

Guidelines for Programs Working with Women Who Use Force

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Women Who Use Force Ad Hoc Committee of
Ohio Domestic Violence Network



The comprehensive resource on domestic violence

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As a statewide coalition of domestic violence programs, all the staff and board members of ODVN hope that the revised Standards will assist local communities promote safety for survivors and the community at large while holding perpetrators accountable.

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INTRODUCTION

Statistics show an increase in women being arrested for domestic violence, including incidence of dual arrest in recent years (Miller and Meloy, 2006). Across Ohio, many of the women arrested have been court-ordered into batterers intervention programs (BIPs) which were originally created for men who are violent toward female partners. At a Batterers Intervention Committee meeting hosted by the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) some concerns were raised regarding the increased number of women referred to traditional men's BIPs and the appropriateness of these referrals.

Prompted by the continuing discussions, in early 2009, ODVN convened a Women Who Use Force (WWUF) Ad Hoc Committee comprised of representatives from BIPs, domestic violence programs, corrections departments, probation departments, law enforcement agencies, and other legal systems to develop some tools for programs in response to the current situation.

OVERVIEW OF THE STANDARDS

ODVN Guiding Principles

ODVN promotes the safety, well-being, and justice for all battered persons while respecting the adult survivor's right to self-direction and control over their own lives. ODVN is accountable to those who are or were battered and are committed to listening to their voices and using their expertise to guide our work. ODVN declares that batterers, not victims, are accountable for their abusive behavior. ODVN is committed to facilitating changes necessary to end oppression and violence within ourselves, and with economic, social and political systems. ODVN is committed to advancing the community's responsibility for stopping violence.

Purpose of the Ohio Standards for Services Provided to Women Who Use Force

The main purpose of this document is to inform providers of some of the issues related to providing services to women who use force and to establish standards to increase the likelihood of providing appropriate and successful services to Women Who Use Force in Ohio. The standards can be used specifically to help develop new services or evaluate existing services for women who use force.

Purpose of Women Who Use Force Services

Due to the changes in law enforcement policies encouraging or mandating arrests of the predominant aggressor when responding to domestic violence calls, an increasing number of women have been arrested and referred to traditional batter intervention programs. In looking at the literature regarding woman who use force, it is apparent that the dynamics which guide women's use of force and men's use of force are different and therefore would imply that traditional treatment programs would not be appropriate for both populations.

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Potential Problems in Developing Women Who Use Force Services

Although there is a need to provide services to women who use force and clear benefits to receiving these services, there are some concerns about how these individuals are referred for services and the type of services they will receive. The circumstances around the arrests of WWUF and the mandating of these women to services can re-traumatize the survivor and reinforce the system of power and control their abusive partners are using against them. Lack of knowledge of the dynamics of women who use force has led to handling the survivor as a perpetrator and subsequently providing inappropriate interventions that do not meet their needs and increases their risk for continued victimization by their partner.

Women's Use of Force

In battering relationships, identified victims of domestic violence may engage in aggressive behaviors, including verbal and/or physical acts, in self-defense of immediate or prolonged abuse directed toward them. Many battered women self-defend on a delayed basis, creating the potential for their mis-identification as batterers or dual batterers. Some battered women may use force in a pre-emptive manner – by inducing the violence from their abusers so they have control over when and how the abuse occurs. Further, some survivors of domestic violence are caught in the system as a result of retaliation against their batterers. It is also important to note that some battered women resort to violence because the system failed to help protect them from batterers. Although there are women who are predominant aggressors in domestic violence situations, researchers agree that majority of women who use force in their intimate relationships are victims who self-defended or retaliated (Miller and Meloy, 2006).

The use of violence in any relationship should never be condoned. However, it is necessary to understand the context and history of violence in order to conduct an accurate assessment and to eventually provide appropriate sanctions for perpetrators and appropriate services for survivors. It is particularly critical to consider the context and history of violence when we are faced with members of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) communities in our assessment because the power imbalance due to gender, as in heterosexual relationships, does not exist in the same way.

