

Exploring Perceptions of Men Who Completed a Group Program for Partner Abuse

**A Thesis Submitted To
The Faculty of Graduate Studies
University of Manitoba**

**In Partial Fulfillment
Master of Social Work Degree**

**By
Melanie MacPhee**

August 2003

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

COPYRIGHT PERMISSION PAGE

Exploring Perceptions of Men who Completed a Group Program for Partner Abuse

BY

Melanie MacPhee

A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University

of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree

of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

MELANIE MACPHEE ©2003

Permission has been granted to the Library of The University of Manitoba to lend or sell copies of this thesis/practicum, to the National Library of Canada to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film, and to University Microfilm Inc. to publish an abstract of this thesis/practicum.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither this thesis/practicum nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
CHAPTER ONE: Purpose, Background, and Nature of the Study	1
Introduction	1
Research Problem and Rationale	3
Research Objectives	3
Learning Goals	4
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review	7
Introduction	7
Types of Groups for Men Who Use Abuse	8
Research on Groups for Men Who Use Abuse	10
Individualized Group Treatment	11
Domestic Abuse and Family of Origin Abuse	12
Domestic Abuse and Men's Parenting	14
Domestic Abuse and Workplace Violence	15
Outcome and Evaluation Research	16
Limitations of the Current Research	20
Program Evaluation	21
Summary	22
CHAPTER THREE: Methodology	24

Research Setting	25
Sample Selection and Recruitment	26
Data Collection	28
Data Analysis	30
Rigor	34
Ethical Considerations	36
CHAPTER FOUR: Description of Findings	38
Introduction	38
Sample Demographic	40
Section 1: Life Before the Group and the Initial Experience of Participating in the Program	41
The Kind of Man I Was	41
Goals	48
Past and Present Circumstances in the Relationship that led To Connecting with the Program	50
Initial Experience of Participating in the Program	55
Section 2: The Group Experience: Process and Impact	57
Group Process	57
Group Impact	62
Section 3: Making and Maintaining Changes: Staying Connected to the program	78
Goal Achievement	79

The Kind of Man I Am Now	82
Helping Other Men	89
Staying Connected	90
Partner's Difficulty Accepting Changes	95
Concept Map: Understanding How the Themes are Linked	97
CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion and Implications	100
Implications for Programs for Men Who Use Abuse	103
Focus on Mutual Aid	103
Abuse in Family of Origin	104
Abuse in the Workplace	105
Parenting	106
Relationships	107
Maintenance	108
Verbal Abuse	108
Suggestions for Further Research	109
Limitations	110
Conclusion	112
REFERENCES	115
APPENDIX	120
A: Endorsement Letter	120
B: Consent Form	121
C: Interview Guide	123

ABSTRACT

Exploring Perceptions of Men Who Completed a Group Program for Partner Abuse

The abuse of women by their intimate male partners is a serious social problem in Canadian society. Numerous programs have emerged in response to the issue across the country in an effort to prevent further instances of partner abuse and provide treatment to the men who use abuse in relationships. Most programs utilize a group treatment approach focusing on inviting men to take responsibility for abusive behaviors, learning empathy, learning non-abusive communication skills, and increasing self-awareness. Although much research has been conducted on groups for men who use abuse, little is actually known about how and why group interventions are helpful and how men understand, integrate, and implement behavior changes into their relationships, and lives in general.

This study conducted interviews with men who completed a group program for men who abuse their partners' to examine their experience of participating in the group program and to gain an understanding of the impact of the group on their use of abusive behaviors. The perceptions of the men provided indications of how they integrated and implemented tools and skills learned in the group into their daily lives.

Participants described the group experience as having a significant impact in several areas including self-awareness, parenting, learning to communicate non-abusively, and increased empathy for those affected by the abuse. Men also talked about the importance of staying connected with program in order to continue with healthy relationships and to maintain positive behavior changes.

Implications for men's programs point to including the issues of family of origin abuse and workplace abuse in group interventions. Increased support post-group is also indicated in specific areas including verbal abuse, parenting, relationships on increased group support after the group ends.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project could not have been completed without the assistance of a number of very important people. First, I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee. My advisor, Dr. Tuula Heinonen provided constant guidance, insight, support, and enthusiasm for my work that was an invaluable asset at every stage of the process. I also appreciate the insights, suggestions, and guidance provided my committee members, Diane Hiebert-Murphy, Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Social Work and Dr. Douglas Brownridge, Assistant Professor in the Department of Human Ecology.

I would also like to thank the staff at the agency where the study took place. I could not have completed this study without their help and generosity not only in helping to recruit the sample for the study, but also for sharing their knowledge and insights on working with men who use abuse in relationships. It is their hard work, dedication, and belief that change is possible that helps make a difference for families affected by domestic abuse.

Huge thanks go to my husband Ben, whose love, encouragement, and patience helped me through the good times and the rough times when I needed him the most. Words cannot express my appreciation.

Finally, the greatest thanks go to each man who participated in this study. This study was a great learning experience for me due to the participants' openness, candor, and their desire to help others who have used abusive behaviors in relationships. I greatly appreciate them sharing their journeys towards change with me, and with all who read this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

PURPOSE, BACKGROUND AND NATURE OF STUDY

Introduction

Partner violence, once considered a “family issue” has become an immense social problem in North American society. Partner abuse was first identified as an important social issue in the early 1970’s. From this time when the first shelters for abused women opened in Canada, abused women, shelter workers, academics, and other advocates have been vocal in their demands for legal remedies, funding, and better treatment for abused women and their children. After more than two decades of research by helping professionals, there is now a substantial body of literature available about the correlates and consequences of partner abuse (Bennet & Williams, 2001; Jasinski & Williams, 1998; Johnson, 1996; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Tolman & Bennet, 1995; Tolman & Edelson, 1990).

Despite the tremendous increase in public awareness of partner abuse, Canadian women continue to be threatened, assaulted, and in some cases killed by the men who profess to love them. In an average year, about 78 women are killed by their husbands and common-law partners and, in 1993, approximately 200, 000 women were threatened, slapped, kicked, punched, choked, beaten or sexually assaulted (Johnson, 1996). Approximately 124 treatment programs for men who use abuse have been established across the country (Johnson, 1996). Treatment for men who use abuse has become a major priority in the family violence field and for social workers nation wide. Treatment programs for men have also become a priority in the literature, with many researchers attempting to arrive at conclusions about treatment efficacy, and causes of violent

behavior. Several theories for partner abuse exist, but are not sufficient on their own to explain why men abuse their partners. Intervention models that integrate theoretical approaches to partner violence are beginning to be valued for their utility in treating men who use abuse.

The majority of intervention research is focused on treatment groups where quantitative methods are used to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions. Qualitative research on interventions with men who use abuse is scant, however currently more qualitative research is being conducted on treatment groups for men who use abuse. This study contributes to this area of research by focusing on men's responses to interview questions that detail their stories and experiences of participating in a treatment group for men who use abuse.

Although a partner of any gender can engage in violent acts, women are more often the victims and report more injuries. This is an alarming trend that supports a close look at change processes for men who use abuse. Domestic violence disrupts couple relationships and family life, causing deep emotional scars leading to mental health concerns for men, women and children (Pandya & Gingerich, 2002).

I believe that the treatment of men who use abuse against their families, along with the empowerment of victims is vital in rebuilding healthy families and preventing future episodes of domestic violence; hence, my interest in exploring change processes in therapeutic group treatment of men who use abuse.

Research Problem and Rationale

This study focused on men's reflections of their process of change as a result of participating in the group, and does not track the process of their change. This research intended to (a) acquire men's perceptions of a group intervention and, (b) to explore if the intervention impacted on changing their use of abusive behaviors and, (c) how they implemented these changes at twelve to eighteen months follow-up. I am conducting this study for the following reasons:

1. The experiences of men who have completed programs are a valuable resource to inform programs by understanding what is and what is not helpful in the treatment context.
2. The perceptions of men who have completed programs may provide indications of how they integrated and implemented tools and skills learned in the group into their daily lives and relationships after completing the group.
3. Men in this study may provide information on how the group intervention fits in with other family violence interventions post-group.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

1. To understand the men's experience of participating in the group.
2. To understand whether the group intervention had an impact on the men,
3. If there was an impact how it was manifested in their use of abusive behaviors in the family.
4. To develop a better understanding of how the group intervention fits in with other types of interventions and life events of the men after completing the group.

Learning Goals

This study provided me with an opportunity to test my research skills and learn from the research process itself. Since this is the first study I have conducted I had learning goals entering this endeavor:

1. I wanted to learn from the experiences of the participants themselves. I viewed the men as much more than research participants. I viewed them as people who have dealt with very difficult issues and viewed myself as not only the researcher, but as someone who can learn from the men's experiences and what they learned through their change process. Speaking one-to-one with the men was an exceptional learning experience that allowed me to understand the act of abuse within the context of the men's lives.
2. I hoped to gain insight on the issue of domestic violence from the men who have perpetrated it. Up until now my understanding of domestic abuse was theoretical, but also came from providing services to this client population. The nature of the study allowed me to be the listener of many accounts of domestic abuse. I feel I have come to a more concise understanding of the issue just by listening to the people who have been directly involved in it.
3. Following from number two, I also hoped to learn more about the role of a researcher. This study allowed me to step out of my helper role in my professional

life and step into the role of student researcher. This provided a unique role that I had not yet experienced. I found that the role of researcher is one of listener and learner.

4. Finally, I wanted to learn how to implement qualitative research methods. I wanted to acquire knowledge in all aspects of the research from the interview through to the analysis, and report writing stages. This study gave me the opportunity to hone my research skills and feel prepared to take this task on again.

My hope is that this research will contribute to the body of literature that exists on group intervention with men who use abuse. This research was not intended to be an evaluation of a treatment group, rather the focus was on the participants words of experiences and their description of implementation of changes in abusive behaviors.

Thesis Overview

Chapter two reviews the relevant literature surrounding group interventions with men who abuse their partners. Different types of group interventions are examined within their theoretical contexts. The research on men who use abuse is also examined including limitations that currently exist in the field. Additional literature was also reviewed in relation to the findings of the study.

Chapter three describes the methodology of the study including qualitative research methods, the setting in which the research took place and recruitment methods for gathering the research sample. Data collection is described including the interview questions, the interview process, and the experiences surrounding this stage of the study. Data analysis procedures are described and discussed in detail including the specific steps of the process. Issues of rigor are explored along with the various ways they were

addressed in the study. Ethical issues are described in terms of the participant's rights and ways in which this was addressed in the study. Finally, limitations of the study are presented and discussed.

Chapter four presents the findings of the study, focusing on describing themes that emerged from analyzing the interview data. Themes and subthemes are described with a particular focus on the participant's words. Chapter five discusses the findings with a particular focus on therapeutic implications for men's programs. Finally, further areas of research are examined.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review focuses on group intervention for men who use abuse, examining types of groups for men, preferred treatment approaches, research on group intervention, efficacy of group intervention, consumer-based assessments, and the current challenges facing research on men who use abuse.

The terms “batterer”, and/or “abuser” is found frequently in the literature on men’s groups. I have not adopted this term in my thesis to reference this client population opting for the term “men who use abuse”. The rationale for using this term stems from comments made by the study participants who stated that they do not appreciate the term batterer as they stated it labels them with a term that carries all encompassing negative connotations and assumptions about who they are and what they stand for as individuals. The terms “batterer”, and “abuser” also do not imply that men can change their behaviors, and this is a central belief for practitioners and the men themselves. Using the term “men who use abuse” does not reflect a label; it refers to a behavior that does not define who the man is, but rather, what he does. Using this term to refer to the men moves away from labeling, and communicates that men can change their behaviors and no longer use abuse in relationships.

The literature on group interventions for men who use abuse has grown in volume and depth over the last fifteen years providing important information to men’s programs on what is known to be helpful and effective and what is not known and needs to be proven. Several major reviews of the literature on men’s groups have been conducted

from 1989-2002 where similar conclusions were made regarding types of groups and benefits of group intervention for men (Bennet & Williams, 2001; Eisikovits & Edelson, 1989; Jasinski & Williams, 1998; Tolman & Bennet, 1990; Tolman & Edelson, 1995). Most authors advocate group treatment as offering the widest range of benefits for men who abuse intimate partners (Bennet & Williams, 2001; Edelson & Syers, 1991; Eisikovits & Edelson, 1989; Gondolf, 1987; Scott & Wolfe, 2000). Bennet and Williams (2001) concluded that groups act to decrease a sense of isolation. Groups also challenge the belief that the man is exceptional, improves his interpersonal skills, offers mutual aid, identifies and develops his expertise in critical areas, maximizes confrontation of denial and inappropriate behaviors, helps him develop a norm for personal and social change, and maximizes his rewards for change. Many other authors agree that group intervention for men who use abuse creates an environment where men are accepted and valued at a personal level, yet they are challenged by group members to stop minimizing abuse and are encouraged to take responsibility for it simultaneously (Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Edelson & Syers, 1991; Scott & Wolfe, 2000; Tutty, Bidgood, Rothery, & Bidgood, 2001).

