods are most effective, for example one-on-one vs group approaches.

01 Research Overview

Objectives

- Identify current theory and approaches related to users of violence.
- Investigate how to support and encourage positive behavioural changes amongst users of violence (best practices).
- Identify approaches and strategies applied in domestic and international intervention programmes that work alongside perpetrators of family violence.
- Provide key considerations that can support practitioners and service delivery.

Methods

- The applicable academic research papers and grey literature related to users of violence were reviewed. These were obtained primarily through Google Scholar, Auckland City Libraries databases and New Zealand's Family Violence Clearinghouse.
- The following key words defined the search parameters: family violence, domestic violence, batterer programmes, perpetrators behaviour, outcomes evaluation, practitioners and best practise.
- Reviewed the websites of domestic and international organisations delivering programmes for perpetrators of violence.

Limitations

- The literature review was limited to publicly available research and data.
- Several organisations provided information on their websites about how they work with perpetrators of family violence, however, we did not have time to contact them directly to provide further information on their programmes.
- Existing literature points out that empirical research in the area of family violence can be highly difficult due to ethical considerations and methodological challenges. As a result, there are few longitudinal studies that explore the long-term outcomes, such as recidivism, for those attending programmes.

Future Research

- Consider focusing efforts and resources on research that enhances its understanding of why its interventions work, for whom they are effective, under what conditions they succeed, and the underlying reasons for their effectiveness.
- Consider conducting process evaluations of existing intervention programmes. This could enhance programme delivery and design, and explore if it is being implemented as intended, adapting to contextual factors, and identifying barriers to participant engagement.
- Consider conducting outcome evaluations of existing intervention programmes. This could assess the programme's effectiveness achieving its intended results. It could also help identify successful components and inform key stakeholders and funders about the interventions contributions to reducing family violence.
- Future research might consider exploring further the effectiveness of group vs one-on-one programmes and using perpetrators to co-facilitate programmes.

02 Users of Violence Terminology and Effect

Key Findings

- The term 'family violence' recognises the impacts are across the whole family.
- Family violence covers a broad range of violent and controlling behaviours.
- Family violence is highly gendered with men disproportionately the perpetrators. Women can also be perpetrators of violence and studies often connect this with self-defensive and retaliatory violence.
- Family violence disproportionately affects women and some communities including Māori and Pasifika.

Users of Violence

- In New Zealand, the Family Violence Act 2018 (which replaced the Domestic Violence Act 1995) defines family violence as violence against a person by any other person with whom that person is, or has been, in a family relationship. The shift from 'domestic violence' to 'family violence' is in recognition of the impacts and effects on the whole family.
- Family violence also includes violence between defacto couples, LGBTIQ+ relationships, intimate partners and immediate family (relatives) of those couples, including step-children and fostered children.
- Family violence covers a broad range of violent and controlling behaviours perpetrated by someone who has previously shared or still shares an intimate relationship or a family relationship. Their actions reduce a victim's autonomy and limit their freedom and resistance. It is also important to note that victims and survivors resist violence to try and be safe and maintain their dignity.
- Violence can take many forms including physical, emotional, psychological, financial, sexual or some combination of these. It typically involves fear, intimidation and emotional deprivation and occurs within a variety of close interpersonal relationships (MSD, 2002).
- Family violence is largely gendered in terms of victimisation, perpetration and impacts. Men are more likely than women to use violence and exercise control and power over others (Ministry for Women, 2023). The New Zealand Crime and Victims survey found in their most recent report (Nov 2021-Nov 2022) that 24% of women experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) offences during their lifetimes (Ministry of Justice, 2023).
- Although predominately perpetrated by males, it is important to note that women can also use violence (Swan et al., 2008). Barton-Crosby & Hudson (2021) cautioned a gendered view of family violence could result in a lack of support for male victims/survivors, and a lack of treatment provision for female perpetrators.
 - An important distinction between violence perpetrated by males and females is that women are more likely to engage in self-defensive and retaliatory violence, using it to protect themselves and others from an abusive partner (Boxall et al., 2020; Swan et al., 2008). Therefore, it has been suggested that victimisation is a critical topic to explore when designing intervention programmes.
 - The high occurrence of self-defensive and retaliatory violence among female family violence offenders has prompted some researchers to propose that all

female-perpetrated domestic violence should be considered 'violent resistance'. However, others view this as an oversimplification that disregards the complexities of women's lives and the range of motivations behind violence (Boxall et al., 2020).

- Family violence impacts all sections of society but disproportionately impacts women, children and young people, Māori, Pasifika, disabled people, older people, rainbow communities, and ethnic communities (Ministry of Justice, 2023).
- Family violence is also reflective of wider structural and social issues such as colonisation and land confiscation.

Considerations

- The Family Violence (FV) and Domestic Violence (DV) terms are interchangeable but in legal references, the term family violence is applied.
- Continue advocating and supporting the delivery of intervention programmes that work alongside the perpetrators of family violence as there is a clear need for these services.
- Continue allocating resources and developing staff capabilities that can support the implementation of intervention programmes.

03 Users of Violence Theory

Key Findings

- Theory forms a crucial basis for understanding the contributing factors that influence perpetrators of violence. It also guides service delivery and programmes that seek to address violent behaviour.
- There is still no single theory that can sufficiently encapsulate all facets of perpetrator etiology (causes) and treatment. The 'one-size-fits-all' theoretical approaches to violence have been critiqued.
- Current literature suggests a multi-faceted theoretical approach that addresses individual, relational, and societal factors and provides the necessary underpinning for effective intervention and prevention of family violence.

Existing Theory

- Existing theories help to conceptualise understanding of the perpetrators of family violence and help to inform treatment programmes that can lead to positive behavioural change.
- Traditionally intervention programmes were built on feminist and cognitive behavioural theories.
- Emergent literature highlights that intervention programmes should consider drawing on alternative theories such as trauma and violence-informed, social learning theory, attachment theory, and ecological systems theory. It is suggested these can improve their responsiveness and effectiveness.

Feminist Theory

- Feminist theory (FT) originated in 1981 in Minnesota, USA. It emphasises power imbalances and gender dynamics in FV and argues violence against women is rooted in patriarchal structures. Most notably, the Duluth model emerged from this school of thought (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Such programmes assume that to reduce violence it is necessary to expose patriarchal or misogynistic behaviour and encourage perpetrators to take responsibility for their behaviour (Turner et al., 2023). In this way, more egalitarian attitudes and behaviours can be promoted (Turner et al., 2023).
 - **Pros:** Shifts responsibility away from victims towards perpetrators. Advocates for community involvement and policy reform. Challenges perpetrators to recognise and change their behaviour.
 - **Cons:** Can overlook factors such as a history of maltreatment, trauma, attachment style, anger-trait issues, mental health status, substance-abuse issues, poverty, and socioeconomic status (McPhail et al., 2019). The model relevance to indigenous cultures is also challenged.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) was pioneered by Aaron Beck in the 1960s, emerging from psychological and social learning theory (Beck, 1979). It focuses on the role of cognitive distortions and dysfunctional thinking patterns in driving violent behaviour. It is believed the learnt behaviour can be changed or modified.

- **Pros:** Helps perpetrators identify and change harmful behaviour patterns and provides them with taught tangible skills e.g., anger management and handling conflict.
- **Cons:** Effectiveness can be limited by its individualistic focus, the need for participant motivation, and the potential neglect of broader environmental or social factors at play.

Trauma and Violence-informed Theory

- Trauma and Violence-informed Theory emphasises understanding the impact of trauma on individuals' behaviour and coping mechanisms. Trauma can manifest in various ways for perpetrators of family violence, and may contribute to difficulties in managing emotions, coping with stress, regulating impulses, and forming healthy attachments.
- It takes into consideration the intersecting impacts on a person's life of systemic violence, interpersonal violence, and structural inequities (Wathen & Mantler, 2022).
- Research shows that while not all men who experience violence as children go on to use it in their adult relationships, many men who do use violence have experienced it as children. This connection cannot be ignored; however, it must be held in tension with an individual's agency and responsibilities, and it does in no way support violence or lead to an excuse for that behaviour (McLachlan, 2024).
- Practitioners need to achieve a balance between supporting clients and understanding their history and the factors that contributed to their use of violence, while also stressing the importance of their responsibility and choice to cease violent behaviour immediately.
 - **Pros:** Helps practitioners develop awareness of trauma driving violent behaviour and helps build therapeutic environments where perpetrators feel secure to engage in change.
 - **Cons:** Could be perceived as excusing violent behaviour, necessitating a balance of compassion and accountability.

