

Putting Ecology to Use in the Community: An Analysis Needs Follow-Up by Planning and Action Part II: Planning

Jacqui Laidler and Robert J. Gregory*

**School of Psychology, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand*

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ABSTRACT Domestic violence, an issue faced worldwide and throughout New Zealand, creates high profile cases that may be followed by media attention and collaborative community efforts. This article illustrates the relevance of planning to cope with this issue in the community of Masterton, New Zealand. Violence crosses boundaries of age, ethnicity, economic, and educational circumstance and consequently affects a large proportion of many communities. This article details a proposed intervention strategy to provide primary prevention via the use of focus or discussion groups and psychodrama. The intervention aims to reduce the potential harmful circumstances that exist in the community, and in the lives of individuals, before new incidents of domestic violence have a chance to eventuate. The desired outcomes of the intervention proposed herein are to raise awareness; to challenge related social norms, to question values and belief systems; to enhance collaborative work; to enhance informal resources; and to build a sense of community. This intervention is presented as just one step in the equation of addressing domestic violence, and is to be viewed as an opportunity that could contribute to the collaborative and effective intervention that already exists within this community.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of domestic violence is not new, nor, it appears, can such violence be comprehensively explained by a single theory. A large number of approaches to theorizing about domestic violence have been tried, including, for example, the theories recognized by the New Zealand Domestic Violence Centre: pathology, psychodynamic concepts, family systems approaches, inner tension, social structure theory, violence as learned behavior, and violence as a consequence of the social system (www.dvc.org.nz/dvtheory.htm, April 23, 2004). Additional theories to note are biological, psychological and social psychological, sociological, and feminist explanations (Jenkins and Davidson, 2001). Integrated, or multi-factorial, models have also been proposed (Browne and Herbert, 1997).

The significance of identifying (or developing) an explanation of domestic violence is that such identification will influence, if not largely form the basis of, the type of intervention that is developed or enacted to prevent or stop it. For

example, if one selects a biological explanation of domestic violence, focusing on such things as levels of testosterone and genetic conditions, then consequential intervention is likely to be focused on such things as anger management skill building (www.dvc.org.nz/dvtheory.htm, April 23, 2004) or controlling/eliminating alcohol intake, which has been thought to exacerbate violent behavior (Reiss and Roth, 1993, cited in Jenkins and Davidson, 2001). In contrast, explanations that focus on the social environment surrounding the individuals involved, for example, sociological models, feminist models, social structure theory, learned behavior, or ecological levels of analysis, are more likely to lead to interventions that seek to change the surrounding environment.

Selecting a single theoretical model as the ultimate explanation of domestic violence is not the issue however. Instead, unless and until solid research can claim otherwise, the approach taken here is that the majority of the existing theories surrounding this issue have something valid to contribute and as such, any model incorporating the complexities of all the elements found to play a part will be regarded as beneficial. Seeking to find methods of best practice, that is, programs that have been empirically shown to be effective (Dalton, 2001), is the approach recommended.

Address Correspondence to: Jacqui Laidler,
7 Brooklyn Road, Carterton, Wairarapa, New Zealand
E-mail: jacq@np.co.nz or to, Robert J. Gregory,
School of Psychology, Massey University, Palmerston North,
New Zealand
Phone: 646350-5799 ext. 2053,
E-mail: R.J.Gregory@massey.ac.nz

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

This article also raises a challenge to an underlying theme that has characterized research surrounding domestic violence for both explanations and interventions, in that what has most commonly been addressed is the issue of 'why women stay' (Jenkins and Davidson, 2001). This research, although resulting in valuable information, has unfortunately been addressed to the detriment of dealing with another related and more important issue, that of 'why men abuse'. Surely, in a bid to understand and provide intervention for this issue, we as a community should first and foremost be focused on understanding why the issue exists, that is, why men abuse, as opposed to seeking to understand why people affected by domestic violence, specifically women and children, respond to abuse and violence in the way that they do.

This trend of focusing on the women's responses places responsibility and blame on women. It leads to interventions that are less effective at eliminating domestic violence as would be the case if the stated alternative was primarily pursued. Such a focus is a reflection of who the question is being asked for; the confused and curious onlookers, certainly not the women who if asked will be more than capable of providing an explanation (www..../goingcrazy.pdf, April 23, 2004), and certainly not the men.