Types of group intervention for men who use abuse

Although group treatment for men who abuse their partners has been almost uniformly adopted as the major treatment modality for this population, there are variations in the theoretical context, group focus and style of intervention. Tutty, Bidgood, Rothery, & Bidgood (2001) outlined three types of the most common group interventions: anger management, psychoeducational, and self-help groups.

Anger management groups utilize behavioral techniques such as cognitive restructuring, anger logs and time out's to help cope with and/or eliminate feelings of anger. Stress reduction and expression of feelings without resorting to violence are the main focus of this intervention. Authors such as Gondolf (1997) and Dankwort and Austin (1999) have criticized this type of intervention due to a lack of empirical support connecting anger and partner assault. A social learning perspective informs this type of intervention; this means that violence as a means to handle anger is viewed as learned behavior from childhood that is replicated in adulthood (Dutton, 1995; Edelson & Syers, 1991; O'Neill, 1998).

Psychoeducational groups combine educational methods such as lectures and video tapes with group discussion and sharing. The rationale for psychoeducational groups is if violent behavior by men is learned and socially enforced, changing his behavior requires reeducation rather than psychotherapy (Tutty, et. al., 2001).

The third and increasingly less used intervention is self-help groups based on the success of Families Anonymous and other "Anonymous" groups. Problems have been cited with these groups due to very high recidivism rates for physical and emotional abuse and the risk that the open groups pose for women victims (Bennet & Williams, 2001; Edelson & Syers, 1991).

The group formats described above most commonly use a gender-based, cognitive-behavioral modality (Bennet & Williams, 2001; Eisikovits & Edelson, 1989; Gondolf, 1997; Tolman & Bennet, 1990; Tolman & Edelson, 1995). The cognitive model of behavior suggests that cognition affects behavior. The cognitive-behavioral approach helps men identify situations that trigger anger, alter their dysfunctional thinking, change

their understanding about those situations, and learn more adaptive behavior in place of controlling behavior. Feminist theory views abuse as occurring in a male-dominated society that enables male violence against women to occur through socio-economic structures and legal practices that implicitly and explicitly approve of greater power for males (Adams, 1988,1989; Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Johnson, 1996). The social perspectives of feminism and cognitive-behavioral skill building are frequently combined in contemporary models applied to intervention programs. The typical men's program now uses a gender-based cognitive-behavioral approach (Bennet & Williams, 2001). This common type of intervention has received the most support in the literature where many authors state that a gender-based understanding of partner abuse is a mandatory part of any men's program with inclusion of the social context of abuse being an integral component of any program that is socially accountable (Adams, 1988,1989; Bennet & Williams, 2001; Dankwort & Austin, 1999; Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Eisikovits & Edelson, 1989; Gondolf, 1997,1999; Tolman & Edelson, 1995). The primary goal in such men's groups is to assist participants to take responsibility for their violent behavior, to learn more appropriate ways of expressing their feelings, and gain empathy for their partners (Scott & Wolfe, 2000; Tutty, Bidgood, Rothery, & Bidgood, 2001).

Research on Groups for Men Who Use Abuse

The research on men who use abuse generally falls into two categories: Studies that examine the behaviors and characteristics of these men and outcome studies that examine recidivism (physical, verbal and psychological abuse) at a designated follow-up time after the group has ended.

Many attempts have been made in the literature to understand the following about men who use abuse: why they use abuse, their personality characteristics, their violent behaviors, and demographics (Holtzman, Munroe, & Stuart, 1994; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986; Jasinski & Williams, 1998). Such studies have provided us with valuable information on types of men who use abuse and have given us possible indications for why they use abuse against their partners. Theories of partner abuse range from individual theories of psychopathology to feminist views of battering as a social issue. Different conceptualizations of the problem of abuse are illustrated in fundamental and enduring questions about the nature of abuse and preferred strategies to address it.

Individualized Group Treatment

A central issue that continues to dominate this part of the literature is a focus on different types of men and how effective treatment may depend on the man's particular situation, for example researchers are now examining groups that would include only men who have experienced abuse in childhood. Up to this point group interventions have utilized a "one size fits all" intervention. Critics of this approach express concerns in the literature that this may be causing higher attrition and recidivism rates due to a lack of addressing specific problems that differ from man to man (Gondolf, 2000; Holtzman, Munroe, & Stuart, 1994). In a recent study Gondolf (2000) attempted to verify the generalizations about the characteristics of men in programs by testing for differences in the men's characteristics across four programs. Gondolf concluded that,

the characteristics of men in programs are particularly important to the family violence field for three reasons. One, many of the speculations about appropriate intervention and treatment for men rest on assumptions about their characteristics

and behavior. Two, the characteristics of men in a program contribute to program outcome and, therefore, need to be considered in evaluating program effectiveness. Three, the characteristics of men in a particular program indicate how representative a program may be. One program may appear more effective than another simply because it has different kinds of men in it. (Gondolf, 2000, p. 1278).

This study echoes the findings of Gondolf where participants described very specific areas that contributed to their use of abusive behaviors and helped explain how abuse is perpetuated within the men's lives. Three areas of the findings from my study represent significant areas of current and future research: domestic violence and its correlation to exposure to family of origin abuse, men's experience of parenting issues where domestic violence is present, and the relationship between domestic violence and workplace violence.

Domestic Abuse and Family of Origin Abuse

Previous research has been conducted with men who use abuse and how this current behavior relates to past victimization in childhood and youth. The literature is scant and the literature I located was very recently conducted. During the course of conducting a search for the literature I noticed that most of the research is focused on current perpetration of child abuse rather than partner abuse where the perpetrator has his own history of victimization. However, the literature I reviewed confirmed that there is a correlation between being abused physically in the perpetrator's family of origin and using abuse against adult women partners. Korbanka and McKay (2000) studied male and female victims of childhood physical abuse. They implemented a quantitative

measure to identify male and female victims of child physical abuse and current domestic violence. They found that victims of childhood physical abuse are more likely to enter abusive relationships in adulthood or use abuse against adult partners than those who were not victims of physical abuse in childhood. Their objective was to alert clinicians to consider childhood abuse in the treatment of men and women because such clients may not mention or recognize the importance of a history of childhood physical abuse as it relates to current domestic violence. Miller (2002) studied the same issue in Britain where she also found a correlation between childhood abuse and domestic violence. She discussed the implications for health care professionals in treating men that possess a history of abuse and current domestic abuse perpetration. Miller focused on the importance of including both contexts of victim and perpetrator in the treatment of men who use abuse. Heyman and Slep's recent research (2002) took the same issue but studied it within the theory of the cycle of violence. The cycle of violence posits that victimized children grow up to victimize others and that violent behavior is learned in the family of origin. The cycle of violence is a frequently cited theory that attempts to explain the etiology of domestic violence. The authors contend that there are many difficulties with the previous research on the cycle of violence theory. Heyman and Slep cite that the poor data-base is due to confusion about the cycle of violence is to different explanations. Therefore the support for the theory is consistent in the research but it is weak. Heyman and Slep's study targeted three forms of the cycle of violence that have never been tested. They studied whether exposure to physical abuse and parental violence increases risk for adults; (a) child abuse perpetration, (b) partner abuse perpetration, and (c) victimization of spouse. The researchers implemented the Conflict Tactics Scale to

6002 men and women who had already been contacted for a national family violence survey in the United States. The Conflict Tactics Scale measures physical abuse. The sample of men and women were either married or co-habiting. Participants also rated questions regarding family of origin violence. The study supported the cycle of violence hypothesis that family of origin violence increased the risk of using physical abuse in adult relationships and also increased the risk of perpetrating child physical abuse and being physically victimized by a partner. The author also warns that having been abused in childhood does not guarantee that a victim will abuse physically in adulthood and that most victims of childhood physical abuse do not perpetrate abuse.

The research on family of origin abuse and its correlation to using abuse in adult relationships appears to be focused on physical abuse, but psychological and verbal abuse have not been measured to the same degree. This represents a limitation in the literature, as it is well known that physical abuse usually occurs in the presence of verbal and psychological abuse. Establishing a correlation between childhood physical abuse and current partner abuse is important. It should inform practice in the area of group intervention for men who use abuse.

Domestic Abuse and Men's Parenting

Parenting and men's experience of using abuse against women partners has not been a focus in the literature around parenting and domestic abuse. Baker and Perilla explain (2001):

No empirical evidence is available as to whether there is an association between men's abusive behaviors and parenting stress and competence. Few studies have explored men's ability as parents because men have not usually been incorporated into research

models regarding domestic violence and parenting outcomes. Even if men do not physically abuse their children they can be defined as psychologically abusive as they are responsible for their children's exposure to violence. As a result men may feel stress associated with parenting as well as feelings of parental incompetence. In addition, feelings of parenting incompetence may result when men lack satisfaction with the quality of their child-rearing skills (Baker & Perilla, 2001, p.1141).

Baker and Perilla hypothesized that perpetrating more physical and psychological abuse would be associated with higher parenting stress and lower parenting competence for fathers and mothers. The research was conducted with Latino couples in the Southeastern United States. Their findings are based on a comparison of men in a domestic violence group with men from a comparison group. They found that men who used abusive behavior feel less competent as parents than did men from the comparison group and felt at a loss in the area of child rearing. This study represents an important attempt to look at the effects of perpetrating abuse on parenting skills and offers support to including this as a component in treatment of men who use abuse.

Domestic Abuse and Workplace Violence

The relationship between domestic violence and workplace violence was an additional key finding in my study. This topic has been rarely studied (Melzer, 2002). In Melzer's (2002) study 13, 017 married couples, co-habiting couples, blended families, and recently married couples aged eighteen to sixty-four responded to a questionnaire. The study incorporated feminist theory, and power and resource theories to examine the potential effects of occupations on men's violence towards spouses. The study found that men tend to work in jobs where abusive behavior is accepted. Melzer cites that men with

a history of childhood abuse tended to self-select jobs where violence is occurring. The author concluded that male workers particularly working in “blue collar” positions bring home the attitudes, skills and behaviors promoted at work. Melzer suggests that more research be conducted in this area for the purposes of prevention and alerting clinicians to environments other than the home where violence may be occurring and affecting behavior elsewhere.

It remains to be seen whether such groups based on typologies of men are useful in intervention programs. However, this study along with recent research in family violence point to the increasing need to look at the individual characteristics of program participants in order for the program to resonate with the participant’s life experiences. This may increase the likelihood of men staying in programs, but also of them being able to work on their own traumatic issues that are directly related to current abusive behaviors.

Outcome and Evaluation Research

Outcome and evaluation research represents the other major category in the intervention literature on men who use abuse. The majority of the research is quantitative and focuses on feminist- cognitive-behavioral group interventions. Even though research in the field has grown in quantity and sophistication over the past two decades, the key question about the effectiveness of interventions remains unanswered. Studies have extensively examined psychological profiles of men, varying counselling formats (groups or couples formats), program length, treatment success based on recidivism rates, and more recently program mode (e.g., psychoeducational, self-help). Cessation of violence and recidivism has been the central focus of most outcome studies. Studies have

consistently reported violence decreasing or ceasing for a proportion of men immediately post-group (54% in Edelson, Miller, Stone, & Chapman, 1985; 67% in Edelson & Grusznuski, 1989) and at follow-up four months to three years after completion of the group (47% in Hamberger & Hastings, 1988 [12 months]; 16% in Dutton, 1986[six months- three years]; 47% in Tolman et. al., 1987 [26 months]). On the whole, evidence suggests that many men are successful at stopping physical abuse for at least a short time subsequent to intervention (Tolman & Edelson, 1995). One important study that went beyond physical abuse was conducted by Harrell (1991) who used a quasi-experimental control group of untreated men. Previous studies have tended to use comparisons of program completers and drop-outs. In addition, Harrell attempted to control for differences in treated and untreated men by adjusting for variables found to be different for the treated and untreated groups including employment status and education. A further strength was the richness of the outcome data gathered. Not only were physical abuse and threats of violence measured, but so too were psychological abuse, conflict resolution skills, beliefs about wife abuse, and the victim's perceived safety. Reports on recidivism were derived from partner reports rather than self reports (Tolman & Edelson, 1995). Harrell's methods represent an attempt to gather a fuller more accurate understanding of how group interventions impact on men's use of abuse but extend this to other outcome factors that involve the victim's safety. Currently, recommendations exist in the literature to include multiple outcome measures for each case studied. These measures follow Harrell's direction to include relationship equity, social functioning, child safety, anti-violence attitudes, sexual abuse, and separation abuse (Bennet & Williams, 2001; Tolman & Edelson, 1995).

