



FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION FUND

Memorandum

To: VAWA
From: Anna Carpenter
Date: September 19, 2003
Re: **NIJ Report on Batterer Intervention Programs**

The National Institute of Justice's report *Batterer Intervention Programs: Where Do We Go From Here?* includes the findings of two studies of batterer intervention programs (BIPs) and the NIJ's analysis of those studies and suggestions for next steps. Each study used a classic experimental model to study two batterer intervention programs in two locations: Brooklyn, New York and Broward County, Florida.

NIJ's Overview of Findings:

Both the Brooklyn and Broward studies found that BIPs have little or no effect on batterer's behavior and attitudes. There are two possible reasons for these findings: one is that the programs truly do not work; the other is that the studies themselves were flawed. Thus, there are two lessons to be learned from these and other studies on BIPs.

First, program evaluations must be improved. Of the many study designs used to evaluate BIPs, researchers prefer the experimental model. The drawback is that this model is difficult to carry out in court settings. Thus, coordination between courts, researchers and practitioners is necessary to carry out rigorous studies. Additionally, researchers need to develop new ways to evaluate batterer's behavior and attitudes, as well as better ways of tracking batterers over time.

Second, BIPs should be improved. Perhaps new BIP models could be developed based on current research. The NIJ analysis states that changes in BIPs may only be effective if those changes are part of a larger reform effort in the "criminal justice and community response to domestic violence that includes arrest, restraining orders, intensive monitoring of batterers, and changes to social norms that may inadvertently tolerate partner violence." Because the field of BIPs is still relatively new, the best question may not be whether BIPs work, but which BIPs work best under which circumstances. NIJ states "As BIPs are a relatively new response to a critical social problem, it is too early to abandon the concept."

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The Broward Study

The Subjects:

404 men convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence were randomly assigned to experimental group or control group. The subjects were mandated to treatment by probation departments; the men who were assigned to BIP classes had no choice in their treatment.

The experimental group was assigned to a year of probation and 26 weeks of group counseling sessions from a BIP, the control group was sentenced to a year of probation.

The Measures:

Interviews with batterers; interviews with victims; probation records; new arrest records.

Hypothesis:

Men in BIPs would be less likely to be physically violent against their partners than those in the control group. Men with a high stake in conformity would be less likely to beat their partners than those with a low stake in conformity.

Findings:

Offender Attitudes: No differences in offender attitudes between control and experimental groups. Both groups reported the same likelihood of abusing their partners again. Only one difference was found, the experimental group was less likely to identify their partners as responsible for violence, although all still found their partners to be “somewhat” to “equally” responsible. The control group viewed their partners as increasingly responsible. The results indicate that batterers in the experimental group did not change their attitudes about the legitimacy of violence against their partners, their responsibility for that violence, or the proper roles of men and women.

Victim Attitudes: Victims in the experimental and control groups reported no difference in their expectations of being battered again by their partners. Additionally, 20 percent of women thought that the abuse would continue, while only 5 percent of men did.

Self-Reporting: There was no change in the likelihood that offenders would self-report abuse for the control group or the experimental group. Similarly, there was no change in the likelihood that the partners of men in either group would report abuse.

Official Measures: There was no significant difference between groups in the likelihood that they would be cited for violations of parole. In terms of stake-in-conformity, the men with the most stable situations were the least likely to be cited for

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violations of parole. 24 percent of men in each group were re-arrested. Lack of steady employment was found to be a stronger risk factor re-arrest than non-attendance at BIP classes.

Study Limitations:

There was a low victim response rate, which is unfortunate because victims provide the best information on continuing abuse. However, the researchers felt confident that they had collected strong data given the multiple sources of information the study collected.

Final Conclusions/Implications for Policy:

The study found that BIPs had no clear effect on batterer's attitudes or behavior and severe physical abuse continued for both the control and experimental groups 6 to 12 months after sentencing.

The Brooklyn Study

The Subjects:

376 criminal court defendants were randomly given one of two sentences: a 39-hour BIP for the experimental group, or 39-hours of community service for the control group. The experimental group was then broken down into one group that went to an 8-week course, and one group that went to a 26-week course.

The Measures:

New incidents reported to the police that involved the same victim and new incidents reported to researchers by the victim. Both measures were taken at 6 and 12 months after sentencing. Additionally, offenders and victims were tested for conflict resolution skills and attitudes.

Findings:

Offender Behavior: Arrest records showed that offenders in the 26-week program had significantly fewer criminal complaints reported than men in the 8-week program or the control group in the community service program. The difference between the 26-week program group and the other two groups was most pronounced at six months, but lasted for a full year. There was no significant difference between the number of criminal complaints against the 8-week program group and the control group.

Victim reports also showed the 26-week group committed fewer new violent acts than the other two groups. However, the differences were not statistically significant.

Offender Attitudes:

The study found that there is "no basis for claiming that treatment changed batterers' attitudes or ways of dealing with conflict."

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Study Limitations:

Researchers had difficulty working with some criminal justice officials. For example, judges were allowed to override assignments to the control group. “If override cases had been included in the control group, the tests of treatments effects would have been more conservative.”

Final Conclusions/Implications for Policy:

The researchers conclude that this study “supports the view that batterer intervention merely suppresses violent behavior for the duration of treatment,” and that “The results of this study do not support the view that treatment leads to lasting changes in behavior.”

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