To support the notion that more research and intervention is focused on why women stay as opposed to why men abuse, the reader might consider the number of services that exist within any community that are targeted at men as abusers or potential abusers, such as support services, in contrast to the number of services targeted at women as abused victims or potential abused victims. When the questions being asked are focused on why men abuse, interventions will be targeted at addressing this issue, and will be evident by such things as an ample provision of services for men as abusers or potential abusers.

The intervention strategy proposed therefore is guided by the goals of focusing more on the core of the issue, i.e., why men abuse, than on why the affected people respond in the ways they do, i.e., why women stay; and of seeking to implement methods that have been deemed the most effective. The main method selected can be categorized as primary prevention, as opposed

to secondary prevention, tertiary prevention, and treatment. This is a type of intervention that seeks to reduce potentially harmful circumstances before they have a chance to create difficulty (Brown and Herbert, 1997; Dalton, 2001; Edleson and Eisikovits, 1996; Jenkins and Davidson, 2001). In contrast, secondary prevention is delivered to those considered to be at risk, and thus involves developing methods for detecting risk factors and labeling, correctly or incorrectly, individuals who are at risk, and tertiary prevention is delivered to those already experiencing domestic violence in a bid to reduce its intensity and duration (Dalton, 2001).

ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

In addition to the intended approaches outlined above, the present article incorporates an ecological level of analysis (Dalton, 2001) for viewing domestic violence, in that the individual involved whether abuser or abused, is viewed theoretically within the context of the ecological layers, such as individual, micro-level, organizational, locality, macro-level (Dalton, 2001). One can also place the many explanatory theories, for example those outlined above, into the ecological layers and can appreciate the effectiveness of each. The method of primary prevention can also be viewed within the context of the ecological model, in that primary prevention attempts can be targeted at the differing levels. The main levels to be targeted in the intervention strategy to follow will be the locality, organizational, and micro-levels, and it is naturally anticipated that as a consequence there will be positive spin-off effects at the individual level.

INTERVENTION

The intervention strategy, designed for the specific region of Masterton, is to provide categorical elements of primary prevention in the area of domestic violence, an identified existing need found during previous research of this region (Laidler and Gregory, In press). The desired outcomes of this intervention are 1) to raise awareness, 2) to challenge related social norms, values and belief systems that are considered a causal or problematic factor with regards to domestic violence, 3) to empower the informal resources of the community, 4) to

enhance collaborative work among community members and organizations; and 5) to build a sense of community.

Because these desired outcomes are elements of primary prevention, in that they seek to intervene before new incidences of domestic violence develop in the lives of the community members, the intervention is targeted at every community member. However, some aspects of the proposal will need to observe and restrict age limits due to the content. In terms of the ecological levels of analysis model, the intervention is targeted at the locality level, especially so for the aim of changing social norms and raising awareness, although these aims are not confined to this level. The organizational level is addressed via the aim of working collaboratively, although, once again is not confined to this level. This should enhance informal resources targeted especially at the micro-level, and build a sense of community at all three levels (micro-level, organization, locality).

The proposed intervention can be delivered via two interconnected parts of one strategy. A series of discussion groups would be run as part one, that will lead collectively, to produce a psychodrama as part two. This play would be delivered to the entire community, or as much that is willing and appropriate to receive it. This drama may not be suitable for younger children due to the content, such as personal testimonies of a domestic violence situation. The participants for the two parts (the discussion groups and the play) may be different, although some members may participate in both parts depending on participant preference. This could be a safety consideration for some people.

One intended purpose of the discussion groups is to gain access to the knowledge of key members of the community who have experiential knowledge of domestic violence. Evidence from recent research reports that women who have experienced domestic violence often desire to be asked "specifically and comprehensively, about domestic violence" (www..../goingcrazy.pdf, April 23, 2004). These members of the community possess valuable knowledge about this issue, and only limited avenues for delivering this knowledge to the wider community can be found. As emphasized by Jenkins and Davidson (2001), many women do leave; in fact, thousands of restraining orders

are sought every year. We can and should ask what is being done to access the knowledge that these women have obtained, and to provide avenues for them to share their life changing experiences. Also, we need to ask what is being done to access and share the knowledge of the men who have experienced domestic violence?

Accessing the knowledge of the women and men who have experienced domestic violence is one purpose of the discussion groups. Another is to access the knowledge of those who work with both victims and perpetrators professionally. Furthermore, involving as many men as possible across this entire intervention strategy is an important strategic aim, as it emphasizes the necessity to not allow the responsibility of dealing with this issue to be laid solely upon the shoulders of women. Care must be taken to ensure confidentiality, however, and the safety of those involved. Careful selection or disguise of participants, may be one way of achieving this. Screening audiences is another option.