Social Learning Theory

- Social Learning Theory (SLT) emerged with Albert Bandura in the 1960s and 1970s (Bandura, 1977). It shares common roots with CBT and the recognition that learning processes are critical in shaping behaviour.
- SLT suggests individuals learn behaviours through observation, modelling, and reinforcement. In the context of family violence, perpetrators may have been exposed to violence in their own families or communities and learned to replicate these behaviours in their own relationships. Interventions based on this model focus on relearning non-violent behaviours and developing positive coping strategies (Wareham et al., 2009). SLT closely aligns with the Inter-Generational Transmission of violence theory (IGT), where the causal process is often attributed to a learning process (Powers et al., 2020).
 - **Pros:** Practitioners can act as positive role models to demonstrate non-violent behaviour.
 - **Cons:** Changing deeply ingrained behaviours can be complex and time-consuming.

Attachment Theory

- Attachment Theory (AT) was pioneered by John Bowlby in 1958. Bowlby's theory suggests the early bond between a parent and child is critical to a child's emotional development.
- It identified specific attachment styles – secure, insecure-ambivalent, insecure-avoidant, and disorganised – that develop from early caregiver interactions (Chesworth, 2018).
- Research suggests insecure attachment styles are linked to higher levels of family violence. These individuals often exhibit jealousy, anger and hostility to cope with fears of abandonment. Treatments often combine CBT with psychodynamic approaches.
 - **Pros:** Helps practitioners understand how early attachment impacts adult relationships. These insights can provide more targeted and effective interventions and help address root causes of violent behaviour and help heal childhood trauma.
 - **Cons:** Emotional complexity can overwhelm some individuals which can lead to resistance and disengagement. It requires specialised training and expertise which can be resource intensive.

Ecological Systems Theory

- Ecological Systems Theory was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The theory posits human development is shaped by the interaction between individuals and their various environmental influences, ranging from immediate settings like family and school to broad societal influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).
 - **Pros:** Emphasises addressing not just individual context but broader cultural values, societal norms and context. The holistic view allows for more effective and targeted interventions. Viewing interconnectedness can help practitioners identify and strengthen relationships and networks for perpetrators.
 - **Cons:** Requires balancing immediate safety concerns with long-term systemic changes.

Considerations

- Integrating theories beyond traditional feminist theory and CBT, such as ecological systems theory and social learning theory as different theoretical approaches can aid the development of intervention programmes that address the complex nature of family violence and meet the specific needs of individuals.
- Equipping staff and practitioners with theory that informs them of the current understanding of family violence. This can enhance the awareness of strengths, limitations, and practice implications, as well as deepen the understanding of client behaviour and situation. This can support efforts to improve engagement and motivation for positive behaviour change.

04 Context of Violence

Key Findings

- Recognising the broader structural and cultural context is paramount when addressing the complex dynamics that contribute to and perpetuate violence within communities.
- Understanding intergenerational trauma is crucial for developing effective interventions and support systems for individuals, families and communities affected by violence.
- Understanding violence within Māori whānau requires placing it within the social, historical, political, and cultural experience of Māori wāhine, tāne and tamariki.
- In Western cultures, patriarchy is considered a primary factor in family violence, as it promotes male dominance and the subordination of women. In contrast, for indigenous communities such as Māori (Wirihana & Smith, 2014), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families (Carlson et al., 2021), colonisation is identified as the primary precursor for family violence.

Intergenerational Trauma

- Intergenerational trauma, stemming from historical injustices e.g., colonisation and land-confiscation, and experiences of violence passed down through generations, plays a significant role in shaping individuals' behaviours and relationships within families (Menzies, 2019; Waretini-Karena, 2017).
- Trauma is often compounded by structural inequities, including economic disparities, lack of access to resources, and systemic discrimination, which can exacerbate stressors and contribute to cycles of violence.
- For indigenous populations, historical trauma resulting from colonisation, forced assimilation, and ongoing marginalisation further intersects with intergenerational trauma, compounding the challenges faced.
 - Recognising and addressing these factors is essential for developing effective interventions that hold perpetrators accountable but also address the root causes of family violence and promote healing and resilience within communities.
 - Intergenerational transmission of violence suggests that individuals who have been exposed to violence during their formative years, whether as victims or witnesses, are more likely to perpetrate family violence themselves as adults (Besemer, 2017).

Māori, Colonisation & Intergenerational Trauma

- Māori are disproportionately affected by family violence due to the complex intersection of socio-historical and contemporary factors. Historical trauma theory encourages the development of understandings and healing frameworks that are cognisant of collective and historical indigenous experiences, particularly about colonisation and its impact.
- Central to the colonisation of Aotearoa (New Zealand) is the dispossession of land and resources of whānau, hapū and iwi. Colonial ideologies and practices of gender, race and class discrimination were imported to Aotearoa and significantly undermined Māori social structures, identity, beliefs, and ways of living (Pihama et al., 2019). It is crucial to understand that whānau violence views violence both as that perpetrated by

colonisation and the state on whānau, and the violence that occurs within and between whānau members (Pihama et al., 2019).

- Whānau violence must be understood within the wider impact of colonisation and the impact of historical trauma on whānau, hapu, and iwi as collectives.
 - Wirihihana & Smith (2014) noted the acknowledgement of historical trauma for Māori is necessary to “facilitate individual and collective soul healing”. It is vital that Māori healing is based on the restoration of the Māori cultural and healing paradigms that colonisation sought to destroy.
 - The literature review ‘Violence within Whānau and Mahi Tūkino – A Litany of Sound Revisited (2023) cited Kruger et al. (2004) who outlined three fundamental tasks were required to undo the effects of colonisation:
 - Dispel the perception that violence within whānau and mahi Tūkino is normal and culturally acceptable.
 - Eliminate opportunities for violence within whānau by educating and empowering whānau, hapū, and iwi to break free from violence and move towards whānau wellbeing.
 - Teach transformative practices based on Māori values and traditions to empower individuals and provide alternatives to violent behaviour.
- Te Ao Māori is an important source of healing for contemporary issues and has many relevant relational obligations, values, and practices (Pouesi & Dewerse, 2024).
 - Whakapapa – creates duty of care for those who are joined together by blood and common ancestry.
 - Whanaungatanga - extends beyond people to the environment and spiritual realm.
 - Manaakitanga – embodies a type of caring that is reciprocal and unqualified, based on respect and kindness.
- Traditional knowledge forms within tikanga, te reo and mātauranga Māori and provides clear guidance for wellbeing and appropriate behaviours within relationships (Pihama et al., 2019).
 - Grennel & Cram (2008) advocated the need for Māori to draw upon the traditional knowledge and wisdom of their ancestors to understand the cultural impact of violence, and how to enable community and collective healing that prevents further intergenerational trauma.
 - Kaupapa Māori approaches to trauma and healing must be defined, controlled, and undertaken by Māori for Māori (Pouesi & Dewerse, 2024).

Considerations

- Implement culturally responsive programmes that reflect an understanding of the broader cultural, social, and economic complexities faced by Māori and consider the multidimensional role of whānau.
- Equip staff and practitioners with a deep understanding of social and cultural contexts of violence and an awareness that many perpetrators have themselves experienced past violence or trauma, contributing to the intergenerational cycle of violence.
- Foster partnerships with cultural advisors and iwi to ensure development and implementation of culturally responsive intervention programmes. Non-kaupapa Māori organisations should continue to focus on deeply instilling the values of whakawhanaungatanga and manaakitanga.

05 Intervention Programmes for Users of Violence

Key Findings

- There is mixed evidence on the effectiveness of intervention programmes and the long-term outcomes for perpetrators. This has prompted a renewed focus on the conditions under which they do work and for whom. The literature contains examples of effective programmes, suggesting well-designed and delivered programmes can help address reoffending.
- During the initial assessment it is crucial to identify risk factors, both dynamic and static, and tailor the programme intensity to individual needs. In addition, it is also important to also consider providing options for one-on-one as well as group-based counselling, where appropriate.
- Recent research emphasises the importance of pre-programme assessments, risk-need-responsivity assessments, and pre-screening. This can help identify complex issues, trauma, and environmental factors that are vital to know when running intervention programmes.
- The evidence shows skilled and experienced facilitators are crucial, and ideally, they will have a personal history of family violence. Programmes should ideally be co-facilitated, co-gendered and focused on behaviour change.