Qualitative methods have also been used in research albeit less often than quantitative methods, to evaluate the effectiveness and the impact of group interventions on the participants. Qualitative research designs represent one promising adjunct to established evaluation methods. Traditionally, qualitative investigations are used at the inception of a new area of research to generate theories, models and hypotheses. This discovery-oriented approach was exemplified by Gondolf and Henneken (1987) when they interviewed twelve reformed batterers who had been successful at changing their abusive behavior through participation in a feminist-oriented treatment program. Women partners were contacted to verify that the men had been non-violent for at least one year. The study included interviews using a broad range of open-ended questions covering areas such as job history, education, family of origin, nature of past abuse, help-seeking, and abuse stopping strategies. Based on men's responses to these questions, Gondolf and Henneken drew three major conclusions about the nature of change in abusive behavior. Men explained the development of their abuse in terms of "failed masochism"; they interpreted group counselling as reinforcement for their previous intent and motivation to change; and they described their behavior change as a personal growth experience. Scott and Wolfe (2000) built on Gondolf and Henneken's foundation by also studying variables related to change in abusive behavior through qualitative analyses of interviews with nine reformed men. Men in their research sample attended a feminist, cognitive-behavioral group intervention program for 35 sessions. A man's partner was contacted to verify that the man had been non-violent (physically or psychologically) for six months. Interview analysis was based on the assumption that men's narratives would have coherent links with traditional theories of change in abusive behavior. The goal of the study was to

identify those aspects of men's narratives that were a good fit with the variables and processes implicated by relevant theories (Scott & Wolfe, 2000). Four variables were found to contribute to change for more than 75% of the men: increased responsibility for their past abusive behaviors, development of empathy for their partners' victimization, reduced dependency on their partners, and increased communication skills. Scott and Wolfe were able to link men's subjective experiences to existing theories of battering which gives us some indication of a cause for the change in behaviors.

Pandya and Gingerich (2002) conducted a microethnographic study of a group for men who use abuse. They provided information on how the men described themselves and their relationships including how the men were impacted by the group, a description of the change process, and how the men implemented changes in intimate relationships. The authors presented the biographies of the men who participated and found through theme analysis that the men moved through the change process at different rates depending on the barriers they had to overcome to engage with the therapy. They concluded that more individualized services would be helpful to engage men in therapy.

The use of qualitative methodology has the advantage of providing in-depth descriptions and explanations of processes while still maintaining connections to the rich body of literature developed in quantitative research studies. Qualitative studies are important because of the insight they can provide in helpful descriptions of group treatment and experiences they can offer the field. However, studies describing perceptions of program participants and partners are largely absent in men's program research (Gondolf, 2000). Dankwort and Austin (1999) recommend qualitative methods to probe victims' and perpetrators' accounts of program services in order to inform

programs, but also to ensure the safety of victims (Dankwort & Austin, 1999; Gondolf, 1997).

Limitations of the Current Research

To date, many questions still remain unanswered that represent gaps in the research. Despite many research efforts to understand why men use abuse against their partner's this fundamental understanding is not known. Several theories exist, but do not sufficiently explain the etiology of domestic abuse on their own. However, when these theories are combined the context for understanding why men abuse broadens. This is an area of the research that has yet to expand, but is moving in this direction.

An additional gap in the research exists around understanding why men do stop, continue, and/or stop and then resume using abusive behaviors again. The research has found that men can and do change within treatment, however why they change is not fully understood. Methodological limitations in the quantitative and qualitative research serve to complicate gaining a fuller understanding. Dankwort and Austin (1999) summarized these methodological limitations. They include, (a) bias in assigning subjects; (b) difficulty in isolating variables being tested from other factors possibly accounting for change; (c) high sample attrition rates; (d) limited validity of data sources (e.g., crime reports, self-reports, partner reports); (e) inadequate instruments measuring change; and, (f) lack of definitional consistency about what constitutes criteria for success. Additionally, classic research designs that include control and comparison groups are few due to ethical and practical issues. Consequently, it is difficult to determine whether the reported effects are due to the program or other factors.

The literature does suggest that group treatment is effective in teaching men positive ways of relating to each other and their families by creating a safe environment where men support each other, listen to one another, and where men learn non-violent ways of communicating. Currently, there is no definition for what a successful outcome is. Success must be defined in order to understand if a program is working. Great difficulties surround this task including defining success based on the length of time a man remains non-abusive. Success also must consider the type of abuse; has physical abuse stopped, but verbal has continued? These questions are integral to understanding if programs are achieving their desired goals. These tasks are ongoing in the research.

Program Evaluation

With the proliferation of North American programs during the past decade for men who use abuse in the United States and Canada during the past decade, there has been a call for a broadening of program evaluation to determine how to best improve or standardize programs (Dankwort & Austin, 1999; Gondolf, 2000, 1997). What has been referred to as “consumer-based assessment” in the education field may contribute to a more comprehensive evaluation of these programs (Gondolf, 2000). In program evaluation, a consumer-based assessment focused on the recommendations of the program participants. A few studies of men’s program participants have summarized their perceptions of program impact. The studies conducted by Gondolf and Henneken (1987) and Pandya and Gingerich (2002) described earlier, provide valuable information on the group experience and how this experience helped men stop their abusive behaviors. In another study, perceptions of program drop-outs were examined (Brown, O’Leary, & Feldbau, 1997). Follow-up assessments with program drop-outs from a

couples program for self-referring men were conducted to obtain clients' reasons for termination. For men and women the most frequently stated reason for drop-out was treatment-related; thirty-six percent of the men and 43% of the women noted dissatisfaction with the content or structure of the treatment program. The authors suggest that more individualized attention and congruence with the goals of clients are needed to make batterer programs more palatable to the participants (Gondolf, 2000). Gondolf (2000) in an exploratory consumer study, summarized the responses of men who use abuse and their female partners to an open-ended question asking for recommendations for men's programs. As part of a multi-site evaluation 594 men and 616 women partners responded three and six months after program-intake. The results indicated that men's recommendations were more likely to call for more supportive counselling, and women's recommendations were more likely to relate to safety information (Gondolf, 2000). In sum, these findings suggest that consumer feedback can inform program development and help social workers improve relationships with their clients. Recent research publications such as Pandya and Gingerich (2002), Gondolf (2000), Scott and Wolfe (2000), Dankwort and Austin (1999) and Dobash and Dobash (1998) recommend consumer feedback as an essential component in understanding how programs can improve services to men and their families.

Summary

The literature on group intervention clearly suggests that the research needs to move in a new direction. We know that men stop violent behavior for some period of time following cognitive-behavioral interventions that are feminist-based in their

theoretical orientations. However, this model does not include other theories of abuse that may work as successfully or in association with feminist theories to address the problem of abuse differently. Multi-causal, multi-modal interventions are just beginning to be utilized in an effort to address the problem. The current evaluation literature on group intervention recommends evaluating the efficacy of these interventions for their utility in addressing issues such as characteristics of men who use abuse, and establishing cause for measured change, key factors in designing men's treatment programs. Along with the move towards multi-modal interventions is the call for more comprehensive research designs that are longer-term, compare data between programs, and incorporate qualitative methods to address some missing information, and/or work in association with quantitative methods to expand our understanding of interventions for men who use abuse. Current research being conducted in the field is moving towards consumer feedback focusing on program consumers and documenting what is helpful about treatment programs and subsequent changes in abusive behavior. Some findings in this study point to significant issues that men deal with that also need to be further researched in order to aid clinicians in the assessment and treatment process and also for the purpose of domestic violence prevention.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand men's experience of participating in a treatment group for men who use abuse and to examine the impact of the group experience on individual men. An additional goal was to understand how the men implemented changes in abusive behavior since completing the group. At the conceptual stage of the study I had the task of deciding what type of methodology I would use – qualitative, quantitative, or a blended approach. I decided to use a purely qualitative approach to the topic initially because (a) I had not implemented qualitative methods before and wanted to hone my research skills and acquire this experience; (b) qualitative methods are consistent with my own theoretical, philosophical and clinical leanings; and (c) I was very interested in the men's narratives and felt that this would be best achieved through qualitative methods of one-to-one interviewing.

The principal advantage of qualitative research is that it is emic. That is, it seeks to capture the point of view of those involved rather than imposing external categories or ways of understanding (Padgett, 1998). Qualitative methods are inherently inductive; they seek to discover, not test explanatory theories. They are naturalistic, favoring observation and interviewing of respondents where the researcher and respondent create a dialogue-like context for the research. "Qualitative studies also seek to convey the complex worlds of respondents in a holistic manner using thick description of a pieced – together, tightly woven whole greater than the sum of its parts" (Padgett, 1998, p.3).

It is my opinion that the use of qualitative research methods in my thesis allowed for a rich and comprehensive understanding of group members' experience of participating in the group, the impact of the intervention on their lives and how they implemented skills and tools learned in the group. This study focused on feedback from the men themselves therefore, acquiring personal narratives of the experience of the group and its impact on their lives over the last six to eight-teen months was essential. Qualitative interviews in research with men who use abuse have provided detailed information on the experience of treatment. In turn this information has affected the content and implementation of programs for men who use abuse by basing interventions at least in some part on the consumers experience of what has been helpful in creating changes in abusive behaviors, and how these changes were implemented. Qualitative research in this area investigates beyond abusive behavior alone to life experiences and family dynamics that are equally important to address in treatment settings.

Research Setting

This research took place in a group program for men who use abuse in Western Canada. The program is now approaching its seventeenth anniversary. Throughout this time the program has been providing individual and group services for women survivors of domestic abuse, men who use abuse, and children who witness abuse. Men enter the groups voluntarily and must complete an intake interview before entering a preparatory education group (Prep group) for at least six to eight weeks. The Prep group utilizes an educational format and focuses on anger management techniques. At this point men are asked for their permission to contact their partners to notify them that their male partner is involved with the program. If men do not consent to partner contact they are not

accepted into the program. Men who have no outstanding criminal charges are then accepted into the First Stage men's group which lasts for thirty sessions over sixteen weeks. The group is guided by a feminist theoretical perspective and utilizes a cognitive-behavioral intervention. Groups are co-facilitated by a male/female team. At the completion of the First Stage group men enter an open group called The Alumni Group. It meets once per month and focuses on continued support through men sharing experiences. This group is facilitated by an individual staff person, and is more group led than the First Stage group with the content of the sessions being decided by the group members. Men also have the option of entering the Second Stage group that meets once per week for sixteen weeks. This group's focus is on relationships and integrating the men's newly learned tools and skills into relationships. A parenting group is also offered that men can participate in voluntarily.

Sample Selection and Recruitment

The sample for this study consisted of nine men who completed the men's group, also called the First Stage Group in 2000 or 2001. The aim of this study was to interview men who have completed the men's group and have had an opportunity to experience any impact the group intervention may have had on their lives.

Due to the fact that the group participants are contained within a single agency, a sample of convenience was selected for the study. Potential participants were initially informed about my research by a letter of endorsement written by the facilitator of the group in which they participated in. Appendix "A" provides the exact letter of recruitment sent to the participants. This letter included a brief description of the

research study, who I am, the purpose of the study, and emphasized the voluntary nature of participation. My phone number was included in the letter with the option to contact me to set up an interview. Phone calls began to slowly roll in and I began the interview process. The recruitment process was slow going and frustrating at times. There was a lull of a couple of weeks without hearing from anyone and then suddenly a few calls would come and finally after all the interviews were transcribed and the phases of data analyses were completed I reached the point of saturation. During the second-level coding phase of analyses the data became repetitive as the same ideas began to emerge and fit well into each category. At the point that no new information was emerging from coding, it was clear that the data was sufficient to address the research problem.

Potential participants were also recruited through the Alumni group. The Alumni group consists of men who are referred to as “alumni members” who have also completed the First-Stage men’s group and who attended the Alumni group monthly. I provided information to the facilitator of that group and he in turn spoke to the Alumni group giving the group members my phone number for anyone who was interested in participating. The Alumni group facilitator let the group members know that this was simply to inform them about the study and offer them an opportunity to participate. My whole recruitment process would not have been possible without the help of the program’s staff people. I felt fairly reliant on them to aid in the recruitment process.

The interviews were conducted outside of the agency that houses the men’s program at another Counselling Centre. Initial phone contacts were initiated by the men and in the case that they wished to participate in the study some screening questions were included to determine whether or not they were appropriate for the study. Men were

excluded from the study if the following issues are present: (a) Men who were currently experiencing a mental health crisis. A mental health crisis was defined as current difficulty with daily physical and psychological functioning due to lack of coping because of mental health issues that may or may not include suicide ideation, and (b) men who disclosed plans to harm themselves or others. No men were rejected to participate in the study. All the men who contacted me participated in the study. Men with suicidal and/or homicidal intent would have been reported to the police as stipulated by law. At the point of the initial phone contact no men were rejected from the study and no men were given referrals for counselling. My experience of the initial phone contacts was very pleasant. The men seemed more than willing to participate and were very flexible with their schedules. Most of the men asked for a description of the study and had very few questions about it.