The groups are intended to achieve two further outcomes, to build a sense of community and to work collaboratively. Building a sense of community involves four elements, membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (Dalton, 2001). It includes an acknowledged interdependence with others, the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure (Sarason, 1974, cited in Dalton, 2001), a feeling of belonging, and that members matter to one another (McMillan and Chavis, 1986, cited in Dalton, 2001). Building a sense of community has been shown to enhance individual well-being, and also to contribute to the development of the characteristics of a competent community (Dalton, 2001). In addition, building a sense of community will serve as a form of primary prevention in that it may prevent new cases of domestic violence from emerging, for example, by enhancing the support provided by the individual's surrounding environment; a relevant achievement if one is to conceptualize domestic violence via explanatory theories that focus on the social context of the individual.

Discussion groups provide an opportunity for members of organizations working in the area of domestic violence to work collaboratively and to build on their relationships with one another. The aim of enhancing informal networks may

be built upon through groups, although this aim is perhaps more heavily focused upon during the second part of the strategy (the play or psychodrama). In addition, groups are a way of incorporating a bottom-up approach whereby the citizens of the community, rather than its leaders, attempt to assert control over their everyday lives and are thus more empowered (Dalton, 2001).

The goal of the drama is to take skills and knowledge obtained from the groups, adapted to suit the context of Masterton, and deliver it to the larger community in a bid to raise awareness. It is within this context that related social norms, values and belief systems would be directly challenged. The aspects to challenge would be identified by the groups and supported by additional research. These challenges would aim to bring certain issues to the attention of all community members and to provoke thought and self-reflection that will lead toward changes in behavior and the community structure.

Personal testimonies of people with experiential knowledge can be included or be a core component of the drama, either being delivered by the participants with experiential knowledge themselves, or for safety reasons or due to personal choice, delivered by actors. The view of a local coordinator working on the regional three year antiviolence campaign is that the method of sharing personal testimonies in a bid to prevent further cases and to raise awareness, is a powerful one (John Slater, personal communication, April 27, 2004). In addition, the use of drama (Moreno, 1953) or developing a play can be termed 'applied theatre'. Applied theatre has been commonly used to address issues of concern to communities and has been shown to be effective in shifting attitudes and behavior (Gregory and Johnson, 1976-1977; Gregory, 1995; www.ex.ac.uk/drama/rdtie/ttpres.html, May 3, 2004).

A further intended outcome of the play is to enhance informal resources. Eldeson and Eisikovits (1996) recognized that prior to the point at which a woman or a man involved in domestic violence comes into contact with a formal agency required to provide services, be it a women's refuge, the police, the courts, or other, a number of people outside the immediate affected family unit are likely to have been consulted about the problem. Most commonly this occurs when the woman involved consults friends or family members. These friends, family,

or neighbors can be classified as informal resources and function as forms of social support, which can enhance the coping process during times of stress (Dalton, 2001). Indeed, a study conducted in Britain (McGibbon, Cooper, and Kelly, 1989, cited in Elderson and Eisikovits, 1996), showed that the combination of informal supporters, specifically 'family and friends', and 'the women's mother', is almost three times larger than approaches to the police, who were found to be the most likely formal agency to be contacted.

A further study (Mooney, 1994, cited in Elderson and Eisikovits, 1996) showed that friends (46%) and relatives (31%) were most frequently told about domestic violence, followed by doctors (22%), police (22%), solicitors and lawyers (21%), social services (9%) and women's refuges or shelters (5%). Therefore, an enormous potential resource exists in any and every community for every individual involved in domestic violence, and as such, this resource should be equipped with the tools to intervene. Taking seriously the extensiveness and the potential effectiveness of the informal support that women and men have, and could have, involves equipping all community members with necessary knowledge and tools. This is the final stated desired outcome of the show.

OPERATIONAL PLAN

Participants for the groups would be called forward first, via the media, public and private organizations, local work places, churches, social groupings, and other, with the intent of extending this invitation to as many people as possible. Involving as many people in this intervention strategy, be it as a member of a discussion group, or as someone who has no knowledge of domestic violence at all but would like to learn and contribute in one way or another, will achieve many of the intervention goals outlined in this article. As already stated participants for the groups would possess experience, training, or work related skills and local knowledge. All participants would be subdivided into smaller groups so as to aid full participation of all members. These groups would be co-ordinated by leaders who will either emerge and be elected during the early stages of recruiting, or be pre-selected and trained to co-ordinate discussion group meetings prior to beginning. The groups

would establish their goals and protocols and work collectively, joining together in the final stages to form one whole group in order to combine all the knowledge and information.