Purpose of Intervention Programmes

- Recognised names for these programmes are also batterer intervention programmes, family violence programmes, and intimate partner violence programmes.
- Intervention programmes are delivered to those who perpetrate family violence. Their primary aim is to stop or reduce family violence and further harm to victims, while they also seek to increase respondent accountability and challenge their negative behaviour and actions.
- The programmes aim to break the cycle of violence, so that future generations do not use violence on their partners and children.
- Perpetrator programmes are generally not intended to operate as a panacea to family violence but, rather, as one part of a broader integrated community response.

Effectiveness of Intervention Programmes

- Given the serious consequences experienced by the victims of family violence, it is crucial to examine the effectiveness of intervention programmes.
- Existing literature paints an uncertain picture. A long-running debate has centred on whether interventions prevent recurrent violent and abusive behaviour among perpetrators and make the lives of victims and survivors safer (Eckhardt et al., 2013). Babcock et al. (2016) suggest that given the consensus appears there is positive but non-significant effects, it is argued the question becomes one of not whether the programmes work but under what conditions they do work and for whom. Travers et al. (2021) outlined there remains a diversity of opinions on programme effectiveness with little known regarding long-term outcomes. Turner et al. (2023) suggests the

mixed findings from existing research leaves practitioners and service providers with conflicting guidance on how best to deliver programmes.

- Research on the effectiveness of treatment and rehabilitation for female violence offenders is largely lacking, with few evaluations of perpetrator programmes for women, especially in New Zealand. Additionally, there is a notable absence of qualitative studies on the process of women's desistance from family violence offending. This gap represents a promising area for further investigation (Bevan et al., 2016).
- Evaluating the effectiveness programmes for perpetrators of violence is an inherently challenging process for different reasons (Laing, 2002; Maxwell, 2003).
 - Behavioural change, especially in the context of violence, is a complex and multifaceted process. Individual differences in readiness to change, the severity of violent behaviour, and personal histories (e.g., trauma, mental health issues) make it difficult to predict and measure change uniformly across participants.
 - Self-reported client data can be biased or inaccurate due to social desirability and/or acceptance, fear of repercussions, or lack of self-awareness. Tracking recidivism (re-offending) longitudinally requires access to reliable data, which can be hindered by inconsistent record-keeping, participants moving around, or unreported incidents of violence.
 - Programme variability i.e., facilitator training, program fidelity, and resources can lead to inconsistent results. External factors such as community support, availability of complementary services (e.g., mental health, substance abuse treatment), and the broader socio-economic environment can also influence programme effectiveness.
 - Many variables interact to influence outcomes, including individual, relational, and societal factors. Disentangling the effects of the intervention from other influences e.g., new relationships, employment changes, and legal consequences is complex. Programmes often aim to address multiple aspects of behaviour and well-being, which requires comprehensive and multi-dimensional evaluation approaches that are harder to design and implement.
 - Sustained programme engagement and maintaining contact post-intervention is difficult, making it hard to gather long-term outcome data (Maxwell, 2003). Evaluations must also carefully consider the safety of victims and survivors when following up, making it essential to implement safeguards that may complicate data collection and analysis (Laing, 2002).
- Recent literature has highlighted the need for research and evaluation that enhances an understanding of why interventions work, for whom they are effective, under what conditions they succeed, and the underlying reasons for their effectiveness (Bell & Coates, 2022). In addition, it has also been suggested that procedures for recording intervention details and data collection are standardised to facilitate comparison more easily (Bell & Coates, 2022).
- Bell & Coates (2022) pointed out an over reliance on measurements of physical violence and recidivism when assessing the efficacy of interventions has been questioned, as perpetrators may continue to use or possibly increase their use of non-violence – including coercive control, threats, emotional and economic control, and victims and their families may not feel safer. They identified other perpetrator-specific outcomes while reviewing existing behaviour change programmes (listed below):

- Attrition rates, mental health outcomes (i.e., improved self-esteem, stress); reduction in substance use; improved parenting skills and efficacy; interpersonal and relational outcomes (i.e., relationship satisfaction, relational skills, communication skills); cognitive competence outcomes (i.e., anger management and self-control).
- There is limited research that explores long-term positive behaviour change outcomes and associated indicators.
- There is mixed evidence regarding the impact of programme length on a programme's effectiveness. Arce et al. (2020) found in some cases that longer interventions (greater than 16 sessions/weeks) might be more effective in reducing recidivism, while others presented inconsistent evidence on treatment length and reduction in violence.

Key Success Factors

Literature continues to highlight the importance and necessity of working alongside the perpetrators of violence and provides important insights on key factors that can influence the success and effectiveness of programmes.

Client Motivation

- One of the most difficult challenges that many programme facilitators face, regardless of the programme's content or focus, is the readiness to change or the motivation of the people who use violence against their intimate partners. Behaviour change programmes or similar initiatives can serve as a standard referral route, with men often being compelled to participate by the legal system (external motivations) (Tarzia et al., 2023). Therefore, it is important to have techniques or approaches that can improve motivation, while simultaneously also holding a realistic understanding of the client's context and their readiness and motivation to change.
- Literature has identified several factors and approaches that can help address client resistance or lack of motivation.
 - Participants have identified facilitator characteristics that help to reduce resistance to the group process and engage group members in the learning process. These are:
 - Facilitators who are invested in the programme and its mission, and display a non-judgemental demeanour (Morrison et al., 2021).
 - Facilitators who are honest with clients and challenge them on their behaviour, and who exhibit a high degree of experience.
 - The use of female facilitators as part of the group whose presence and perspective can encourage further engagement and learning (Cramer et al., 2024).
 - Motivational interventions can greatly help improve the effectiveness of violence programmes (Stinson & Clark, 2017). Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a collaborative, goal-oriented communication style that aims to strengthen an individual's motivation and commitment to change. It is often used when individuals deny or minimise their violent behaviour and blame the victim(s) or circumstances (Michailovič et al., 2022).
 - Ken McMaster of Hall McMaster & Associated Limited (HMA) has provided a document titled 'Motivational Interviewing in relation to family violence intervention'. It provides a detailed overview of approaches that influence motivation.

- Alternative approaches such as acceptance and commitment therapy (a type of psychotherapy) offer a flexible approach that can help people develop skills to cope with difficult thoughts and feelings (Wagers et al., 2017). This can help reduce attrition and improve a client's motivation/buy-in within intervention programmes.
 - The Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) has emerged due to evidence of inconsistent effectiveness of the Duluth Model and CBT IPV treatment approaches (Zarling & Russell, 2022). ACT is a mindfulness-based treatment intervention that aims to enhance psychological flexibility. Low psychological flexibility has been linked to the avoidance of emotional experiences and impulsivity (Zarling & Russell, 2022).
 - ACT aims to address factors that maintain intimate violence within a relationship. For example, some risk factors include exposure to childhood abuse, attitudes that support violence, and alcohol abuse (Abramsky et al., 2011). The more the attachment to the belief or attitude of the individual is explored, the higher the probability that the individual's psychological flexibility will increase with treatment. Michailović et al. (2022) outlined the primary difference between Duluth/CBT and the ACT-based philosophies is the ACTV model does not teach or require the content of participants' thoughts on behaviour to change, only the way they respond to their thoughts (Berta & Zarling, 2019).
- A core criticism of some intervention programmes has been their focus on individual deficits i.e., the problem behaviour occurs due to some underlying inadequacy in the individual (Bowen et al., 2019). This can inadvertently undermine participants' motivation and has prompted some renewed focus on desistance-focused practice (process of abstaining from crime) that considers clients' strengths.
 - The strengths-based approach focuses on identifying and building upon the strengths and resources of individuals (Bowen et al., 2019). It emphasises empowerment, resilience, and the capacity for positive change, and recognises and reinforces positive behaviours and strengths to help build healthier relationships and coping strategies.
 - Critics of the approach note that some perpetrators may resist a strengths-based approach, especially if they are not yet ready to acknowledge their harmful behaviour or take responsibility for change (Bowen et al., 2019). In addition, focusing exclusively on strengths could lead practitioners to neglect addressing underlying issues such as patterns of abusive behaviour, attitudes supportive of violence, and risk factors for re-offending. There is a risk that an approach may inadvertently undermine accountability for perpetrators' actions by primarily focusing on their strengths and positive qualities.

Programme Responsiveness & Adaptability

- A prominent theme in the literature is a shift from these blanket approaches to treatment based on individual need and co-occurring issues (Butters et al., 2021). Human behaviour is complex and, thus, there is no single solution when it comes to the etiology or causes and treatment.
- Programme and treatment approaches seek to address broader considerations and promote better outcomes (McMaster, 2012). Client motivation can depend not only on their internal motivation, but also on factors such as whether the programme applies a well-suited and individualised approach toward behavioural change.