Data Collection

Data were collected through one-to-one interviews. A consent form (see Appendix B) was provided to the participants before the interviews (see also “Ethical Issues” section for detailed description). At the outset of the interviews I gave the participants a few minutes alone to read the consent form and answered any questions at that time. All of the participants appeared very easy going, and I spent a few minutes going over the purpose of the study again and engaging in general “ice breaker” conversation.

An interview guide is a list of questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview (see Appendix C). An interview guide is prepared in order to

make sure that the same basic information is obtained from a number of people by covering the same material (Patton, 1980). The interview guide for this study was formatted as a standardized set of open-ended questions. The interview schedule includes questions that are written out exactly the way they are to be asked during the interview. Careful consideration was given before the interviews about how to word each question. Probing questions were placed in the interview at appropriate places. Probing questions are defined as questions that are interjected during an interview that allow the interviewer to expand on points of the interviewee. Examples of probing questions included: "Can you tell me more about that?", "How did you do that?" , "What was that like for you?". The basic purpose of a standardized interview guide with open-ended questions is to minimize interviewer effects by asking the same question of each respondent (Patton, 1980). For me, the interview experience was the high point of conducting the study. The interviews began in April, 2002 and ended in July, 2002. Each interview was approximately one hour in length and were tape-recorded. Prior to commencing the interviews I engaged the men in some conversation and thanked them for their participation. I found this initial dialogue very helpful for myself, and the participant to feel more comfortable with the interview and in rapport building. The men answered the questions at length, and spoke in candid detail about their experience in the group and the many aspects of their lives that were affected by the use of abusive behaviors and the change in behaviors. I found that as the interviews progressed, I used more probing questions and I began to observe common themes in the interviews. At the completion of the interviews more casual conversation occurred with all of the men. All of the men expressed a sense of pride at having participated in the study and having

accomplished changes in abusive behaviors. Some men expressed some difficulty with family issues and were interested in pursuing counselling. I provided referrals for two of the participants who requested them.

Data Analysis

My data analysis methods are based on the work of Tutty, Rothery, and Grinnell (1996), and Padgett (1998). According to Tutty, Rothery, & Grinnell, “the central purpose of data analysis in qualitative studies is to sort and organize through the masses of information acquired during data collection in such a way that the themes and interpretations that emerge from the process address the original research problem” (1996, p. 90). The data collected from the interviews was tape recorded and transcribed verbatim in order to allow the context of the conversation to provide as much meaning as possible. I used a journal to record category and coding criteria and procedure. This process continued through the analysis and results phase. It is important to carefully trace every step of the analysis phase as it lends to credibility and reliability of the results. If this process is done efficiently an outsider should be able to replicate the analysis process achieving similar results. The interview data was analyzed through a process of content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic process of coding, categorizing and locating themes within the data. Coding begins at the point when similarities and differences between data segments or meaning units are noticed in the data (Tutty, et al, 1996). The primary task of coding is to identify and label relevant categories of data first concretely (first level-coding) and then abstractly (in second-level coding). Tutty, et.al., (1996) describe the data analysis approach that I am using in this study. They describe the five tasks of first-level coding: “{1} identifying meaning units, {2} assigning category names

to groups of similar meaning units, {3} assigning codes to categories, {4} refining and recognizing codings, and {5} deciding when to stop” (Tutty, et al, 1996, p.100).

The process of identifying meaning units was a time-consuming and rigorous task. First, after reading the transcripts several times I went over the entire set of transcripts highlighting the data bits that were relevant. During this process potential categories were mentally noted. I then manually cut out the data bits (meaning units) and placed them in a pile. Meaning units consisted of a few words, to complete paragraphs. The next task was to begin to form categories through the process of constant comparison. Constant comparative analysis (Padgett, 1998; Tutty, Rothery, & Grinnell, 1996) was used here by placing meaning units of data with the same characteristics in the same category with the same code. The process of constant comparison was one of the most demanding tasks of the analysis. In this process one must decide which meaning unit goes where, and many of the meaning units were very similar, yet different in meaningful ways that I wanted to capture in my analysis. Meaning units that were different in important ways were put into a different category and given another code (Tutty, et. al., 1996; Padgett, 1998; Patton, 1980). In some cases meaning units fit into more than one category. These units were flagged as such and I tentatively placed them in a new category. When this process was completed I had twenty-six categories that were named and coded. Some of the categories were very general with headings like “ Initial Goals ”, “Group Process” and some were more specific with sub-categories such as “How I Connected With the Program”, and “ Changes I’ve Noticed About Myself”, with sub-categories such as “ Self- esteem, “Cognitive” and “Behavior”. The categories

naturally emerged out of the interview questions. I also had a miscellaneous pile of data bits that I read again to determine if they fit in any identified category.

Initially I found that I needed a highly organized system to manage the great volume of data. I decided to use a hanging file system to contain my data bits and labeled the files with the category name. I then read through my entire set of transcripts, coding the appropriate meaning units with the category name. This process was really a turning point in the analysis as I could see new categories emerging and got a sense that my categories were reflective of the content. At this time I also met with my advisor which I found very helpful as a reality check and a confirmation that I was headed in the right direction.

I then moved on to second –level coding where Tutty, et. al., (1996) describe, The focus of the analysis shifts from the context of the interviewee to the context of the categories. The major task in second-level coding is to identify similarities and differences between the categories in an attempt to detect relationships. The two tasks of second-level coding are {1} retrieving meaning units into categories, and {2} comparing categories. (p. 104)

I again went through the transcripts manually cutting and pasting the coded parts of the transcripts. I again placed the data bits that formed the content of the categories into the hanging file folder system and labeled the file with the code name. This process ended up being a more concise system of classification where the categories were now more refined where some categories were amalgamated and new categories were discovered. For example, categories such as “ Tools and Skills Learned” were

amalgamated into the major category of “ Group Impact” and was eventually a sub-theme of that category. Some categories were amalgamated such as “View of Self” and “Patience”. These categories were viewed as important but were not enough on their own, they eventually became amalgamated with “ Group Impact”. The result was fewer but more concise categories. Many new categories were also created through the process of second-level coding such as “ Initial understanding of the group”, and “Partner having Difficulty With Changes”. The new categories were more concise and I felt confident that this stage of the second-level coding process was successful. The next step was to compare the categories. I went through all of the categories data bit, by data bit, making sure that they fit in the right categories and that the content of the categories was reflective of the name, themes and sub-themes that were beginning to emerge. As I compared categories relationships between them became apparent. For example, some categories had similar content, and could be combined with one name with sub-categories. The category of “Group Process” ended up containing five sub-themes. Patterns were also identified where one category routinely preceded another. For example, “ How I Connected With Evolve” always accompanied “circumstances in the relationship that led to seeking help”. Some categories logically fit together such as “Demographics”. I also noticed that at the completion of second-level coding the “miscellaneous” pile of data bits contained much less and outliers were identified that represented important pieces on their own.

At this point in the analysis themes and subthemes began to emerge based on the comparison and integration of categories. Finding themes involved locating patterns that repeatedly appear in the data. For example, the category “How I Connected With the

Program”, always preceded “Circumstances in the Relationship that Led to Seeking Help”. The major themes of “Group Impact”, “Group Process”, and “The Man I Am Now” contained several sub-themes that worked together each in its own unique way to comprise a theme. Some categories that were created in first-level coding became themes on their own, but in most cases themes emerged directly from combining several categories that revolved around the same concept. This was a very exciting time in the study and the next task was to write a report that would accurately reflect the process.

Rigor

Qualitative analyses involve issues of rigor, credibility and trustworthiness (Padgett, 1998; Tutty, et. al., 1996). Rigor refers to the degree to which the qualitative study’s findings are authentic and its interpretations are credible. Threats to trustworthiness and credibility include reactivity, researcher bias and respondent bias (Padgett, 1998). Issues of trustworthiness and credibility were addressed in this study primarily by keeping a research journal that included notes on the method used in my study, and notes on issues of credibility. This is called an audit trail (Tutty, Rothery, & Grinnell, 1996; Padgett, 1998).

Leaving an audit trail means adopting a spirit of openness and documenting each step taken in data collection and analysis. The components of an audit trail include the raw data along with analytical memos that describe category, coding and thematic criteria.... Although the audit trail is not intended for exact replication of a research study, it does enhance *reproducibility*, that is, another researcher is able to use it to reproduce and verify the findings (Padgett, 1998, p.101).

I also kept a personal journal that recorded personal experiences for the duration of the study. This journal provided an outlet for me to examine my own biases. My journal was also a place to process my reaction and experiences to interviews. The journal was very helpful to reflect upon in the report writing stage as it kept the experience fresh.

Member checking was also utilized in my study to help add credibility and trustworthiness to my results. This study is focused on the words of the participants and their experience therefore allowing them to give feedback on the results is essential. Member checking involved contacting the research participants once I completed the data analysis phase and before presenting thematic results. The participants were asked to check my results and verify that they were a truthful reflection of their experience (Padgett, 1998). Four of the nine participants agreed to this process. Two of the four men contacted me with feedback on the findings. One of the men gave me feedback via a telephone conversation where he stated that he felt the findings reflected his experience of participating in the program, his journey of change, and the experience of being a man who uses abuse in his intimate relationship. He stated that he enjoyed getting perspectives of the other men, particularly where the man appeared to be still blaming his partner. He stated that reading his and others' experiences in "black and white" was interesting and helpful. The other man who contacted me echoed these sentiments adding that as he read the findings he realized he had changed in other ways since the interview and felt like adding on to his experience. These conversations with the men were highly

enjoyable and provided a very good way to check if the findings resonated with the participants.

Peer support and debriefing are also crucial components that were utilized at all times throughout the study. Keeping in mind that all the participants' identities were to be kept confidential I debriefed the research experience extensively with my student peers and in turn I provided support to them through their graduate research processes. This process was very helpful in "grounding" me and reminded me that struggles are normal for a student researcher. Sharing suggestions and debriefing the process of research contributed to the clarity and consistency of the whole research process.

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations exist with my study. Due to the fact that my thesis will be published and held in public collections of the University of Manitoba, issues of protection of identities, and protection of participants' right to withdraw from the study are important ones to consider. Informed consent occurred with the group participants signing consent forms (see appendix B). The information contained in the forms respected levels of the participants' comprehension and was discussed in lay language. A description of the study was provided including the purpose, usefulness, expected benefits, and methods (Canadian Oral History Association, 1992). Participants were also informed of their right to refuse to participate, or withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were also informed of their right to ask questions about the study, and discuss this with me. Confidentiality was outlined explaining that any potentially identifying information would be changed through the use of non-identifying quotations.

This included names, occupations, family information, geographic information, and race and religious beliefs. Facts and details of incidents of domestic violence and other pertinent features were also changed. I went over the forms with the study participants, ensuring that they understood them, and answering any questions. Considering the sensitive nature of the participants' information, I took special care before the interviews to ensure that the purpose of the information is for my thesis, and would not be used for any purpose beyond this. Tapes and transcripts were erased at the end of the study. Participants were informed that any current threats of harm to themselves, others, or child abuse would be reported to the authorities as stipulated by law. On the whole, the participants had very few questions in regard to the consent procedure and their rights. Overall the participants seemed uninterested in the consent form and there were no issues in this area. Participants were also informed that no staff members would have any knowledge of who participated in the study and that participation in the study would in no way affect any services they receive from the program. Here again the participants had no concerns regarding staff members, in fact most of the participants had already let one of the group facilitators know that they were participating.

CHAPTER FOUR

DESCRIPTION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

The primary goal of this study was to obtain an understanding from men of the experience and impact of participating in the men's group. The study also examined what was helpful and meaningful for the men through their experience in the group. Indications of what is helpful about the group and how the group fits in with other family violence services are also examined. This chapter will provide a description of the findings of the study focusing on participants' responses to the interview questions. The following themes constitute the findings of the study.

- The Kind of Man I Was
- Goals
- Past and Present Circumstances That Led to Connecting With the Program
- Initial Experience of Group
- Group Process
- Group Impact
- Goal Achievement
- The Kind of Man I Am Now
- Helping Other Men
- Staying Connected
- Partner Having Difficulty Accepting Changes

The content included in each of the subheadings reflects the responses of the participants and the themes discussed during the interview. The demographics of the sample is described including information relating to age, living situation, marital status, education and children. A discussion of the themes begins with The Kind of Man I Was which describes the men before they entered the Evolve Program and the types of abuse they used towards family members and co-workers. The theme Goals examines participant's goals for entering the group. In the section on Past and Present Circumstances that Led to Connecting with the Program circumstances in the relationship and past issues that led to entering the program are discussed. This theme also includes information about how the men made the initial contact with the program. Initial Experience of Group includes information on how they experienced the initial weeks in the Program. The Group Process section of the findings describes men's experience of mutual aid, and what was helpful and meaningful in the group context. The section, Group Impact focuses on how the group affected various areas of the participants' lives and their use of abusive behaviors. Goal Achievement discusses the participants' feelings on whether and how they achieved their goals and the work left to do. The Kind of Man I am Now section discusses the men's descriptions of themselves now and the changes they have seen in their use of abusive behaviors. The theme of Helping Other Men refers to how the men describe their desire to help other men change. The theme of Staying Connected is explored with participants describing the importance of continued contact with Evolve after completion of the First Stage group. Finally, the theme of Partner's Difficulty Accepting Changes examines the participants' description of partner relationships after going through the program and their partners' difficulty accepting their changes.