Currently available research and practice knowledge have very limited information about some groups of WWUF, such as certain racial/ethnic groups, individuals with disabilities, diverse religious groups, and immigrant/refugee communities. WWUF programs must be aware of the lack of knowledge and be open-minded in program implementation.

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STANDARDS

Victim Safety

While working with women who use force, it is critical that service providers keep in mind safety issues regarding working with these women who may still be involved with their abusive partner. In every aspect of providing services, including but not limited to policy development, documentation of group and individual sessions, sending home reading material or homework assignments, and communication with referral source should take into account the safety of their clients.

Partner Contact

Service providers are discouraged from conducting partner contacts with the abusive partner. Such contacts could further endanger the safety of the women who use force group member or individual client.

Confidentiality

All clients/participants in women who use force services shall be informed at the start of treatment about the limits of confidentiality. They shall be informed that their referral source (i.e. court or children's services board) will receive information on their acceptance of service, attendance, compliance with rules and guidelines of the program, participation and progress. No specific statements or comments by participants should be disclosed to referral source or any other party without the participant's consent.

Assessment

Assessment is defined as "an intentional process to learn as much about what is happening in a person's life as needed in order to 1) identify if and how power, control and exploitation is working in a relationship and 2) to connect that person with the best possible resource." (Burke, 2008). Assessment is a critical component of the WWUF program that determines whether or not an individual will be served by the program. At the end of the intentional process of assessment, the program shall be able to: 1) sort out who the individual is; 2) determine appropriateness for the individual's WWUF program participation; and 3) refer her to other appropriate services such as mental health or substance abuse treatment.

Things to Consider When Conducting an Assessment

When conducting an assessment for women who use force it is important to remember the following:

1. A survivor may be able to give you a more detailed accounts of events compared to a batterer. The survivor's ability to give information may be influenced by the impact of trauma on her memory, use of alcohol and drugs, and the time that has lapsed since the events.
2. A batterer is likely to be vague, avoid answering questions and/or try to change the subject. It is usually difficult to get a clear picture of the events from a batterer.

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3. Survivors often take responsibility for the abuse and may even defend their partners. On the other hand, batterers tend to portray themselves as the victim and give negative accounts of their partners.
4. A predominant aggressor may have defensive wounds, such as scratches on face and bite marks on lower arm.
5. Having a record of previous domestic violence/assault charge does not necessarily mean you have a batterer in front of you.
6. Universal precautions – Presume that every woman you encounter has been exposed to abuse, violence, neglect, or other traumatic experiences.
7. Remember that the criminal justice system, from arrest to court-order into a BIP, can re-traumatize women.
8. Information from a third-party, including police report, probation pre-sentencing investigation, and report from child protective services, may be helpful in assessing women.

Potential Questions For Intake

To assure a thorough assessment, one will assess **for history (H), pattern (P), context (C), intent (I), and effect (E)** of violence in order to determine if the woman is the survivor or predominant aggressor. The following are examples of questions and topics to explore. These are just examples and should not be used as a checklist, used rigidly in this order, or used as an exhaustive list.

- Do you have a history of arrest/convictions of DV/violent offenses and/or violating court orders? H
- Does your partner have a history of arrest/convictions of DV/violent offenses and/or violating court orders? H
- What happened this time? (Need to get details) HPCIE
- What happened in the past? (Need to get details) HPCIE
- Tell me about the first time something like _____ happened. HPCIE
- Tell me about your use of violence. HPCIE
- What kind of injuries do you have? How did that happen? CIE
- What about your partner? How did that happen? CIE
- What were you trying to do? I
- Who do you think is/was responsible? HPCI
- Are you afraid of your partner? Tell me more (Get specifics). HPC
- Do you dread him/her coming home/calling you? Tell me more. HPC
- What do you do when your partner is mad? HCI
- What have you done to minimize the problem/stop the abuse? HPCI
- What happens if you try to do _____ (exercise autonomy)? HPCE
- What changed in your life since _____? E
- How does your best friend describe your relationship w/ ____? HPCIE
- How does your partner describe your relationship w/____? HPCIE
- What was your relationship like with your past partner(s)? HP
- What's keeping you in the relationship? PCIE
- What would it be like for you to be away from your partner? HPCE

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For more examples, refer to Artemis Center (2001), Baum (2001), BRAVO (XXXX), and House (2001).