- Perpetrators are a heterogeneous group with many different contributing factors behind their violent behaviour (Chesworth, 2018). This is the case for both male and female perpetrators of violence (Van Diemen et al., 2014).
- Michailović et al. (2022) stressed the importance of analysing each person's case and providing additional assistance as required. Intervention programmes should account for the heterogeneity of violence causes, degrees of severity, personality traits, and recognise the multilevel socio-ecological forces that influence the use of violence (Graham et al., 2022).
 - Practitioners should be aware of demographic factors affecting treatment completion and re-assault, perpetrator typologies, perpetrator readiness to change and the use of motivation-based approaches, and common individual co-occurring concerns, including substance use and mental health issues (Butters et al., 2021).
 - Practitioners should also be aware of therapies that are emerging in response to the heterogeneity. Yakeley (2022) pointed to Schema Therapy (ST), a third wave cognitive behavioural therapy that is an integrative therapeutic approach that could be effective for treating those using violence. In addition, metacognitive interpersonal therapy, a third wave CBT model that uses experimental techniques including guided imagery, rescripting, two chairs, role-play and bodily interventions.
- Research has made a compelling case for integrating the principles of Risk-Needs-Responsivity (Morrison & Davenne, 2016), which has been shown to improve intervention effectiveness (Stewart et al., 2014).
 - Risks – Providing sufficient intensity of service based on risk level.
 - Needs – Target criminogenic needs i.e., factors empirically linked to criminal behaviour.
 - Responsivity – Use effective methods and address responsivity issues.
- Risk assessment is an important stage of risk management and is applied regularly pre-intervention. There is limited literature that explores how risk is assessed or managed post-intervention.
 - It should be noted that risk assessments are imperfect and difficult and can run risks of false negatives and false positives (Meyer et al., 2023). Risk can be static and/or dynamic. High-risk factors include recent separation, stalking, use of weapons, or strangulation (Ministry of Justice, 2017). Risk assessments should also consider information provided by victims.
 - Risk assessment tools typically consist of a standardised set of questions designed to identify factors e.g., alcohol and substance use that increase the likelihood of domestic and family violence (DFV) revictimisation (Meyer et al., 2023). These are typically carried out pre-intervention.
 - Actuarial tools utilise quantifiable metrics to produce a total score, which categorises the risk as low, moderate, or high. In contrast, other methods combine standardised questions with professional judgment, incorporating additional available information to assess risk (Meyer et al., 2023).
- Pre-screening participants can also shed important information for practitioners, such as, their suitability and preference for individual or group-based programmes. Group therapy has generally been the preferred modality as it has many advantages, including prosocial support, peer challenging, modelling prosocial behaviour, and cost efficiency. However, some perpetrators will respond better to individual programs.

Programme Facilitators & Group Dynamics

- Literature highlights the crucial role of programme facilitators and the importance of an effective group environment. They are critical for enhancing client engagement in the therapeutic process and their motivation to change (Michailović et al., 2022). When unsupported by trusting working relationships between offenders and facilitators, interventions can risk doing more harm than good (Renehan & Gadd, 2024).
 - Hamel et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of the quality of the working relationship between the client and the group facilitator(s). Clients reported deriving greater benefits from their group experience when they perceived facilitators to be caring, committed, and nonjudgemental; humble and authentic, but also knowledgeable and able to provide information and tools with which to change; and who can maintain a safe, working group environment but also willing to challenge clients' behaviours respectfully. There is a paucity of research that focuses on the use of perpetrators to co-facilitate programmes. Morrison et al. (2021b) has noted, however, that participants responded well to facilitators who had shared similar realities.
 - Roguski & Gregory (2017) found that clients who had experienced positive impacts from stopping violence programmes, connected this to the importance of sharing experiences within a safe group environment with a facilitator who had a personal history of family violence. Clients also reported being more open to change and to learning from someone who they could identify with.
 - Paulin et al. (2018) in an evaluation of stopping violence programmes, also found the key features of successful programmes were skilled facilitators, conversational and interactive sessions, and a comfortable environment.
 - Co-gendered facilitation of intervention programmes brings different advantages in the different knowledge, experience, and perspectives. It also enables facilitators to role-model safe, healthy, and respectful relationships; explore gender stereotypes and social norms; and constructively express gender identity. If female facilitators have experience working with victims, they can use their voices to develop empathy.
- Building better relationships with men who present a high risk of violence to women and children, and who are often reluctant to engage, is hugely demanding, time-consuming, highly skilled work that needs to be nurtured and valued (Renehan & Gadd, 2024). It is crucial that facilitators feel supported and valued when engaged in such important work.

Cultural Relevance

- The literature is clear that programmes must embed a deep cultural understanding when engaging indigenous, ethnic and minority communities. In addition, understanding the broader structural context is paramount in addressing the complex dynamics that contribute to and perpetuate violence within communities.
- When culturally relevant and effective programmes are implemented, it can lead to lasting modification of perpetrators behaviour and create safer family relationships. They can achieve positive outcomes including reduced recidivism, improved mental health, and better attitudes to gender equality.
- Māori are disproportionately affected by family violence due to the complex intersection of socio-historical and contemporary factors (further information has been provided in the earlier section titled 'context of violence').

- Culturally-focused interventions are important for Māori. There is a growing evidence base that shows the effectiveness of Kaupapa services and reclaiming mātauranga Māori. In addition, whānau-centred services have shown potential in reducing the level of family violence in New Zealand.
- It is vital that Māori healing is based on the restoration of the Māori cultural and healing paradigms that colonisation sought to destroy. In addition, Kaupapa Māori approaches to trauma and healing must be defined, controlled, and undertaken by Māori for Māori.
- Practitioners working with perpetrators of family violence must recognise that many perpetrators have themselves experienced violence or trauma in their past, contributing to the intergenerational cycle of violence.
- Practice models should be evidence-based and address the root causes of violence, including childhood trauma, learned behaviours, and dysfunctional family dynamics.

Parenting & Family Programme Focus

- There is also evidence suggesting that programmes that focus on both parenting and intimate partner relationships are more likely to promote holistically better outcomes within family units and beyond (Diemer et al., 2020).
- Emphasising the family unit is crucial. Research indicates that men may be more motivated to engage in a programme and utilise broader services if the programme philosophy includes developing skills to be a better father (Diemer et al., 2020).
- Evaluations of the Caring Dads programme have reported promising results.
 - The programme has been shown to positively impact fathers' parenting and co-parenting (Scott & Lishak, 2012), reduce the risk of further domestic violence exposure for children (McConnell et al., 2017); increase fathers' ability to recognise the impact of their behaviour on their children, and reduce their levels of aggression (McCracken & Deave, 2012).

Considerations

- Develop programmes that recognise participants as a heterogeneous group requiring varied approaches, content, and support. Practitioners should be mindful of demographic factors, perpetrator typologies, motivation to change, and common individual risk factors, such as drug and alcohol abuse. Utilising pre-screening and risk-needs-assessment (RNR) tools can help navigate these complexities effectively.
- Have a realistic view of participants' motivation and readiness to change. Exploring techniques such as motivational interviewing, commitment and acceptance therapy, and a strengths-based approach can provide avenues for addressing this crucial area.
- Consider exploring the application of peer-to-peer approaches and the use of perpetrators to co-facilitate programmes.
- Consider inclusion of components that address parenting skills and promote positive parent-child relationships. This may involve providing education and support around non-violent discipline techniques, child development, and nurturing caregiving practices.
- Consider standardising evaluation procedures and including a broader set of outcome variables when assessing programme effectiveness.

06 Existing Users of Violence Programmes

Integrating insights can enhance the design and delivery of intervention programmes, ultimately leading to better outcomes for perpetrators, victims, and the broader community. This section reviews several existing international and domestic programmes focused on working with perpetrators of violence and provides some key insights for organisations.

Key Findings

- Programmes utilise a mixture of individual and group sessions over several months to generate positive behavioural change.
- Programmes continue to struggle with attrition and disengagement. In response, more individualised and therapeutic approaches are being applied to understand and address client motivation.
- Evaluations suggest the programmes had a positive impact on behaviour and abusive behaviours; however, the long-term outcomes remain unclear.