The focus of this study is on the participants' experiences in their own words, from their perspectives. The voices of the participants have been used as often as possible in describing the findings of this study. Comments made by group members that reveal personal thoughts and statements are presented as individual statements.

It was my experience that all of the nine men interviewed were very open, descriptive and generous with their answers to the interview questions. The data provided here is rich and thickly descriptive. The participants' initial presentation was sometimes nervous, but within a few minutes participants appeared comfortable and spoke on the topic with ease. Participants' quotations appear in italics.

Following a description of the sample demographic, the findings are divided into three sections: 1. Life Before the Group and the Initial Experience of Participating in Evolve, 2. The Group Experience: Process and Impact, and 3. The experiences of the men after the group.

The findings are represented by theme headings following the section heading.

Sample Demographic

Ages ranged from 37 to 52 years of age. Seven out of the nine men had separated from their partners and were living on their own. Relationship length ranged from four to thirty years. Seven men had been married to their partners and two men were currently in common-law marriages. Participants' employment status was varied: four men worked in professions requiring university degrees and five men worked in skilled trade jobs. In the area of education, four men had university degrees, two men had completed some high school and three men completed high school. Six of the men had one to four

children, ages four to twenty-eight years of age. Three men did not have children. All men with children were married to their partners at some point

Section 1: Life Before the Group and The Initial Experience of Participating in the Program

This first section of the findings focuses on how men described themselves before entering the program. Men describe in depth what was going on in their relationships with intimate partner's that led to them seeking help, how they connected with the program, they describe their initial goals, and what this initial group experience was like.

The Kind of Man I was

This theme focused on information that emerged as an answer to the question "what forms of abuse would you say were a problem for you before you entered group?" In response to this question the men described themselves before entering the program and what forms of abuse they were using at home and in the workplace. The following responses describe how the men saw themselves before entering the program:

"I was demeaning, I was full of putdowns, I was verbally abusive, controlling, just an asshole. I was a terrible person. I was angry an awful lot."

"I was never aware of my feelings at any given time... I had a tendency to use violence and intimidation as a way of control in my life. This is stuff I realized through the program. I never took into account people's feelings. It was about me

and what was good for me. As a result of that, when I entered into my marriage, she was not aware of the kind of person I was, so over the years I tended to be very controlling at times.”

“I was struggling just to try and figure out who I was and get myself back, start raising my self-esteem- a lot of shame, a lot of guilt, a lot of emotion.”

“I wasn’t happy with the way my life was. People around me weren’t happy. I was making them miserable- that’s my wife and son. I wasn’t happy with myself. I knew something was bothering me. I just didn’t know why I was angry all the time. I knew it wasn’t right to channel my anger towards my wife and son, so I just knew I had to make some changes in my life. I didn’t want to be angry anymore”

“The way I see it my life was spiraling with substance abuse, mostly alcohol, and the year before I entered treatment and even I noticed it was spiraling. It was getting worse. I was drinking much heavier, more callous at home. I was impossible.”

All men described themselves as using verbal and psychological abuse and two of the men described using physical abuse against their partners and children.

Men reported how they used verbal and psychological abuse:

"I used violence as a means of communication. I never hit or argued but I was a door slammer, a wall puncher, and when I got angry I got right in her face and screamed and gave her the look. It was a terrible way to be."

"In the past I put partners down like the big bully on the block."

"I'm a verbal abuser, psychologically abusive in the sense of twisting words and playing games with my partner, and verbally. I'm not a physical person, but the verbal abuse and the cutting words and the demeaning actions and attitudes. That's what I did within the home, not only to my partner but to the children as well."

"I was a verbally abusive husband. I would degrade my wife, I would use a lot of name-calling, I brought her to the point where she was starting to curve the truth of her own realities at times, and I did that through psychological battering basically. You know, "you're an idiot, you don't know what you're talking about, how could you be so stupid." Very abusive, a lot of profanity, a lot of aggression."

"Home was the only place I seemed to unpack it. But it was control and manipulation, especially around my drinking."

“I was so verbally aggressive; swearing and speaking up, and pointing; very bad emotional abuse. Most of the time I tried to put her down. In the same way I was having affairs. This is a kind of emotional abuse.”

“It was harder with my partner to be more supportive and less critical and that’s one of the biggest areas where I stumbled was always criticizing my partner for the things that she did or didn’t do, and it was a no-win situation for her, because if she did do something and did it well, I would find what she didn’t do and pick on that.”

Men described using verbal abuse as a way to deal with anger and place blame on their partners. Many men describe “feeling angry all the time” and feeling they had few internal resources to manage the anger and immediately used abusive behaviors without thinking about other ways of dealing with emotions.

Men described their use of physical abuse:

“If I could punch my way out of a situation it was easy, or if I could scream and call her names that was easy.”

“I have a violent, quick temper, and I was abusing my wife in different ways- emotional, physical, and sometimes sexual abuse too.”

“ There was physical abuse, but it was from retaliation and self-defense. She felt that I was physically abusive because when she hit me it got to the point where I started hitting back because I wanted to stop her from hitting me.”

“About two years ago my wife and I had an argument and I hit her a lot, and that was the final straw for me. I hadn't had any violence in my relationship for a long time and I thought I was over it, and then this happened and that was it. It was either get help or she probably would have left me.”

“Before I finished my probation I had another fight with my daughter and I was charged with assault.”

Physical abuse was less prevalent than verbal abuse in this sample. In all cases verbal and psychological abuse accompanied physical abuse.

Men also described different types of psychological abuse. This abuse was manifested in controlling behaviors exemplified below where men described control over money:

“Control over money because I would get annoyed a lot of times when we'd go grocery shopping and we'd get home and there would be nothing to eat. I would turn around and say, “we're not buying this. We need food on the table, not this junk.”

Men also described how they used jealousy as a form of abuse:

“I guess there was a certain amount of jealousy developing because she wouldn’t tell me where she was, so I would become jealous and then you would start having ideas happening in your head.”

“I was so jealous of her, and jealousy is a kind of control and power. I didn’t know that at the time.”

“Some jealousy came into play there because of low self-esteem.”

Men viewed jealousy as a reflection of their low self-esteem and need to control their partners. Men stated that their partners were being faithful to the relationship at the time but that they chose to interpret events as “cheating” or looked for instances where they could accuse their partner of infidelity. Men described jealousy as a controlling behavior that they clearly identified as abuse.

The majority of participants also described use of abusive behaviors as a problem at work.

“A lot of times I wasn’t supportive of their [co-workers’] actions, especially in the work that I do, because I found myself in a leader role, and I struggled with that for quite awhile. I wanted to control what they were doing and get things done my way. I took that into the home as well.”

“At work as well. I’m a very critical individual. I have perfectionist tendencies and always want things in a certain way and it’s my way. My attitude was ‘don’t I run the world?’ So how come things aren’t the way I want them to be? I was critical of my co-workers.”

“I guess I’d snap at somebody at work”

“The whole environment there is winning through intimidation. Some of my problems with my behavior are that you’re using every four-letter word you can think of, and you have supervisors that use this type of language. I’ve been in arguments and we’ve been nose-to-nose just screaming at each other. So I never got reprimanded for being abusive. That was the thing to do.”

“Unforeseen to me, when you are at work it takes a lot of energy to participate at that kind of level and it was draining to me because I’d come home and be tired, and I would be escalated.”

Out of the nine participants, six of them identified using abusive behaviors at work. This finding is interesting as the men related it to the use of abusive behaviors in the home. The workplace was important to the men in two ways, firstly, in some cases the men were abusive at work and secondly, the stress with the workplace contributed to violence that occurred at home. Men stated that they would feel escalated or act aggressively towards

their partners after work. Many participants described their work places as hostile environments where verbal abuse was the accepted form of communication. Men described bringing home some hostility, but the difference here in some cases was that this would at times be manifested in physical abuse against the family. Physical abuse was not used by any of the men at work; only in the home environment. This apparent relationship between workplace and domestic violence was unexpected and points to the importance of further investigation in this area.

Goals

This section of the findings examines the participants' goals when they entered the program. Men described their goals in terms of initial goals and goals that developed as they became involved in the program where they were learning more about themselves and what was realistic for them to achieve. Almost all the men (seven out of nine) stated that their initial goal was to "save my marriage":

"Well my original goal when I started group was to get back into my home and back into my role as husband and father, and having my family around me. I really didn't have a goal that was more general in terms of helping myself become better. I actually had goals that were very much role-related in terms of reestablishing myself in a particular position in society and, in this case, in my family and a relationship with my partner. Those were my initial goals. They changed."

“To save my marriage, and to change. What form that change was going to take I really didn’t know. I knew I wanted to stop the abuse that I was doing, but what the real end result was going to be, I was just grasping for some help and not knowing really what the end result was going to be.”

“My initial reason to be very blunt and honest was that I was hoping to get back into the home with my partner and kids. That was my initial reason. I had hoped that by going through group and making changes in my life that that would actually happen. It hasn’t happened, and it’s not a disappointment to me either, but that was my original goal, which changed”.

Along with the initial motivation to reconcile with their partners, men also expressed goals in terms of learning skills that would help with dealing with anger, increased self-awareness, and increased coping skills:

“ I got into the program because I wanted to learn how to handle conflicts. I sure didn’t like the way I was doing it before. It got me more trouble than it was worth.”

“My biggest goals were regaining my credibility, rebuilding my relationship with my children, and just feeling good about myself.”

“It’s been my goal all along, and it’s just that I want to be able to cope in the world. It’s been an ongoing thing for me trying to be a better person because I didn’t like the way things were.”

“I wanted to get control in my life, I didn’t want to be angry anymore.”

“I started being honest and open with myself because I came to the group to help myself and get self-control.”

It appears that men were invested in the group for reasons of staying in the relationship which does not necessarily entail change. Men may have hoped that just being in the group would be enough for their partners to allow them back into the relationship.

However, reasons involving change in behaviors that didn’t revolve around what partners wanted seem more likely to accomplish change. These reasons were secondary to reconciliation with partners initially. This changed for most men as they began to focus more on their roles in the relationship.

Past and Present Circumstances in the Relationship that Led to Connecting with the Program

In the interview men were asked about the circumstances in the relationship that led to them seeking help. Many important sub-themes emerged from this section of the data. Men spoke of abuse experienced in childhood and what was happening in the relationship that prompted them to get help. Men also described how they initially connected with Evolve and whose decision it was to enter the program.

Out of the nine men, five of them described experiencing abuse in childhood, or stated that they learned this mode of communication by witnessing abuse between parents. They saw the group as beneficial to increasing their understanding of their experiences in childhood and how this has been carried over to adult relationships. Men also stated that they are learning new ways of approaching relationships and working through anger.

Understanding how the past fits in

"I grew up with a lot of abuse around me which is part of it, and I was a victim of it, and so on and so forth, so I realized something was wrong and I have been spending most of my adult life trying to change and be a better person."

"Now I understand why my parents abused me physically and emotionally."

"Circumstances from my childhood were not very nice. I battled with self-esteem up and down throughout my life, so there's problems there."

"I'm kind of in a mixed up way of life, I was brought up one way and I'm being told I can do something else. I was shown one way of doing things and now I'm changing. That's no excuse, but it's good to know that what I did was wrong. It's not good to know that, but you have to know what you did was wrong in order to move on."

"With my abusive upbringing, well, I didn't want to go that way."

“Sometimes guys spoke about the past experience of a kind of abuse that happened in childhood and I realize that I have a lot of abuse from my parents and I said, ‘oh well, I am not alone. This can happen to anyone.’”

Making a connection between abuse experienced in childhood and men’s abusive behavior provided some healing for the men on their journey towards change. It is here where the experience of being victimized is important and directly relates to current abusive behaviors. This finding is interesting as it provides a different context in which to view the men. Viewing the men as victims does not excuse abuse but widens the context in which abusive behaviors are learned and allowed to thrive.

Desperation and the search for help

Circumstances in the relationship that led to the participants seeking help varied slightly, but many men had common experiences. The overwhelming response was “desperation”, as their partners asked them to leave, and a desire to change behavior. Seven out of the nine participants’ partners asked them to leave the home. Two of these men were charged with assault. The other two men accessed help while continuing in the relationship with their partners.