Eligibility for Women Who Use Force Services

After a thorough assessment, a woman may be categorized into one of the following groups:

1. **Self-defense in the moment:** A partner was assaulting the woman and she reacted to save herself from further harm.
2. **Delayed self-defense:** A partner assaulted/threatened the woman and she responded after some time to the assault or threat. Example – Partner threatens to kill her tonight. He falls asleep and she then assaults him believing he will hurt her when he awakes.
3. **Retaliatory violence:** A partner has been violent, threatening over time. Woman eventually fights back, not necessarily to defend herself, but to show her own power to control her life or to express her frustration.
4. **Multiple offenders across life span, hypervigilant:** A partner may or may not be exerting power and control over the woman, but other partners/persons have. Woman fights back against old fears, not willing to allow another person to hurt her.
5. **Woman using violence in many settings, violent to many people, experiencing multiple oppressions, societal alienation:** Woman may or may not have a violent partner. Woman uses violence and threats as the main way to express some control over her world, and possibly over other people. She may see walking away from violence as weak, allowing others to treat her with disrespect and leaving a void in herself.

Women in the categories 1 through 3 are generally appropriate for WWUF services. It is often appropriate for 4, but inappropriate for 5 due to the limited scope of the group. In cases in which a woman has current drug/alcohol use, has a mental illness that includes psychosis or delusions or moderate to severe cognitive limitations, or the woman is not in any way committed to increasing her safety or changing her behavior, the group may not be appropriate (Waller, et al, 2002). Although it is extremely rare, individuals for whom a medical condition is the primary cause of violence, such as those with a severe brain injury, may be excluded from the program. The program staff must consult with the individuals' physician and other appropriate service providers and have written documentation of these conditions before making decisions.

If a BIP receives a WWUF referral, the BIP shall identify if the referral is a survivor or a predominant aggressor and develop a separate group for each category of women. If there are not enough participants to form a group, it is recommended that women be served in individual sessions.

Curriculum

There are only a few curricula for WWUF programs currently available for communities across the country to replicate. However, the literature regarding this topic is emerging

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and can provide us with some suggestions as to what may be more appropriate than others.

Vista

The Vista curriculum was developed by Lisa Young Larance, MSW, LCSW, LMSW, Allison Hoffman-Ruzicka, MA, and Jane Baldwin Shivas, MSW, LCSW, DVS in 2009. Vista is a 20-week curriculum addressing women's use of force. The Vista curriculum focuses on the group members' motivations, intent and consequences of their actions. The curriculum emphasizes that the use of force is not appropriate and teaches healthy alternatives. Group topics include Identifying Forceful Behaviors, Anger, Defense Mechanisms, Healthy Boundaries, Effects of Force on Children, Conflict Resolution and Healthy Relationships.

Turning Points: A Nonviolence Curriculum for Women

Turning Points was developed by Ellen Pence, Laura Connelly and Melissa Scaia in 2011. This program is an educational program for women who use force against their partners. The goal is to help women understand the connections between the violence they experience and the violence they use. The program is divided into three parts. The first part is on educating women on domestic violence and the impact it has on their relationship and family members. It focuses on making the connection between what type of violence they experience versus what type of violence they use. It addresses their motivations and the impact of their behaviors. Part two addresses different aspects of violence against an abusive partner, such as feelings of guilt, feeling justified, feeling trapped, or feeling that their only option is to use force. Part two also focuses on the problems associated with the members' use of violence, its impact on people, its sources, and most importantly, what must be changed in the short- and long-term to bring the violence to an end (website description). Part three addresses living with anger, talking to children about the violence, and understanding partners experience.