Examples of Programmes

Building Better Relationships (UK)¹

- **Programme Overview/Aims:** Building Better Relationships (BBR) is a structured intervention programme designed to work with perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in the United Kingdom. It has been operational since 2013 and delivered within the Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) (Renehan, 2021). It ultimately aims to promote lifelong changes in behaviours and attitudes among those using intimate partner violence.
- **Programme Approach/Theories:** BBR represents a shift from feminist-informed practice to a General Aggression Model which is a comprehensive, integrative, framework for understanding aggression. It considers the role of social, cognitive, personality, development, and biological factors in aggression (Allen et al., 2018). It applies a cognitive behavioural approach to challenge problematic and biased thinking that underpins justifications for violence. It emphasises the importance of the therapeutic alliance between the client and practitioner and adopts a strengths-based approach (Renehan, 2021).
- **Programme Structure:** BBR has four core modules, each consisting of six sessions, which cover programme concepts, thinking patterns, emotions, and relationships. Pre-, during and post-programme individual sessions provide opportunities to develop personal goals and individualise treatment, often resulting in men disclosing early childhood traumas, difficult experiences and complex feelings. The programme seeks to help clients with the following:
 - Developing skills of emotional control and positive communication designed to assist in behavioural change.
 - Gaining an understanding of how personal beliefs and values can play a part in violence and stress in relationships and how these can be challenged.
 - Discovering and building upon personal strengths, maintaining personal development, and improving relationships.

¹ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6436b0b8cc9980000cb893e4/evaluating-the-building-better-relationships-programme.pdf>

- Practising being a thoughtful and empathetic partner.
- **Evaluation:** Renehan (2021) explored the programme and provided several key recommendations:
 - Regular training and development for practitioners including therapeutic and trauma-informed training.
 - More one-to-one sessions should be held before group sessions to reduce hostility and ensure men are prepared to engage. Introduce strategies to manage emotions and reduce abuse strategically in one-to-one sessions.
 - Programmes must be responsive to neuro-diverse populations.

Drive Partnership (UK)²

- **Programme Overview/Aims:** Drive is a UK-based programme that works with high-harm repeat perpetrators of domestic abuse. From 2016-2023, it has worked with 4644 high-risk perpetrators across Wales and England. It seeks to make victims and survivors safer and challenges those who are causing harm to change. Drive focuses on priority (high-risk, high-harm and/or serial) perpetrators, as this group carries the greatest risk of serious harm, and engagement with available services is low.
- **Programme Approach/Theories:** Drive implements a whole-system approach using intensive case management alongside a coordinated multi-agency response, working closely with victim services, the police, probation, children's social services, housing, substance misuse and mental health teams.
- **Programme Structure:** The intervention was intended to last 10 months and comprised: direct one-to-one work carried out by case managers with service users; indirect work carried out at a multi-agency level primarily to share information, manage risk, and disrupt perpetration; and one-to-one IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor) support for the associated victims-survivors.
- **Evaluation:**
 - Rao & Vallis (2020) explored Drive's IDVA model, and found it achieved positive outcomes, in large part by combining Case Manager and IDVA expertise through their exceptionally close working relationships.
 - The University of Bristol undertook an independent, three-year, evaluation of the Drive project and 'Pilot Model' during the first phase of delivery (2016-2019). It showed Drive had resulted in new working practices across agencies where victims-survivors, children and perpetrators are considered together. It concluded it had reduced abuse and the risks associated with perpetrators. Key findings included:
 - The Drive Programme significantly reduced abusive behaviours among service users, with physical abuse down by 82%, sexual abuse by 88%, harassment and stalking by 75%, and jealous and controlling behaviours by 73% (Rao & Vallis, 2020). IDVAs reported a moderate to significant reduction in risk to victims in 82% of cases during the intervention. Additionally, Drive led to a statistically significant reduction in repeat and serial perpetrator cases, and police data showed a 30% decrease in criminal domestic violence incidents for Drive service users, unlike the control group which showed no change (Rao & Vallis, 2020).

² <https://drivepartnership.org.uk/about-the-drive-partnership/the-drive-project/>

- It was found that high caseloads undermined the effectiveness of the programmes (Rao & Vallis, 2020). Access to police records would enhance pre-screening and provide valuable background information on service users. Increasing information sharing, skill sharing, and documentation of disruption activities that could improve the overall programme effectiveness. Additionally, having case managers work alongside new practitioners to challenge service users in one-on-one settings could foster more impactful interactions. There was uncertainty regarding the long-term sustainability of these changes.

Caring Dads (Australia & Canada)³

- **Programmes Overview/Aims:** Caring Dads was developed in Canada in 2001 by the University of Toronto and Canadian agency, Changing Ways. It has since been adapted and delivered in the UK, the USA, Europe, and Australia. It was developed to better include fathers in efforts to enhance the safety and wellbeing of their children. In 2017, the programme was piloted by the Victorian Government, a programme for fathers who perpetrate family violence, or who are at risk of perpetrating violence.
- **Programme Approach/Theories:** The Programme principles emphasise the need to enhance men's motivation, promote child-centered fathering, address men's ability to engage in respectful, non-abusive co-parenting with their children's mothers, recognise that children's experience of trauma will impact the rate of possible change, and work collaboratively with other service providers to ensure that children benefit (Diemer et al., 2020). Team members will try to engage with the partner and children, and provide them with information about the programme, make referrals if necessary, and provide immediate safety planning if required (McConnell et al., 2016).
- **Programme Structure:** A typical group usually runs for two hours, one night a week, for 17 weeks. There are usually between 10-15 men registered in each group. Groups may only be led by accredited Caring Dads facilitators.
- **Evaluation:** In 2016, the University of Melbourne, conducted an independent evaluation of the Caring Dads programme between 2017-2020. It found behavioural change was commencing and moving in a positive direction and should be viewed as an important tool to support behaviour change amongst perpetrators of violence.
 - The most significant change related to men's ability to reflect on abusive and harmful fathering practices (Diemer et al., 2020). This was triangulated with fathers' self-reports, mothers' reports, facilitators' observations, and referrers who stayed involved in the case management.
 - Further findings show fathers' self-reported relationship with children improved, with their ability to recall and apply parenting skills and tools (Diemer et al., 2020).

Choose Change (Australia)⁴

- **Programmes Overview/Aims:** Choose Change is a voluntary early intervention programme for those using violence within their intimate and family relationships. The programme is run through the umbrella organisation [Communicare](https://www.communicare.org.au) and works with Aboriginal and Torres-Strait Islanders and other cultural backgrounds.

³ <https://caringdads.org/>

⁴ <https://www.communicare.org.au/get-support/family-domestic-violence/choose-change/>

- **Programme Approach/Theories:** This is a behaviour change programme focused on early intervention. Additionally, the programme has a child-centred focus to hold individuals accountable in making positive parenting choices and help develop healthy relationships with children within the family unit.
- **Programme Structure:** The programme supports individuals by increasing their awareness and skills surrounding non-abusive behaviours, identifying unhelpful thought patterns, and developing emotional awareness and management skills.
- **Evaluation:** The programme was evaluated by Eric Dillion Consulting, an independent consulting firm (Dillon, 2022).
 - Data was obtained from 22 participants. Improvements were observed in 'wellbeing' (59%), safe actions and reactions (50%), taking responsibility and communication (41%), being a good father (36%), and thinking and attitudes (32%). Data from the Armadale Police District revealed a 15.6% reduction in police interventions from September 2020 to February 2022. While not solely attributable to programme, police representatives consider Choose Change to have made a significant contribution.
 - The evaluation reviewed its governance, content and operations finding it utilised well-trained staff, adapted to the relevant needs of clients, and had clear risk frameworks.

Not Our Way (Australia)⁵

- **Programmes Overview/Aims:** The 'Not Our Way' programme works across the Mid-West Gascoyne area to stop family and domestic violence offending for Aboriginal participants.
- **Programme Approach/Theories:** The programme is based on cultural relevance and delivery suited to the learning styles of Aboriginal participants and works with both men and women who use violence.
- **Programme Structure:** Clients are initially separated depending on their levels of resistance and alcohol and drug issues. The programme has 23 sessions that are held twice weekly. It covers a range of topics, including harmful attitudes and beliefs, managing mood states, relationship skills, substance use, as well as impacts on and empathy for victim survivors. Individuals who complete the programme celebrate by participating in a graduation ceremony where they commit to 'no more violence by these hands' and place handprints on a banner.

Respecting Boundaries (Australia)⁶

- **Programme Overview/Aims:** Respecting Boundaries was specifically designed to support individuals who have received family violence restraining orders (FVRO) and are motivated to bring about a positive transformation in their abusive or violent behaviours. The programme looks to help participants to develop goals and paths.
- **Programme Approach/Theories:** It holds participants responsible for identifying and practising strategies to manage their behaviour, based on their individual strengths and skills. Additionally, the programme provides case management support and connects respondents with Family and Domestic Violence and Abuse (FDVA) services.