“ Desperation ”

“I had to do something. It was a sort of desperation attempt because I wasn’t getting any better by myself.”

“ I threatened her. I said something I shouldn't have said. I told her I was going to stick her in the mouth if she didn't shut up. I don't carry firearms, but I was that angry. She had had enough at that point and said that she wanted a divorce. She asked me to leave. I was desperate to retain my marriage at the same time not taking into account my wife's feelings. I was desperate to do anything and I thought, 'Okay, I'll go for counselling,' not really thinking about what it was I needed.”

“I was asked to leave my home by my partner, so I agreed to that. I left home peaceably but under emotional turmoil.”

“I saw something in this person, meaning my partner, as being someone who I would like a long lasting relationship with. She was kind of different from other partners I've been with. I was in a good space and I was ready for change.”

“ You could have told me about the program a year earlier and I would have said I didn't need it. It wasn't until I was in crisis that I realized I really needed something. That's the time I was ready to ask for some help.”

“ My abuse cost me my relationship with my children; it's cost me everything. I needed to find better ways to deal with that.”

Here, men discussed a sense of desperation for a few reasons; the threat of the relationship ending, wanting to change for themselves and their partners and feeling certain that things will not get better until they get some help. Again the motivation seemed to revolve around partners and saving the relationship. This is certainly a recurring theme in the initial stages of entering the program.

Men talked about connecting with the program in different ways. Most of the men did not know about the program until their partner or a family member alerted them. Men also found out about the program by doing their own research. All of the participants called the program voluntarily.

“I was trying to figure out what she wanted and not getting anywhere or any answers. So, her mom gave me a number and I asked, “ what is it?” She said, “ Well, phone it.” And it was the number for Klinik. I went there basically to save my marriage.”

“ I was able to phone in. It was during summer and I was very depressed and frantic and upset, and a lot of things, but I was persistent.”

“That’s where I did some research. I really didn’t know there was any help out there for me. It just so happened that my partner had been in abusive relationships prior to this and her partners have gone through with good result, I guess. So she suggested it to me and I went.”

As far as the decision to enter the program, seven men stated it was their idea. The other two men felt forced by their partners.

“ The idea to enter the program was mine. My wife wanted to separate at that time, but I’m the one who looked for some help. I knew there was a program and I was planning to get in not knowing exactly what the long- term situation was going to be, but I knew I needed some help. I had never asked for any help before. I didn’t know what it was going to take or what was going to take place.”

“ She insisted it was all my fault so I said, “ If that’s what you feel I’ll be the first to take the step”.

Initial Experience of Participating in the Program

Upon entering the program, participants overwhelmingly described feelings of apprehension, fear, confusion, and pondering whether or not they belonged.

“When I first went into group my initial impression was that I was going to be with a lot of wingnuts. That’s what I thought of it as; a bunch of guys that were bashing their wives around.”

“I thought I shouldn’t be here because I wasn’t that kind of person. I wasn’t physically abusive, I wasn’t sexually abusive. Some of the things I heard that

some people were doing to their spouses and families from alcoholism and all this other stuff, that was my first thought, 'what am I getting myself into?'

"A little apprehensive at first. When I went there, there was a number of people that had spent ten days in remand and they were very aggressive, and some of the stories I heard I thought, 'what the hell am I doing here? I'm going to pick up some bad habits."

"I figured abuse entailed beating the hell out of your wife, and that simply isn't the case. But I met the men. I was very shy and reluctant at first to open up especially in First-Stage. There was a lot of reluctance on my part initially. I can't speak for other men, but I'm sure they felt a bit of fear maybe, or what is this all about? What are they planning to do?"

One of the participants who came to Canada from another continent expressed a unique initial experience of the program:

"In the beginning I was feeling a little bit isolated because of my accent. It's kind of a skill when someone is not very fluent in English like myself. I was a little bit shy. In the Prep Group people began sharing and I was thinking "why are people talking like that?"...In the First-Stage I was feeling isolated because I wasn't able to participate with other guys. It was a very big group. I couldn't express myself because they were using a kind of, that red flash and time-out and self-talking

ques. I asked the facilitator, ' Could you give me an example because I don't know what these things mean. "

The initial experiences of the program were characterized by apprehension, confusion, and anxiety. Most of the men felt they were in the wrong place. Men tended to compare their experiences with those of other group members. This seemed to minimize the abuse they were using especially where men had not been criminally charged. Men also talked about not understanding what abuse was outside of physical abuse at that time. Men who had physically beaten their partners were viewed as worse and in need of more help. Despite these dichotomies, the men talked about gradually feeling more comfortable and being able to understand all forms of abuse, how they are related and have the same purpose and effects.

Section 2: The Group Experience: Process and Impact

This section of the findings focuses on the participant's experience of the group process, and how this affected their understanding of their use of abusive behaviors. The Theme of Group Impact examines several sub-themes that describe the impact and how men learned to implement changes.

Group Process

A great deal of the data from this study deals with comments about the participants' experience of the group process. This major theme of the study can be broken down into the following subthemes: sharing experiences; feeling I am not alone; feeling safe; and support from group members.

“I am not alone”, Sharing Experiences

All nine men in the sample expressed that sharing experiences related to abuse, sharing feelings, and sharing coping strategies were key components of the group process that led to changes in behavior. The men also described feeling, “I am not alone”, through the group process.

“It gave me a place to talk and share my feelings. It gave me some insight and some ideas around how to try and cope and with the problems that I was going through at the time. Listening to some of the other guys in the group and listening to some of the things they were going through, because they were guys that were going through pretty much the same thing I was going through. So it gave me the chance to help them out dealing with whatever problems they were coping with, which in turn kind of woke up stuff inside of me, saying I should be doing the same thing”

“It put me in a group setting where I wasn’t alone, which initially I think wasn’t a thought of mine, that I’m the only one abusing, but over time it felt more comfortable. Sometimes I wouldn’t even know how to express a lot of things, yet someone else in the group would and I would identify with that. If you just sat there quietly, sometimes you could learn a lot more about yourself by listening to other men sharing their experiences.”

"I enjoy the group process. To me I like connecting and hearing the other guys' stories, and just that general feeling. And other guys have shared it as well. You're not alone. The first time I walked into prep session and looked and thought, 'look at all these guys; you're not alone.'"

"I learned how to listen a little bit and learned how to share and open up a bit, and how to trust. I enjoyed the group process very much."

"We had a really good group of guys. The facilitators were good as far as keeping us on track and kind of throwing ideas out there. We took the ideas and went with them, listening to each other and letting each other talk, but we also didn't hold back when we felt someone was going in the wrong direction or we had ideas ourselves for those who had been through similar circumstances and felt 'okay this worked for me, possibly this will work for you.'"

"I guess the way everything was presented in letting each of us have our say, and letting us kind of work through it with each other."

The men stated that once they felt comfortable in the group it became a safe place to release emotions that had been bottled up for a long time while not being judged. Men described this as a new concept that was essential for them to work through anger and hurt. Learning that there are other ways of dealing with these difficult emotions other than abuse was also identified as providing hope and motivation for change immediately.

Feeling Safe

Through the process of sharing experiences with each other the men described a growing feeling of safety, where they felt they would not be judged, but would be challenged where appropriate.

“Group gave me a really safe place to talk about my feelings and the issues I had with myself, with my partner, with my children. I think maybe in the first couple of sessions I struggled with a little bit of how do I fit into this group, but after that for me it was a home and a safe haven where I could come and just vent, but also have people look at me critically as well and be willing to accept that criticism. I looked forward to it. I looked forward to it because it made me feel better.”

“It was safe. I wasn’t being ridiculed or made to feel less of a man or less of a person because of that.”

“I’d come to meet some different guys and get a sense of comfort and camaraderie with some of the other guys in the group. I was anxious to move on this process with them as well. So that’s kind of how it felt for me.”

“Acceptance. I wasn’t looked down upon, I didn’t feel inferior or like I was some kind of animal. I felt quite equal. I felt like I was not a bad guy; I was just trying to cope with difficult situations. They made me feel comfortable with that.”

Acceptance and Group Support

Men also described the group process in terms of feeling they can rely on the group to be there for them during difficult times and viewed the group as a support network.

“That was when I was going through my separation with my second wife, and it was just being here that helped me through a lot of the stuff. I was feeling very depressed and even suicidal. I was going through a really tough time. The guys in the group, I’m sure they must have got sick of me sometimes, but they were very supportive. That helped me through a really rough time.”

“ When I come to the group when I’ve had a really bad day or something, I usually leave feeling very good, or I feel a lot better knowing that I’ve gotten all the things that have been on my mind out, and I’ve had a chance to talk or listen to some others. I always feel upbeat and uplifted. I always feel very good.”

“Everybody that’s involved- the ones I have gotten to know, the guys really seem to be able to help people. It’s nice to have a place like that to come to. If something is really irritating me I’ll come back to group, or I know there’s someone there that I can phone and talk to, and I can use that as an outlet.”

In describing their experience of the group process, the men credited the process of mutual aid as being an extremely beneficial component of the group. The feeling of not being alone with the issue of abuse was unanimously seen as helpful and was experienced as a turning point towards change for the participants. Discussing alternative ways of dealing with emotions in group discussions by sharing and listening to other men was viewed as the vehicle of change for participants. Being challenged on attitudes and behaviors was also seen as advantageous as it provided an opportunity in the group to see situations from a different perspective. These insights could only be achieved in a safe environment where the participants felt they could share experiences and thoughts with no risk of judgement. Men described the group as a support network where they could give and receive help. In this way they doubly benefited from the group process by feeling they were contributing to some one else's change process while helping themselves.

Group Impact

The theme of group impact is the strongest theme in the study constituting the majority of the data. Participants spoke at length on the many ways and varying areas where the group had an impact on their lives. This theme consists of eight sub-themes: Taking responsibility, knowledge of skills and tools, getting in touch with feelings, self-awareness, empathy, thinking before acting, self-care, and parenting.

Understanding Choices and Taking Responsibility

All nine men spoke about responsibility as an essential part of the change process. Responsibility-taking was one of the initial ways that men started focusing on themselves rather than on their partner.

“I guess I never wanted to admit or take responsibility for what I did. I could always come up with an excuse or something to justify, but that was my motive of thinking back then. But that’s when I was angry. So when you sit down and say, ‘okay buddy, you’ve got a problem’, it’s one thing to admit and then it’s something else to actually do something about it.”

“One of the ways they [facilitators] brought that out was through discussing your behavior towards your partner. It was never what your partner did to you because then you could lose sight of that; what was the actual healing process. What did you do that she asked you to leave? What did you do that she phoned the police? These are things that guys had to account for. You are starting to understand how you feel, but how do you think she felt when you told her she was a bitch?”

“I’ve learned about choice and that I am solely responsible for my own behavior. That’s the experience I’ve gotten here and however my life turns out is not going to be at the whim and follies of circumstance, it’s because I choose it to turn out that way. So that’s what I got out of the program.”

“I’ve learned that I’m able to take responsibility and realize that the only way I’m going to be happy in this world, it’s going to be through me. I have to make that for myself. There are circumstances that will affect me, but it’s how I choose to react to this. Evolve really emphasizes that the choice is yours. You can continue to be abusive, you can continue to go through life failing relationships, you can continue to get in trouble with the police for angry, violent behavior- I’ve never been charged-but what I’m saying is that you have that choice. That’s what I learned is that I have the choice to decide how I want to feel.”

The men described their focus changing from blaming their partner and others for their abusive behavior to focusing on the role they played in the relationship and how they made choices to behave abusively. The men began to realize that they had to keep the needs of others in mind including partners and children. Their focus shifted from solely on themselves to understanding the needs of their families and learning how to address them.

All of the nine participants discussed having a sense of responsibility for their abusive behaviors. However one comment made that deserves attention here was contradictory to the majority of responses in this area. Where most participants openly took responsibility for their behaviors, this response was different in the sense that responsibility was not fully accepted.

“ I wasn’t so convinced that I was abusive, and I’m still not convinced I was abusive. I agree it’s abuse. There are different kinds of abuse. I changed the way I do things so that people don’t consider it abusive, I guess. Don’t think I’m sitting here thinking I’m an angel and that, and that I didn’t hurt her and stuff like that, but there’s another side to this. There’s her side of it. I think if she didn’t have her past, what came to happen wouldn’t have happened. I’ve never been abusive before in either of my marriages. I didn’t use abuse towards partners to get what I wanted.”

This comment is interesting as it stands out against the others, and considers the partner’s side of things and places some blame on the partner for abuse that occurred in the relationship.

Skills and Tools for Change

Men talked about learning tools and skills to address anger in a non-abusive way. All men in the sample discussed the importance of having knowledge on different ways of handling difficult situations where abuse behaviors were previously used. Having this knowledge resulted in the men feeling they had choices regarding behavior. Men referred to these choices as “skills and tools” that they learned in the group. Men also commented that having the knowledge and acting on it are very different.