Women Who Resort To Violence Program Guide and Curriculum

The approach used in this program is based on a collaboration between the Artemis Center for Alternatives to Domestic Violence, a non-profit agency for victims of intimate partner violence and Preventing Abuse in the Home (PATH), a batterer intervention program. The WWRTV program is an intervention program specifically designed for females who have a history of being battered by a partner and who have used violence against a partner in self-defense or retaliation. This intervention is based on Feminist Theory and Social Learning Theory, and uses Cognitive Behavioral techniques to intervene. The goals are to empower this population and increase knowledge, teach skills and change attitudes through lectures, and provide thought provoking discussions, experiential exercises and homework. The WWRTV program addresses domestic violence education (i.e. power and control, differences between men who batter and women who batter, risk factors, children's issues, substance abuse, healthy versus unhealthy relationships), safety planning, and anger management (i.e. time-outs, cool-down techniques, healthy communication). It provides advocacy for

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women who need additional support with the legal system and access to national and local resources.

The program guide provides a description of the rationale and background of WWRTV, a brief history of the WWRTV program and examination of its methods and organization, a consideration of factors related to establishing WWRTV groups, an outline of curricular components, a discussion of evaluation issues, and a list of local resource materials and further readings. This program guide will provide individuals working with women who resort to violence with an effective treatment option and a better understanding of this population.

Recommended Interventions

Although there are limited services available addressing women who use force, there are some consistent themes in the curricula and research literature currently available. The following is recommended for WWUF to include in their curriculum and program format at minimum:

- Gender responsive and trauma informed services
- Women only group sessions.
- Lead or co-lead by women
- If number allows, group format. If not, individual sessions.
- One to one and a half hours in length

The following is recommended for contents of a WWUF program:

- Safety planning
- Types of abuse
- Dynamics of abuse
- Trauma
- The dynamics of women who use force
- The impact of abuse on parenting
- Advocacy and knowledge of community resources

Inappropriate Interventions

- BIPs originally developed for men who batter female partners
- Mixed-gender group
- Group that mixes survivors with predominant aggressors
- Couples and family therapy
- Religion-based counseling whose goal is to preserve the relationship and/or the family at the expense of safety for partners/family.

Discharge

There are two categories of discharge: completion and termination. Completion indicates the participant has complied with the rules and regulations of the program, attended scheduled sessions, and participated at an acceptable level. Upon completion of the program, additional recommendations may be included in the completion letter sent to the referral agency. Termination indicates that the program has terminated all services to the WWUF client/participant due to noncompliance or subsequent

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information that indicates that she is not appropriate for WWUF services. The WWUF service provider will document the reason for termination and make specific recommendations to the referral agency. Reasons for termination may include but are not exclusive to missing more than the allotted number of sessions, using alcohol or illicit drugs before coming to group, refusing to actively engage in group sessions, being aggressive toward other group members or facilitators, or not abiding by any other rule/guideline of the program.

Working with Marginalized Communities

Individuals providing WWUF services shall strive to be inclusive of all populations represented within the community they serve. It is recommended that WWUF service providers cultivate and maintain collaborative relationships with marginalized communities through local and regional task force work, outreach, prevention and intervention initiatives, cross training, and other venues. WWUF service providers shall need to be flexible in modifying their approach to intervention to meet the needs of the diverse populations they serve. WWUF service providers will reflect the experience of the diverse communities they serve in their program materials by adjusting the language, including applicable scenarios in individual or group work, and creating policies that are inclusive of their diverse communities. They will also provide appropriate accommodations to make their facility and services accessible (i.e. providing interpreters, providing extra time and one on one assistance, ramps and elevators). Individuals providing services to WWUF are highly encouraged to attend trainings geared specifically to working with diverse populations.