⁵ <https://www.communicare.org.au/get-support/family-domestic-violence/not-our-way/>

⁶ <https://www.communicare.org.au/get-support/family-domestic-violence/respecting-boundaries/>

- **Programme Structure:** The programme runs for 12 weeks and mixes online modules with individual and group therapy. It uses solutions and strengths-based approaches to bring about change.

Stopping Violence Services (NZ)⁷

- **Programmes Overview/Aims:** Stopping Violence Services provides intervention programmes in Canterbury, New Zealand. Clients are expected to attend all of the agreed sessions to complete the programme.
- **Programme Approach/Theories:** Programmes are based on but not limited to Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT), Motivational Interviewing (MI) and a strengths perspective. Group programmes are a preferred method of programme delivery as they develop a culture where family violence is openly explored and not "kept behind closed doors". Group programmes are co-gender facilitated.
- **Programme Structure:** Group programmes are delivered in the evenings over a timeframe of 30 to 55 hours. This includes an assessment and between 10 - 17 three-hour sessions depending on need.

Considerations

- Design programmes need to be culturally sensitive and responsive to the diverse needs of participants, particularly for neuro-diverse populations and specific cultural groups, ensuring inclusivity and relevance in service delivery.
- Ensure practitioners are provided with regular training that covers topics including therapeutic processes, trauma-informed practice, and neurodiversity awareness. This will help equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to handle complex cases effectively.
- Ensure practitioners are partnered with more experienced staff to help navigate more complex client cases.
- Incorporate more one-to-one sessions before group activities to reduce hostility and prepare participants for engagement. Tailor support to individual needs, addressing early childhood traumas and complex feelings.
- Additional focus on fostering strong relationships and coordination with various agencies (e.g., police, mental health services, housing authorities) to provide a comprehensive support system that addresses multiple facets of programme participants' lives and ensures victim safety.

⁷ <https://www.svschch.org.nz/Adult-Services/>

07 Conclusion

This literature review has sought to provide insights and considerations that can help inform those involved with the design and delivery of non-violence programmes. By exploring relevant literature, best practice and evidence-based approaches from both local and international contexts, the review aims to highlight effective strategies for intervention and support. Additionally, it underscores the importance of heterogeneous and culturally responsive approaches to ensure the framework is both relevant and impactful. This comprehensive approach will enable the development of robust programmes that can address and respond to the complex needs of family violence perpetrators.

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Appendix A – Theories

The following appendix provides a more in-depth overview of the key theories that inform the current understanding of those that perpetrate family violence. It also lists some additional literature for those that wish to explore these areas further.

Feminist Theory

Overview

Feminist theory (FT) emphasises power imbalances and gender dynamics in intimate partner violence. It argues that violence against women is rooted in patriarchal structures that perpetuate male dominance and control over women (Turner et al., 2023). Interventions based on feminist theory aim to challenge and change these power dynamics, often through education, empowerment of survivors, and promoting gender equality. Notably, the *Duluth Model* is a community-based protocol that addresses Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) (Pence & Paymar, 1993). It shifts the blame from the victim to the offender, emphasising the accountability of the abuser for their actions. One of the core beliefs of this model is that men use violence to control women (Cotti et al., 2020). It prioritises the voices and experiences of women who experience violence in policy creation and implementation. Detractors cite the model's insistence that men are perpetrators of violence due to socialisation overlooks other factors such as a history of child maltreatment, trauma, attachment style, anger-trait issues, mental health, substance-abuse, poverty, and socioeconomic status (McPhail et al., 2019).

Associated Literature:

- Pence, E., & Paymar, M. (1993). *Education groups for men who batter: The Duluth model*. Springer Publishing Company.
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- Stark (2007) – Rethinking Coercive Control. *Violence Against Women* 15(12): 1509-25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801209347452>

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Overview

Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) focuses on the role of cognitive distortions and dysfunctional thinking patterns in driving violent behaviour (Beck, 1979). Interventions aim to identify and challenge these distorted beliefs, teach anger management and communication skills, and promote empathy and accountability. CBT encompasses elements such as psychoeducation, coping skills, and correcting negative thinking patterns (Nesset et al., 2019). It views violence as a learned behaviour that can be unlearned through cognitive restructuring and skill-building, emphasising the importance of altering the perpetrator's mindset to prevent future violent acts (Nesset et al., 2019). The approach gained further recognition with the understanding that women can also be perpetrators of violence.

Associated Literature:

- Beck, A. T. (1979). *Cognitive therapy and the emotional disorders*. Penguin Books.
- Beck, Aaron T., ed. *Cognitive therapy of depression*. Guilford press, 1979.
- Linehan, M. (1993). *Cognitive-behavioural treatment of borderline personality disorder*. Guilford Press.
- Beck Judith, S. "Cognitive Therapy: Basics and Beyond." (1995).
- Smedslund, G., Dalsbø, T. K., Steiro, A. K., Winsvold, A., & Clench-Aas, J. (2011). Cognitive behavioural therapy for men who physically abuse their female partner. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 7(1), 1-25. <http://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD006048.pub2>.
- Gilchrist, E. (2007). The cognition of domestic abusers: Explanations, evidence and treatment. *Aggressive offenders' cognition. Theory, research and practice*, 247-266.
- Townend, M., & Smith, M. E. (2007). A case study of cognitive-behavioural psychotherapy with a perpetrator of domestic abuse. *Clinical Case Studies*, 6(5), 443-453. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534650106295899>
- Nesset, M. B., Lara-Cabrera, M. L., Dalsbø, T. K., Pedersen, S. A., Bjørngaard, J. H., & Palmstierna, T. (2019). Cognitive behavioural group therapy for male perpetrators of intimate partner violence: a systematic review. *BMC psychiatry*, 19, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-019-2010-1>

Social Learning Theory

Overview

Social Learning Theory (SLT) emerged with Albert Bandura in the 1960s and 1970s (Bandura, 1973). It shares common roots with CBT and the recognition that learning processes are critical in shaping behaviour. It suggests individuals learn behaviours through observation, modelling, and reinforcement (Wareham et al., 2009). In the context of family violence, perpetrators may have been exposed to violence in their own families or communities and learned to replicate these behaviours in their own relationships (Wareham et al., 2009). Interventions based on this model focus on relearning non-violent behaviours and developing positive coping strategies. SLT aligns closely with the Inter-Generational Transmission of violence theory (IGT), where the causal process is often attributed to a learning process (Powers et al., 2020).

Associated Literature:

- Bandura, A., & Walters, R. H. (1977). *Social learning theory* (Vol. 1). Prentice Hall: Englewood cliffs.
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- Mihalic, S. W., & Elliott, D. (2017). A social learning theory model of marital violence. In *Domestic Violence* (pp. 303-329). Routledge.
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Attachment Theory

Overview

Attachment Theory states the quality of a child's relationship with their primary caregiver can have a profound influence on their life across multiple life domains (Chesworth, 2018). It posits these early experiences with caregivers shape individual attachment styles and relational patterns throughout life. Many perpetrators of family violence have experienced insecure attachments or trauma in childhood, contributing to their difficulties in forming healthy relationships (Spencer et al., 2021). Interventions informed by Attachment Theory focus on repairing attachment disruptions and fostering secure attachments through therapy and relationship-building exercises. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise many individuals who have insecure attachment styles do not go on to perpetrate violence. Moreover, Attachment Theory can risk neglecting other potential considerations beyond the internal working models of relationships, like biology or environmental factors.

Associated Literature:

- McClellan, A. C., & Killeen, M. R. (2000). Attachment theory and violence toward women by male intimate partners. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 32(4), 353-360.
- Finkel, E. J., & Slotter, E. B. (2006). An attachment theory perspective on the perpetuation of intimate partner violence. *DePaul L. Rev.*, 56, 895.
- Spencer, C. M., Keilholtz, B. M., & Stith, S. M. (2021). The association between attachment styles and physical intimate partner violence perpetration and victimization: A meta-analysis. *Family process*, 60(1), 270-284. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12545>.
- Chesworth, B. R. (2018). Intimate partner violence perpetration: Moving toward a comprehensive conceptual framework. *Partner abuse*, 9(1), 75-100. <https://doi.org/10.1891/1946-6560.9.1.75>
- Park, C. (2016). Intimate partner violence: An application of attachment theory. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 26(5), 488-497. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2015.1087924>

Trauma & Violence Informed Theory

Overview

Trauma and Violence-Informed Theory expands on the understanding of trauma by taking into consideration the intersecting impacts on a person's life of systemic violence, interpersonal violence, and structural inequities (Wathen & Mantler, 2022). The main problem is not necessarily the person's psychological state, but both the historical and ongoing violence that has been inflicted upon them, both by individuals and by social inequities. Those raised in an environment where violence is seen as a 'normal' response to a range of situations, do not always have opportunities to see alternative ways of being, connecting, and being in relationship with others. Research shows that while not all men who experience violence as children go on to use it in their adult relationships, many men who do use violence have experienced it as children. This connection cannot be ignored; however, it must be held in tension with an individual's agency and responsibilities, and it does in no way support violence or lead to an excuse for that behaviour (McLachlan, 2024). There is a balance to hold for all practitioners to support clients to understand their history, what has led to the use of violence, and the responsibility and choice they now must stop using violence.