“I’ve made a promise to myself and I said that I will never abuse another woman as long as I live. I have the skills and abilities and tools now that if my wife and I.

Its happened a few times where we've gotten into arguments while on the phone and I'll say, 'Let's stop and take a time out,' and she'll say okay, and we may not talk for days. We understand that we'll get back on this topic, or whatever has got us angry at the time, but you know what, we need to get away from each other."

"It wasn't until we got into group that they started dealing with some simplistic things. They first started dealing with very general living, self-care, things like eating three meals a day, learning to rest, learning to take a time-out and relax and enjoy your life, and our homework assignments were based on those kinds of things. They gave us things like learning to check in with yourself, and in other words asking yourself things like, 'How am I feeling right at this moment, right now, am I mad, why am I mad, I haven't eaten since breakfast."

"The impact was the tools that were taught and how to use them. It's just using them and keeping them in mind over and over. I noticed especially this year the changes from two or three years ago. Then I wouldn't have responded in the same way. It's had a good impact on me that way."

"So the men's group really gave me a lot of tools to actually change the behavior and the thinking that I never knew existed before. I was a knuckle driver just going through life not knowing that there was anything like time-outs or different strategies in looking at things."

“Group made me try and find ways when I get into a conflict on how to get out of it, and how not to escalate it, and how to take a time-out. Maybe I haven’t told the person that it is a time out, but when things are getting to where I don’t want them to be, I’ll walk away.”

This area of impact is key for men because it deals with concrete ways of dealing with anger and escalated feelings. Men talked about having knowledge of choices as essential to change. This area is also important because it deals with implementation of new skills. Men learned these tools and skills on a theoretical level in group and then had to find ways to implement them in their lives. Men saw this as a welcome challenge in their relationships.

“ I Think Before I Act Now”

Through the tools and skills that were learned in the group all men described the impact of purposefully going through a cognitive process before acting. The men described this process as new to them and one of the most beneficial impacts of the group. They described “reacting” in previous situations where they would immediately act and speak in anger, rather than cognitively examining their choices. The men identified this cognitive process as an important implementation of change.

“As far as abuse, I find that I think before I speak now. I don’t walk away from situations whereas before I’d walk away angry or I’d just walk away and not say

anything. Now I stop and think about it and go, 'okay, I can respond in a way that's coming across respectful, just walking away doesn't work. That in itself is a huge impact.'

"I changed my behavior, but Evolve gave me the tools and reinforced it. I'm much more able to deal with situations without erupting and going right to the anger, and if I do experience anger, hopefully I'm given enough time to take it apart and that's not the main thing. You can be angry about something but that used to be the only emotion I had and the only feeling I had. Now I'm able to break it down and ask myself why I'm angry. Is it me, or is it my daughter that's gotten me angry?"

"I'm a little bit more laid back, brush things off. For example, if somebody did something direct to me that was a severe insult or something like that, I know I could just walk away. If somebody else is going to be that stupid and push their limits, well then let them. I'm much more tolerant."

The men described themselves as kinder, more tolerant people. They felt more comfortable "in their own skin" and therefore did not feel that they had to use abuse to get what they wanted. This allowed them to take the time to examine options in tense situations.

Getting in Touch With Feelings

Part of using tools and skills through a cognitive process to deal with difficult emotions and situations means that men have to address how they are feeling in difficult situations. Participants described this as allowing themselves to feel and/or acknowledge feelings that are there as something they have control over, rather than something they have to use abusive behaviors to control. Men described this process of getting in touch with feelings as new and necessary for change and for a measure of “self-control”.

“ That’s all it was, was ‘how am I feeling, and what am I feeling right now, and[what] can I do to change it.’ And you realize that you get a level of self-control, learning to eat and get enough sleep, learning that if something is stressing me out from work, it’s not her fault anymore. So, how do I deal with this. Well, I would have to deal with it on my own. What happens initially in group is that you learn to get in touch with yourself and your feelings.”

“After a night in group you had learned some things about yourself or be left with questions that I have to think about, but always felt a sense that I was actually getting better in terms of walking down some kind of road where I felt that I had a goal. I was actually achieving something. I started to feel; I started to feel human, because I think I was just actually getting in touch with my feelings and not denying them and stuffing them down. I want to say it was a joyous experience. It was. It brought me joy to actually both feel and learn to feel those feelings.”

“So that’s what First Stage has given me, some control in my life instead of just walking around in anger. So it was more than anger management, it was getting in touch with why you’re angry. We did deal with it in First Stage.”

“First Stage gave me the opportunity to find out about feelings, emotions. I guess I didn’t realize how angry I was.”

“So that’s a change. I’m even able to talk to my wife about things, and be honest with her, and we share feelings where before the only feeling was anger.”

Men found that acknowledging feelings allowed them to further understand the impact of their abuse on others and how they felt abusing others. Men stated that talking about anger and what is behind it helped to dissipate it. Talking about feelings also gave the men permission to have feelings and encouraged them to value feelings and their importance in relationships.

Self Awareness: Understanding Who I Am

The men discussed the group impacting on their sense of self-awareness as getting a better understanding of who they are outside of “angry”. They discuss this renewed sense of self-awareness as emerging out of taking responsibility for abusive behaviors and getting in touch with their feelings.

“Other areas started opening up, particularly when you started asking yourself how you were feeling, and you started developing that level of self-awareness.”

“It was an experience that gave me the opportunity to reflect upon the person I was, and that I had become over a long period of years, and to take a good hard look at how I had changed, not for the good but for the worse.”

“I guess I am more aware of what’s happening and I think that in itself is one of the biggest things I’m supposed to be aware of. Where all the cues are in your body and the way you’re feeling, and knowing that I have to stop, and I can’t go on with the same communication whether it’s me taking it on the wrong way or whether it’s me presenting the wrong way.”

“The program just gave me a new level of awareness of how unaware people can be about themselves or how they perceive things. Your perceptions change a heck of a lot, and it’s a good change. I think it’s more insightful and it helps you to get better control over your environment.”

“ I realized later on once I started looking at myself and examining myself, and that was the greatest thing developing that level of self-awareness. It’s changed me around so much.”

The increased level of self-awareness allowed the men to come to a better understanding of their impact on others and was essential for them to move from being self-absorbed to self-aware.

Empathy: Developing Understanding and Compassion

Participants discussed an increased sense of self-awareness, due in part to getting an understanding of what their partners experienced as a result of their abuse behaviors. They said empathy for their partners grew as a result of going through the group. Men also expressed that being easier on themselves and others in their lives aided in developing a sense of empathy for people around them.

“ One of the biggest things I learned is to validate other people’s feelings, and realizing that women are human beings. I know that sounds really ironic perhaps, but I didn’t notice that my wife was a person with feelings who had dreams and aspirations, who should have been allowed to self-actualize and be the kind of person she needed, not to have someone who is going to dominate and judge her every move.”

“Going to the program helped me to understand her as much as I could understand myself, which was a big help.”

“What I got out of the program was a better understanding of people. I guess I understand why she was ticked at me for asking all these questions all the time.”

“During group I began to look at what she is doing, because she is the mother of these children, and I don’t have much of a role in parenting them, and I have to find ways to always be supportive of her, even in speaking with the kids as well that mom’s trying to do the best she can, and she’s doing a good job, and she’s always there for you guys.”

“I’ve learned a sense of compassion again, being sensitive to other people’s needs, and to genuinely listen and to understand.”

“It made me understand why people do the things they do, and why people feel the way they do. Not necessarily that they are right for feeling the way they are. I can see the other side of the fence looking back at me. I may not agree with it, but I can understand why they are doing it.”

Here the men have moved farther from a focus on themselves to not only understanding the impact of their behaviors, but they also made an effort to understand their partner’s feelings and looked at the situation from her perspective. Compassion and sensitivity are new emotions for the men who viewed them as difficult, yet necessary for them to stop using abuse.

Self Care: A New Understanding of Control

Through increased self-awareness and empathy towards others comes increased self-caring. The men described the group affecting their attention to their self-care needs which were completely ignored previously. They described learning the difference between fulfilling your needs through controlling others and nurturing themselves by focusing on what they do have control over: their environment, feelings, and choices for living.

“Number one, you’re doing this program yourself, self-care. If you turn around you make yourself physically and mentally healthy, and you’re strong enough to work on a relationship. Until you fix those two items there’s no use trying to work on a relationship. Self-care for me at times now is still a struggle in the fact that I have to look after everything myself. So it’s taking a lot of strength on my part to control so that I don’t pull myself under. So far for me self-care is listening to music like Jazz and Blues.”

“It’s ironic because as time progressed in group, the more you did just general self-care for instance, certain other areas started to open up.”

“I guess the biggest impact is that I’m actually going back to school and taking some courses and training to be a helper.”

“I believe that I lower myself as a person when I have to use abusive behaviors to get my needs met. I think I have learned some things in group and in prep sessions about figuring out what my needs are, how to get them met and not always having to control other people to get my needs met, which has helped me. It has helped me with my partner, my co-workers and my kids.”

“I’m doing it for myself. I’m actually being selfish by putting myself first.”

A healthy focus on self is described here. Some men talked about this being a difficult balance. Worries over appearing selfish were described, but most men felt that they needed to learn to be comfortable with themselves and not depend on their partners to care for them.

Parenting: Learning to Connect on a New Level

Participants with children all expressed a large impact from the group on parenting. Men described encouraging their children to be open with their feelings, something they did not do before the group. They also described spending more time with their children and making their well-being a stronger priority where previously children’s needs came after their own. Men also described rifts in relationships with children where there is little communication and respecting the distance their children want between them right now and the difficulty staying away from controlling behaviors in these situations. This topic proved to be difficult for participants to talk about and was the only section of the interview where some men became quite emotional.

“The oldest two I don’t have communication with other than over the phone. My eldest child, he doesn’t talk to me at all. He’s got a lot of anger towards me. In that sense, dealing with the younger two, the child I have the best relationship with is the one I had the worst relationship with earlier. I was always on his case and always treating him as an over-supervisor and always having issues with him. We used to always fight. We don’t do that anymore. I’ve stepped back, I’ve listened, and I try to be supportive and try to understand. I’m trying to figure out what they really need. Abusive behavior is a place I cannot go, and I won’t go there.”

“I hate not being in control of others that are part of my life. With my relationship with my kids, my three oldest want nothing to do with me and I want to fix it. That’s something that’s driving me bananas, so I want to fix it. That’s in a sense taking control of the situation, and it’s something I can’t do. So I’ve taken a step back, I’m giving them space, I’m not bothering them, I’m not phoning them up. But they choose not to have anything to do with me so I have to respect that. It’s something inside of me where I have to bite it and walk away from it. It’s tough for me.

The comments above describe the difficulty that some of the men continue to have with parenting. Respecting children and giving space are identified as important, but very difficult to maintain particularly where the children have cut off contact. Given that in

most cases the men's partner relationships had ended the men identified that healing the damage done with children was their last chance to prove they had changed. This was one of the areas where men identified the urge to use controlling behaviors and worked hard not to.

Men who continued their relationship with children identified ways that they try to encourage them to talk openly about feelings and work things out non-abusively. The men wanted their children to see that they have feelings and can be compassionate and understanding. The men also expressed a sincere desire to get to know their children and nurture them.

"I find it much easier dealing with my daughter. Partly because of my abuse she entered a dangerous lifestyle. But now we have a fairly good relationship. My daughter hides a lot of her feelings, but I'm finding that the important part is that I can express my feelings to her. I'm able to express how I feel so she knows Dad has some feelings. I'm sure she's seen some changes, but until I start expressing feelings she may not be able to open up herself."

"I was an absentee father. I was there but I wasn't there and I didn't spend a whole lot of time with them. I know more about my son now, about who he is and what makes him tick, and his likes and stuff then I did when I was in the house. It's weird because I've finally taken the time to realize he's a human being and he has values, and I listen to what he needs."

“I realized I don’t want to be a father, I want to be a Dad to my kids. So my biggest strength and priority right now are my children and ensuring that they have a good quality role model and that I am involved in their lives, not just every now and then.”

“I even worked it out with my daughter. There are times when she’s angry, she’ll say ‘I need to be alone’. That’s her way of saying ‘I need a time out’, and I try and respect her feelings and I’m trying to show her that I care about her feelings. It’s not about my authority as a parent, it’s about ‘I have to understand you as a person before I can have any kind of relationship with you, and I have to respect how you feel.”

In sum, along with increased insight around abusive behaviors with partners and co-workers, the participants with children transferred this knowledge to relationships with children and parenting skills.

Section 3: Making and Maintaining Changes and Staying Connected to the Program

This final section of the findings focuses on how the participants felt they had changed at the completion of the group. They also identified challenges that they were facing in terms of relationships and abusive behaviors. The theme of staying connected to the program is examined as well as what other family violence services the men had used.