The following information has been adapted from the Ohio Standards for BIP Revised 2010.

Appalachian Communities

1. The following counties are considered to be in the Appalachian region: Adams, Ashtabula, Athens, Belmont, Brown, Carroll, Clermont, Columbiana, Coshocton, Gallia, Guernsey, Harrison, Highland, Hocking, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Lawrence, Mahoning, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Muskingum, Noble, Perry, Pike, Ross, Scioto, Trumbull, Tuscarawas, Vinton, and Washington (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2008).
2. Appalachian regions face social-political and economic challenges such as “geographic isolation, high unemployment, lack of public transportation and high levels of poverty” (Contos Shoaf, 2004). Individuals providing services to WWUF shall be aware of how these factors may affect the clients they serve.
3. WWUF service providers shall be aware that the Appalachian people who reside in urban and suburban Ohio may face the same challenges as those living in designated Appalachian regions.

Communities of Color

1. Communities of Color include people who belong to an oppressed group based on race and/or ethnicity and experience the oppression on a daily basis. They include, but are not limited to, people of African, Asian, Hispanic/Latino(a), Native and Pacific Islander descent and may be of multiple heritages.

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2. WWUF service providers shall be aware of the racial oppression that members of these groups face in their daily experience at institutional and individual levels.

Disability Communities

1. A Disability is defined as any physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of an individual; record or such impairment; or being regarded as having such impairment (Americans With Disabilities Act or ADA, 1990).
2. The range of disabilities includes developmental disabilities developed before the age of 21, cognitive disabilities, physical disabilities, sensory disabilities, acquired disabilities, aging-related disabilities, and diagnosed mental illness (King Akers, 2006).
3. Disability communities are diverse and include individuals who may or may not self-identify as being a member of this community. The deaf community does not view hearing loss as a disability from a cultural perspective. It is important to directly inquire about any suspected disability and get appropriate supporting documentation if necessary before one labels, diagnoses, or documents that an individual has a disability.
4. WWUF service providers shall comply with federal laws such as the ADA. The compliance may require accommodations, such as providing sign language interpreters for the deaf/hard of hearing participants; providing extra assistance with homework for participants with learning disabilities, providing physical accommodations for a member who utilizes a wheel chair, and others.
5. WWUF shall utilize culturally appropriate, linguistically and visually accessible curriculum and interventions to foster optimum participation and learning for individuals with self-identified disabilities.

Immigrant/Refugee Communities

1. An immigrant or refugee could be of any race and ethnicity born outside of the United States. They may not be proficient in English, have limited personal support, and not be familiar with customs and norms of the United States.
2. In case of limited English proficiency (LEP), the WWUF service provider to the extent possible, provide services to them in their native language or arrange interpretation and translation services.
3. WWUF service providers shall not use participants' partner, children, or other family member as interpreters to ensure safety, confidentiality, and accurate interpretation of concepts. Only trained professional interpreters shall be used.
4. Program materials shall be translated into the native language of the WWUF participant or information provided through a professional interpreter.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Communities

1. The term lesbian refers to women who are romantically, emotionally, and sexually attracted to other women. The word bisexual describes those who feel romantic, emotional, and sexual attraction to both males and females. In case of women, transgender is an individual who identifies as a man and lives their life as a man. In the case of a man, it would be the opposite. Queer is a term

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- embraced by the LGBTQ community and used to describe the entire LGBTQ community.
2. WWUF service providers shall keep sexual orientation of the participant and their partner confidential.
 3. WWUF service providers, in collaboration with organizations serving the LGBTQ communities, shall develop and provide sexual orientation specific group(s). The WWUF facilitators shall be members of the specific community while paying attention to the needs for confidentiality.
 4. The experience of LGBTQ communities shall be reflected in the program materials by adjusting the language, including LGBTQ scenarios in group work, and creating policies that are LGBTQ inclusive.
 5. LGBTQ participants shall be placed in LGBTQ specific groups or be seen individually if the number of participants is not enough to form an on-going group.