In working with perpetrators of family violence, a trauma-informed approach involves recognising and addressing the underlying trauma that may contribute to their behaviour (Wilson et al., 2015). It is important to note, however, there are still individuals who perpetrate violence and report no history of child maltreatment or any other type of trauma exposure. In addition, this theory does not provide a sole explanation for violent behaviour as there are also many individuals who have been exposed to trauma during childhood but have not perpetrated violence themselves. Thus, it is quite plausible that among perpetrators with a trauma history, there are still other factors that contribute to their perpetuation (Wathen & Mantler, 2022). Taken together, like the feminist theory, this theory is also limited in that it does not always provide a comprehensive account for why an individual uses violence against an intimate partner.

Associated Literature:

- Wilson, J.M., Fauci, J.E. and Goodman, L.A. (2015). Bringing trauma-informed practice to domestic violence programs: A qualitative analysis of current approaches. *American journal of orthopsychiatry*, 85(6), p.586. <http://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000098>
- Bokoch, R. (2024). A commentary on a trauma-informed, community-based, and holistic intimate partner violence program: 'A micro approach to a macro problem: One agency's approach to domestic violence' by DiBella et al. (2023). *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development*, 1-8. <http://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2024.2326082>
- Augusta-Scott, T., & Maerz, L. (2017). Complex trauma and dominant masculinity: A trauma-informed, narrative therapy approach with men who abuse their female partners. In *Innovations in interventions to address intimate partner violence* (pp. 75-92). Routledge.

Ecological Systems Theory

Overview

Ecological Systems Theory (EST) addresses the complex interplay of individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors that can influence behaviour. Interventions based on Ecological Systems Theory aim to address family violence within the broader context of social systems, such as by providing community support services, advocating for policy changes, and promoting community education and awareness (Heyman et al., 2013). In Australasia, there is often an emphasis on co-ordinated, multi-agency responses to domestic violence. Integrated Response Models (IRMs) involve collaboration between various sectors and organisations, to provide a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to addressing domestic violence (Crane & Easton, 2017; Day et al., 2009). Integrated response models (IRM) emphasise a comprehensive approach that combines intervention (drug and alcohol) programmes, monitoring, and support services to address the complex dynamics of domestic violence and promote victims' safety. The approach highlights the importance of formal partnerships across organisations in criminal justice e.g., police, courts, victim services, child protection, health, and associated community services.

Associated Literature:

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1992). Ecological systems theory. In R. Vasta (Ed.), *Six theories of child development: Revised formulations and current issues* (pp. 187–249). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Heyman, R. E., Foran, H. M., & Wilkinson, J. L. (2013). Theories of intimate partner violence. In *Handbook of Family Theories* (pp. 190-207). Routledge.
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- Flynn, K., & Mathias, B. (2023). "How Am I Supposed to Act?": Adapting Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to Understand the Developmental Impacts of Multiple Forms of Violence. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584231159674>
- Assari S. Multilevel approach to intimate partner violence research and prevention. *Int J Prev Med*. 2013 May;4(5):616-7. PMID: 23930176; PMCID: PMC3733196.

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Appendix B – Evaluation of Intervention Programmes (2020-2024)

The following appendix provides an overview of some recent programme evaluation focused on perpetrators of family violence. It identifies some key learnings for practitioners and service deliverers. Those listed were published between 2020-2024 and can be read in more depth using embedded links in the titles.

Author(s)	Year	Title	Summary
Satyen et al.	2022	The Effectiveness of Culturally Specific Male Domestic Violence Offender Intervention Programs on Behaviour Changes and Mental Health: A Systematic Review.	This study underscores the importance of culturally specific intervention programs for male domestic violence offenders, demonstrating their effectiveness in promoting behavioural change and improving mental health outcomes. These programmes are particularly successful when they incorporate culturally relevant content, employ facilitators from similar cultural backgrounds, and address specific cultural norms and values. Practitioners should focus on developing and implementing culturally tailored interventions to enhance engagement and relatability for participants. Additionally, incorporating elements that address mental health issues and promote holistic wellbeing is crucial. By leveraging culturally specific approaches, practitioners can achieve more meaningful and sustained behavioural change among domestic violence offenders.
Michailovič et al.	2022	Challenges to an Individualised Approach Toward Batterers Intervention Programs in the Context of Coordinated Community Response to the Intimate Partner Violence in Lithuania.	This study outlines that Batterers' Intervention Programmes (BIPs) play a crucial role in addressing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) by increasing perpetrators' accountability and ensuring victims' safety, yet their effectiveness remains debated. Recently, the focus has shifted from overall programme effectiveness to identifying specific qualities of interventions that benefit distinct clients. This study explores how to enhance BIP outcomes. Key concepts for practitioners include differential treatment, motivational interviewing, and building effective facilitator-client alliances. These can improve BIP effectiveness and support meaningful change in perpetrators' behaviour.
Bellini et al.	2021	Fragments of the past: Curating peer support with perpetrators of domestic violence.	This study showed that digitally augmented artifacts, such as audio messages linked with tangible objects, can safely and effectively facilitate communication and support among perpetrators. Digital peer-support networks positively influence behaviour change and wellbeing outcomes, offering a valuable addition to traditional methods. Engaging perpetrators through innovative means helps build rapport and sustain motivation for change. Collaborative design involving support workers and perpetrators ensures relevant, effective solutions, supported by empirical evidence, enhancing the success of intervention programmes.

Roldán-Pardo et al.	2023	Self-determined goals of male participants attending an intervention program for intimate partner violence perpetrators: a thematic analysis.	This study highlights encouraging perpetrators to set their own goals within intervention programmes enhances motivation, commitment, and a sense of personal responsibility. Common goal themes include improving self-control, communication skills, rebuilding relationships, and developing empathy. Recognising these themes allows for tailored interventions that address individual needs effectively. Facilitators play a crucial role in helping participants articulate and refine their goals, leading to better engagement, higher satisfaction, and significant behavioural change. Emphasising empathy and relationship-building is critical for long-term success. Regular assessment and support help maintain progress and adjust strategies as needed. These insights guide the design of more effective, personalised intervention programmes that foster sustainable positive change.
Mallion et al.	2020	Systematic review of 'Good Lives' assumptions and interventions.	This study emphasises The Good Lives Model (GLM) can build on individuals' strengths and focus on their capacity for a fulfilling life, rather than solely addressing deficits or risks. This holistic approach integrates psychological well-being, social integration, and personal fulfilment, leading to more sustainable rehabilitation outcomes. Encouraging offenders to develop a positive self-identity and intrinsic motivation to change is crucial and involves setting and achieving personal goals that align with their values. Practitioners might consider designing strengths-based interventions, creating individualised treatment plans that consider each offender's unique needs and circumstances. The review highlights empirical support for the GLM, suggesting it can reduce recidivism and improve wellbeing. Practitioners should also be aware of implementation challenges, such as the need for adequate training, resources, and a supportive organisational culture.
Butters et al.	2020	Intimate partner violence perpetrator treatment: Tailoring interventions to individual needs.	This study emphasises the importance of personalised interventions for perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), highlighting that a one-size-fits-all approach is less effective. Tailoring treatment to individual needs, such as considering the perpetrator's background, mental health status, and specific risk factors, can lead to better outcomes. Practitioners should be aware of demographic factors affecting treatment completion and re-assault, perpetrator typologies, readiness to change, motivation-based approaches, and common co-occurring concerns like substance use and mental health issues. The study underscores the value of comprehensive assessments and incorporating various therapeutic modalities, such as Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy, motivational interviewing, and trauma-informed care. Collaboration with other service providers and continuous monitoring and adjustment of treatment plans are critical. By adopting a personalised, flexible approach, practitioners can more effectively address the complex issues underlying IPV and support lasting behavioural change in perpetrators.