Key members of the community who have access to resources and decision-making authority would be involved. It is anticipated that members of organizations required to work with families dealing with domestic violence would be involved. Overall, as domestic violence has been shown to affect persons of any age regardless of ethnicity, economic circumstances, or education (National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges, 2004) it would be expected that a wide section of the community would come forward to participate. After all, not only will every member of the community benefit from a safer and healthier community, every member is also a potential informal resource for people dealing with domestic violence in their personal lives. It is therefore intended that every person of the community who expresses the desire to participate would be accommodated for in one way or another.

The project would be set to run for one year, from start to finish, that is, from the first invitation for participants, to engagement of discussion groups, to practice of skits and formation of a psychodrama, to delivery of the play, to evaluation of effectiveness and feedback. The frequency and number of discussion groups held would be established collectively by those involved at the very early stages of recruitment. The groups would run for several weeks, during which time members would discuss the issues and leaders would encourage participants who wish to create skits, through a selection process, to develop a psychodrama or play suitable for display in the community in diverse settings (Gregory, 1972; 1974; 1990). Obviously, the process would have to be negotiated by those involved and by practical realities. As much as is possible, resources such as venues, materials necessary for the show, staff, participant time, and so on, would be donated and/or funding obtained where possible.

Measures would be put in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention strategy. This would involve running pre and post program gathering of archival information to make comparisons of the number of reported cases of domestic violence occurring, with a particular view towards assessing the current rate at which

new cases emerge. This measure, in particular the post program assessments, may need to occur over the longer-term, for example measured one year following the end of the program. Additional measures, such as questionnaires, surveys, and self-report forms would be designed to measure the effectiveness and impact of each intended outcome of the program. All information measuring the entire project's effectiveness would be collated, summarized and reported back to all community members, and shared with outside communities to enable replication and contribution to the store of knowledge and intervention methods that are in existence.

The intervention strategy outlined in this piece has been designed to complement and coexist with measures already being taken by the local community. Currently a three-year anti-violence campaign that began December 2001 (Wairarapa Times-Age, December 19, 2001) is in place in the Wairarapa and is successfully working towards significant and effective change. The success of this campaign is signified by the 2003 Local Authority Community Development Award, in which the Masterton Safe and Healthy Community Council was the winner in one of the four categories, Partnerships and Collaboration, and was short-listed in another. The coordinator, John Slater, states that one of the successes of the campaign is that it has identified and filled in gaps in services, for example provision of new support services for men (Personal communication, April 27, 2004). The goals of the anti-violence campaign, partnerships, changing attitudes, improving well-being, and improving coordination, sit nicely with the goals and desired outcomes of the present proposed intervention strategy, primary prevention: raising awareness, challenging belief systems, working collaboratively, building a sense of community, and empowering informal resources.

The two components of this strategy, the discussion groups and the play, provide for a number of qualities that can be deemed as contributory to the goal of primary prevention. The groups enable access to knowledge held by the citizens of the community, particularly those with experiential knowledge, but also those with the skills obtained via their work and/or training. Further, they provide for access to the knowledge of the men and provide an opportunity for men

to contribute to the need for communities to take responsibility for addressing this issue. In addition, they provide for empowerment and provide qualities of self-help groups. The groups also provide an opportunity to improve individual well-being and to build a 'competent community'; they serve as the avenue for achieving the desired outcomes of working collaboratively and building a sense of community. They enable people who have experienced domestic violence to share their stories and knowledge: an identified desire.

CONCLUSION

The drama provides a channel for delivering the obtained knowledge to the community. It also provides an opportunity to build a sense of community and to work collaboratively. It serves to achieve the desired goals of challenging related social norms, values and belief systems; raising awareness; and enhancing informal resources. Together, the two components of the strategy serve as the route for the goal of providing primary prevention: seeking to reduce harmful circumstances before they have had a chance to create difficulty.

This intervention strategy is proposed as a realistic possibility for the current intervention strategies already being implemented in the Masterton and wider Wairarapa region. It incorporates many features of proven effectiveness. It is not deemed to be a solution on its own but a step towards the goal of addressing domestic violence, a problem that affects many of our community members in Masterton, in New Zealand, and in our world. The effects of domestic violence are profound and can be life-long for the individuals and communities involved. Intervention is not an option, but an absolute necessity. Whether the

action stage is reached now depends on the community and its leadership.

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