Religious Communities

1. Christianity, particularly Protestant, is the religion practiced by the majority of people in the United States (CIA, 2007). Marginalized religious communities include individuals who experience oppression based on religious affiliation with non-Christian spiritual practices, such as, but not limited to, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, indigenous, and atheist.
2. WWUF service providers shall treat all religious practices with respect while not allowing any religious practice or belief to be used to justify abusive behavior.
3. WWUF service providers shall reflect the experience of non-Christians in the program materials by adjusting the language, including applicable scenarios in group work, and creating policies that are not religion-specific.

Rural Communities

1. A rural community is characterized by small population size and/or population density as well as a higher density of acquaintanceship (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2009).
2. WWUF service providers shall be particularly careful in keeping participants and their partners' information confidential as personal information may spread easily in rural communities where people tend to be acquainted with each other.
3. WWUF service providers shall be aware of the isolation in rural areas and how that might impact their participants' safety.
4. WWUF service providers shall be aware of the prevalence of firearms in rural communities and the impact on safety of their participants, children and other community members.
5. Curriculum serving rural communities shall reflect the experience of the community in the materials provided.

Women Who Use Force Program Accountability

Ethical Standards

1. WWUF service providers shall meet the ethical standards as outlined by their professional organization with which they are affiliated or licensing board and the employing agency's ethical guidelines.

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2. WWUF service providers, program administrators, and all others who are involved in the operation of providing WWUF services shall familiarize themselves with the Standards and strive to meet the Standards.
3. All WWUF service providers shall be violence free and willing to sign a statement to that effect.
4. All WWUF service providers shall also communicate and act in ways that are free of victim blaming, sexism or misogyny and remain open to self-examination and constructive feedback on issues of power and control, sexism, and cultural sensitivity in their work and their own lives.

Training

Training shall be an integral part of working with women who use force. WWUF facilitators shall have ongoing training in the areas of:

1. Trauma informed care
2. The dynamics of women who use force
3. The dynamics of domestic violence and its impact on the WWUF participant
4. The dynamics of domestic violence on parenting
5. Issues of victim safety
6. Legal issues resulting from charges of domestic violence
7. Community resources available to survivors/victims
8. The role of WWUF service provider as part of the coordinated community response team
9. In addition to the above, new facilitators/service providers shall receive comprehensive training on domestic violence in general.

Supervision

WWUF service providers shall have a supervisor experienced in working with WWUF. If such a supervisor is not available, service providers may arrange for peer review or other forms of internal monitoring of WWUF activities.

Self-Evaluation

WWUF shall engage in regular self-evaluation through participant progress regarding knowledge gained, attitudes/beliefs changed, and skills learned and utilized, recidivism rates, and participant satisfaction and self-report.

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RESOURCES

Primary Aggressor Documentation Form

Artemis Center for Alternatives to Domestic Violence
310 W Monument Ave # 3
Dayton, OH 45402-3000
(937) 461-5091

Turning Points: A Nonviolence Curriculum for Women

Domestic Violence Turning Points
PO Box 814
Grand Rapids, MN 55744
218-656-0272
info@dvturningpoints.com
www.dvturningpoints.com

Vista, A Program for Women Who Use Force: Curriculum Guide

Jersey Battered Women's Service (JBWS)
P.O. Box 1437
Morristown, NJ 07962
Vista: 973-267-7520 Ext.254
info@jbws.org

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Women Who Resort to Violence Curriculum

Preventing Abuse in The Home (PATH)
School of Professional Psychology
Wright State University
9 N. Edwin C. Moses Boulevard
Dayton, Ohio 45402
(937) 775-4300

Women Who Use Force in Intimate Partner Relationships: Common Language and Concepts Guide

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