Opoku et al.	2023	Adapting a men's behaviour change program to online delivery using a developmental evaluation approach.	This study highlights the importance of flexibility and adaptability when transitioning behaviour change programmes to an online format. The developmental evaluation approach emphasises continuous feedback and iterative improvements to enhance programme effectiveness. Practitioners should ensure that online programmes maintain core components of successful interventions, such as participant engagement, accountability, and support. The study also underscores the need for robust technological infrastructure and training for both facilitators and participants to navigate the digital environment effectively. Attention to privacy and confidentiality is crucial in an online setting to protect participants. By embracing these strategies, practitioners can successfully adapt men's behaviour change programmes to an online format, ensuring accessibility and maintaining programme integrity.
Tarzia et al.	2023	"Help me realize what I'm becoming": men's views on digital interventions as a way to promote early help-seeking for use of violence in relationships.	This article highlights the potential of digital interventions to encourage early help-seeking among men who use violence in relationships. The study reveals that men appreciate the anonymity, accessibility, and non-judgmental nature of digital tools, which can reduce barriers to seeking help. Practitioners should focus on developing user-friendly digital platforms that provide resources, self-assessment tools, and guidance on behaviour change. It's crucial to ensure these interventions are empathetic and non-stigmatising, promoting self-reflection and awareness. Additionally, integrating features that facilitate connection to professional support can enhance the effectiveness of digital interventions. By leveraging digital tools, practitioners can reach a broader audience, encourage early intervention, and support men in recognising and altering violent behaviours.
Cunha. O	2022	Dropout among perpetrators of intimate partner violence attending an intervention program.	This article emphasises the importance of addressing factors that contribute to high dropout rates in intervention programmes for Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) perpetrators. Key factors include participants' lack of motivation, external pressures, and programme-related issues such as perceived relevance and engagement levels. Practitioners should focus on enhancing participant engagement by tailoring interventions to individual needs, using motivational interviewing techniques, and providing continuous support throughout the programme. Building a strong facilitator-participant relationship and creating a supportive group environment can also help reduce dropout rates. By understanding and addressing these factors, practitioners can improve retention rates and enhance the overall effectiveness of intervention programmes for IPV perpetrators.

Appendix C – Meta Studies of Intervention Programmes (2020-2024)

The following appendix provides an overview of meta-studies focused on programmes for perpetrators of family violence. Those listed were published between 2020-2024 and can be further explored using the embedded links in the titles.

Author(s)	Year	Title	Summary
Addis & Snowden	2023	What works to prevent violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence (VAWDASV)? A systematic evidence assessment.	This review identifies effective practices for preventing Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse, and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV). It highlights the importance of several key factors in successful interventions: longer duration for lasting behaviour change, socio-cultural relevance to enhance engagement, and effective implementation methods. Utilising online and social media platforms can resonate with younger audiences and allow for tailored interventions without extensive human resources. Additionally, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) provides opportunities to deliver culturally sensitive and multilingual interventions, making programmes more accessible and effective. These insights are crucial for practitioners and service providers to design and deliver more impactful intervention programmes for perpetrators of family violence.
Roberts, S	2023	A Meta-Analysis of the Effectiveness of Batterer Intervention Treatment Methods for Reducing Recidivism.	A meta-analysis was conducted to identify the most effective treatment methods for reducing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and recidivism, including 13 individual or combined families of studies. The overall effectiveness of IPV interventions on recidivism showed a statistically non-significant reduction in reoffending. However, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) demonstrated a statistically significant impact compared to Duluth and CBT approaches. ACT helps address factors that maintain intimate partner violence, such as childhood abuse history, harmful drinking habits, and attitudes toward violence against women. By exploring and challenging these beliefs and attitudes, ACT increases the individual's psychological flexibility, enhancing their ability to change and reduce IPV. These findings suggest that practitioners and service providers should consider incorporating ACT into their intervention programmes for more effective outcomes.
Cheng et al.	2021	Compared to what? A meta-analysis of batterer intervention studies using nontreated controls or comparisons.	This meta-analysis reviews the effectiveness of Batterer Intervention programmes (BIPs) in reducing Domestic Violence (DV) recidivism, focusing on studies with non-treated comparison groups (N = 17) published between 1986 and 2016. It analysed three outcomes: DV recidivism reported by the criminal justice system, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) perpetration assessed by survivors, and general offence recidivism reported by the criminal justice system. The results showed BIPs significantly reduced DV and general offence recidivism according to criminal justice reports but not according to

			survivor assessments. BIP participants were about three times less likely to re-offend in DV and 2.5 times less likely to re-offend in general offences compared to non-treated groups. These findings underscore the importance of BIPs in reducing reoffending rates, particularly from the perspective of the criminal justice system, highlighting their relevance for practitioners and service providers.
Travers et al.	2021	The effectiveness of interventions to prevent recidivism in perpetrators of intimate partner violence: A systematic review and meta-analysis.	This systematic review and meta-analysis assessed the evidence for interventions based on the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) framework compared to the traditional 'one-size-fits-all' approach. The findings indicate that RNR treatments show promise in reducing IPV in the short-to-medium term, but sustaining these effects in the longer term remains a challenge. These results highlight the importance of personalised intervention strategies and the need for ongoing support to maintain long-term effectiveness.
Tarzia et al.	2023	"Help me realize what I'm becoming": men's views on digital interventions as a way to promote early help-seeking for use of violence in relationships.	This study explores the potential for digital interventions (websites or apps) to address a critical gap in early engagement with men using violence in relationships. Through qualitative analysis of focus groups with 21 men attending Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs) in Victoria, Australia, the study examined men's perceptions of these digital interventions. Findings suggest that digital tools can connect men with their "better man inside" through themes such as (a) gradual engagement, (b) self-awareness, (c) envisioning change, and (d) simplicity and accessibility. While digital interventions show promise for early engagement by providing a safe, private space for reflection, they also pose challenges in balancing non-judgmental engagement with accountability. These considerations are crucial for practitioners and service providers when designing effective digital interventions for men using violence in relationships.
Livings et al.	2022	Breaking the Cycle of Family Violence: A Critique of Family Violence Interventions.	This study reviews the family violence intervention literature to assess how interventions interrupt the intergenerational transmission of family violence. Effective intervention approaches identified include long-term one-on-one coaching and home visits to improve parenting. Results show a dose-response relationship, indicating that increased frequency and duration of interventions have lasting value. The study also highlights gaps in the literature, such as the need for interventions in low-income countries and those specifically targeting fathers and communities. These findings underscore the importance for practitioners and service providers to implement comprehensive, long-term interventions and address identified gaps.

Wilson, D	2021	Court-mandated interventions for individuals convicted of domestic violence: An updated Campbell systematic review.	This study aimed to assess the effects of post-arrest court-mandated interventions for intimate partner violence offenders, focusing on male batterers. The researchers searched numerous databases and websites, reviewed bibliographies of published literature, and scrutinised annotated bibliographies. The findings indicate insufficient evidence to conclude that these programmes are effective. This raises doubts about the effectiveness of court-mandated Batterer Intervention Programmes (BIPs) in reducing re-assault among men convicted of misdemeanour intimate partner violence. These results suggest that new programmes or entirely new approaches should be explored. This highlights the need for practitioners and service providers to reconsider and innovate intervention strategies for this important social issue.
Expósito-Álvarez C et al.	2023	Participants in court-mandated intervention programs for intimate partner violence perpetrators with substance use problems: A systematic review of specific risk factors.	This systematic review aimed to identify specific risk factors in men with and without Alcohol and Drug Use Problems (ADUPs) entering court-mandated perpetrator programmes. The findings indicated that IPV perpetrators with ADUPs had higher clinical symptomatology (e.g., anger and impulsivity), personality disorders, poorer executive functions, more stressful life events, higher exposure to childhood trauma, lower intimate social support, and greater responsibility attributed to their personal context compared to those without ADUPs. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between IPV and ADUPs and can inform key targets for perpetrator programmes, potentially improving the wellbeing of their (ex)partners and enhancing the effectiveness of intervention programmes. This is crucial for practitioners and service providers to consider when designing and implementing intervention strategies.
Renehan, N	2024	Improving the Response to Domestic Abuse Offenders on Probation.	As the Ministry of Justice seeks to develop a 'new generation' of programmes to reduce reoffending, this study reflects on lessons from Building Better Relationships (BBR), the only accredited domestic abuse programme in England and Wales. Findings from an ethnographic study of BBR, situated within the Probation Inspectorate's recent inspection, revealed a fractured and over-stretched workforce within the newly unified Probation Service. The central argument is that to avoid exacerbating issues, practitioners must be provided with the time, supervision, and skills necessary to maintain a therapeutic alliance, which is crucial during crises in both their lives and those of their clients. This highlights the importance for service providers to ensure adequate support and resources for practitioners to effectively deliver intervention programmes.



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