Goal Achievement

Earlier on, participants' goals were described in terms of reconciling with partners and learning strategies for dealing with anger and controlling behaviors. The men discussed whether or not they felt they had achieved their goals. The majority of participants reported they had partly achieved their goals, and felt that working on abusive behaviors is a life-long activity. They also discussed how goals changed and became more realistic as group progressed. No men had reconciled with their partners at the time of this study.

"I would say specifically not. I would say I achieved partially the goal of becoming a parent, but I'd have to say in response to that now I think those goals were unrealistic. Looking back at them, because I did change them; those were unrealistic goals because they were dependent upon other people to allow them to happen rather than looking at myself and saying 'what can I do for myself?' So those goals weren't realistic at all."

"Yes, I mean, the biggest goal was saying, 'okay, you've got a problem', and figuring out what I have to do to achieve a sense of; I'm going to call it reality or normalcy, or whatever that might happen to be at any given time, into my own life. Then no matter what happened between my partner and myself it made me, and that was the biggest thing that I found. It's not my partner, you have to work with yourself, and if that isn't for yourself then it's not going to matter."

“Yes, to make myself better in terms being better able to cope, but also learning about who I was. That was a far more general goal, and I think that goal I did achieve. I learned a lot about who I was. The negative behavior, the abuse, the verbal abuse, the psychological playing games, twisting words; that’s not okay, but being a kind, caring individual, and someone who wants to help other people, that’s fine. I had a lot of negative self-talk and worried about who I was. In that sense I would say I achieved that goal. I know we were asked in group too, about one thing we’d like to achieve when we finished group, and I had a lot of what I would call beliefs that really encumbered me in terms of just being who I was.”

All of the men described achieving goals as ongoing work and multi-faceted. Stopping abusive behavior was only one aspect of the change process. Men identified several goals where progress had been made.

“I wanted to be a better person and a husband, and I’m still achieving it. I wanted to be more communicative with my wife and son and I’m doing really good with that. I wanted a better understanding of why I was angry all the time. I didn’t want to be angry anymore and I’m working on it. By controlling my anger that’s made me happier and that’s let me be more communicative, which has been really good for my marriage, really good with my son. So I’m working on these goals. I’ve achieved most of them, or [am] striving to achieve them. I’m never going to say one hundred percent, but it’s getting there.”

“I think I ‘m getting closer to there, but those are goals that I don’t think I’ll achieve until my last dying breath.”

“ In a lot of ways it will be an ongoing, lifetime process. At least it’s getting easier.”

“ I feel I need time and I’m going to give myself that time. I’ve got a very clear direction, but it’s a never-ending process. You can’t stop at any time. It’s like going to the gym for a week and saying ‘ Boy, that felt great, I never have to work out again’. Who are you kidding? It’s the same principle”.

“ To honestly say that I would never be abusive, that’s a promise I would never make to myself because it’s not realistic. However, I will promise that every day that I get up I will try and be respectful and look for other ways not to be abusive. On a day to day basis it’s much more realistic.”

Clearly participants thought that the change process does not end. It continued after group and was seen as an on-going process. Continued support in the program was identified as essential for maintaining changes and working on goals.

Men also discussed factors other than the group that affected their goals while they were going through the group. Supportive partners and family had the most influence, and a few of the men found self-help groups beneficial at that time.

“Sure, just having a wife that wanted to make the marriage work. Having my wife there for me helped me to achieve my goals.”

“My supports. I have good family and friend supports.”

“ The fact that I was meeting other people in the self-help group helped.”

Overall, the men stated that the group was the most influential force behind their changes. Partners were also mentioned as main supports. This was the case whether the relationship was intact or whether the couple was separated.

The Kind of Man I Am Now

The men described themselves now and how they are implementing what was learned in the group into their relationships. Three subthemes reflect how the men described themselves now; whether or not abusive behaviors have occurred since leaving the group, and changes in abusive behavior at home and at work.

“I Like Who I Am Now”: How Men Describe Themselves Now

The respondents reported seeing themselves in sharp contrast with the kind of man they were before the group. During and after the group they saw themselves as more open and honest with increased self-esteem and awareness; whereas before the group they would not have possessed these qualities. Men described an overall sense of joy at how they had changed and how they see themselves as valuable.

“ Yes, I like myself. I’m more aware of who I am. It’s like I knew what I was but I didn’t know who I was. I’m not afraid now when I know I’m not right. I have more confidence in myself.”

“I have self-control. I don’t use power to control my wife, and I am not jealous anymore. I respect people, and I like to be respected. I don’t use power to control nobody.”

“I look at other people and realize, ‘you know what, it’s not me that’s the important one; everyone has something to offer,’ and I look at other people and I look at what they bring, and their uniqueness and stuff, rather than being concerned about what their perception of me is and being very self-centered. It’s easier for me now to make friends.”

“ I feel so much stronger as a person. I feel so much more alive. I’m setting goals for myself again. I always believe that we should contribute to the community in some way.”

“I’m happy with myself for the first time. I noticed it, perhaps not in First Stage; that was so intense. But I’ve noticed that I’m happy with the person I became.”

“ I changed from being an abuser to respect myself and to respect the people around me. The thing is understanding that women have the right to talk, a right to dress any way they want. ”

“I feel very much stronger as a human being. I’m more self-aware. I ‘m a heck of a lot more relaxed, and I love to laugh at myself often, and I do.”

The men appeared very proud of the changes they had made, but acknowledged at the same time that these changes do not erase the past, and that these memories linger for them, but that they must remain future oriented in order to stay on track

The Constant Battle and the Use of Abusive Behaviors Since Leaving Group

Out of the nine participants seven stated that they had used abusive behaviors since leaving the group. All seven stated they have used verbal abuse with no physical abuse mentioned. Two participants stated they had not used abusive behaviors since leaving the group. The men discussed using abuse but feeling that they had more control over their behaviors. They stated that they use abusive behaviors far less frequently and saw these times as the exception rather than the norm.

“I would be lying if I said I didn’t use abusive behavior. The degree that I have used it is not as obvious as before. The biggest one would be at work where I called a guy an asshole. That’s been the extent of my abusive behavior for quite some time anyway.”

“I have used abusive behaviors earlier this spring. I lost it on my daughter. I yelled, I ranted, I raved- that was abusive. I shouldn't have behaved that way. I knew it at the time but the words just happened.”

“ I still carry some of those things around with me, but I've really tried to do otherwise. I can't say I've never had slips because I certainly have, but I do recognize them more quickly.”

“Oh yes, it's like riding a bike in a sense, you're still going to fall off, but you keep on trying. It's one of those things where every time it happens you feel bad because you've got the tools and you know you can use them. It's somewhere inside but it's just not in that space at that moment in time.”

“No, I haven't used abuse. There's a fine line about my entering this Evolve group.”

“So, I don't know when I've been abusive. I can't think of a time when I've been abusive. I think the last time was prior to entering the program- well over a year ago. It's been such a good way to be [without the abuse].”

The men described abuse as happening much less often, but when it did happen there were feelings of guilt associated. Using abuse after or during the group was seen as

expected but different in the sense that the men were no longer blaming others for the abuse and immediately looked at themselves as the cause and the solution.

Making Choices: Changes in Abusive Behaviors

The respondents talked about changes in use of abusive behaviors with the family and at work. They described feeling calmer, “choosing battles”, taking things less seriously, and diffusing anger. The men discussed how the impact of the group was manifested in their lives and how changes were implemented in the family and at work.

“ When I do have thoughts of being disrespectful or abusive I’m able to put those in a different area and diffuse them; not swallow them and bury them up, but just diffuse them with other thoughts instead of going the negative route, which is the easier route for me.”

“I’ve noticed big changes in my use of specific behaviors I have. I have always been a very critical person and that shows in my language in terms of judging people’s work and looking at them with a critical eye. Now I’m more positive and praising.”

“I’m calmer. I don’t get worked up as easy. I let things that would bother me four or five years ago not bother me. I have more self-esteem. I realize I am not the monster that I sometimes make myself out to be.”

“I’ve noticed some big changes there. I handle conflicts in different ways now. Sometimes instead of just heading straight on into a conflict I’ll just say it’s not worth it. I try to pick and choose my battles, and most times it’s not worth it, I’ll just walk away. I still stuff some of those feelings inside but I look at other way of resolving them.”

“ I’m more aware of what causes me to accelerate into the abusive behavior and what gets my anger up, and I try to catch them. Sometimes you get caught by surprise or something, and things happen.”

“Yes, I am more friendly. I don’t get angry that quick. I control myself by thinking before speaking. I don’t blame people for my behavior, and I’ve learned that I can’t make my wife or someone else guilty for the things that are happening. I don’t feel guilty and full of shame like when I started the program.”

Here men identified a conscience around abusive behaviors that did not exist before.

Men talked about consciously dealing with a situation using tools and skills taught in the group and learning from situations where verbal abuse was used.

Change in Abusive Behaviors at Work

In addition to describing changes in their use of abusive behaviors with family, participants also described the same type of changes in the workplace, chiefly, that they were not escalating, and being able to control anger. The men linked the abuse in the

home with abuse in the workplace. Men were able to see abuse as a problem beyond the domestic realm. Men commented on how they addressed the same feelings of anger, but in the workplace where most co-workers were male.

“There’s a lot of confrontation at work, and yet I can deal with confrontation at a completely different level because I try to understand how this person I’m dealing with is feeling, and if I can at least acknowledge their feelings, all of a sudden the interaction changes.”

“I share an office with a team leader who could gradually see changes in me as well in terms of how I cope with other work tasks I had. I was able to spill over some of the things I was going through and some of the things I was learning about how to deal with my anger, how to get in touch with my cues, and not be as controlling, and how to let go. It was good to share that with him in the workplace because we were able to find ways to apply that well to situations that we found ourselves where we were trying to control people.”

“Doing that at work as well. Not being judgmental of co-workers and knowing that other people have value. So I started to change my perspective and it’s begun to show, and still does show up in my language and how I talk to people, rather than focusing on the negative first.”

“It was funny because I went to see my supervisor the other day and sat down and he said ‘you’re so different. A year ago you would have come in here threatening me, throwing things, screaming and yelling.”

The participants described themselves as kinder, more open with feelings, more tolerant, self-aware, increased self-esteem and less abusive than before entering the program.

Helping Other Men

The majority of participants described a desire to help other men with similar problems. The men discussed wanting to pass on experiences and knowledge to men who are using abuse. They also described a desire to help men take responsibility for abusive behavior, letting them know they can change. Participants also described wanting to let other men know that they are not alone. They also talked about feeling better and helping themselves when they help others.

“I’ve decided that one thing I really don’t want to see in society is violence against women, I stand very strongly against it now. Through the program I gained this awareness of the damage and the impact it has, and I’m very devoted and committed to it. I haven’t done anything per se my self because I’m still in the process of rebuilding my life but I have promised myself that I will devote my time, be it as a speaker at various sessions if they ask me to, going out in public, education and training.”

“ I made a commitment to myself to know who I am and to finish the group to see what it is about. I’ve been a speaker a couple of times. I want people to see that they are not alone.”

“I want to help my community in the same way where I used to have that macho personality, I want to change people and understand that we are not doing right with that kind of personality.”

“I really do want to help other people and facilitate some of the First Stage groups. I enjoy that stuff. I really enjoy that, partly because it helps me continue to stay well and stay healthy, because it keeps me focused on the things that I need to do in my day to day life.”

Here men described helping others as part of the change process. Through helping others the men felt that they would be going beyond themselves to other men’s lives, and helping maintain their changes at the same time.

Staying Connected

Participants expressed the importance of staying connected with the program after First Stage. They stated that it is important for them to stay connected in order to maintain changes and have a support network while trying to implement changes. Men also described the new friendships they have made through the group and that in most cases these friendships have become a major support system that participants described as

vital to maintaining changes and coping. Men also described the other family violence services they have used since completing the First Stage group.

“Even though I’m not abusive any longer, I feel I have to stay on top of it, and I do like participating in some other volunteer work here and I do the parenting classes. I just find it’s good for me to stay in touch.”

“It [verbal abuse] seemed to be getting worse when I wasn’t going back to the Second Stage. I’m in Second Stage right now. I just thought that it was because I couldn’t talk. I could talk to my wife, but only certain things that I could really talk about. I enjoyed listening to others too, and you would say, ‘I’ve done that, I’ve been there’, and it really helps. I noticed that the verbal abuse was cutting back and I wasn’t in Second Stage, but I needed something. I did phone up a facilitator a few times and talked with him. So that really helped. It just confirms the things your feeling and reassures you.”

“It’s a support network there for me, and it gives me someplace to fall back when I can’t figure things out for myself. If I had to do that on my own, chances are I’d probably still be finding myself with problems.”

Staying connected with the program was essential for men to maintain changes and relationships forged in the First Stage Group. All of the men discussed enjoying the time in the group and the routine of it being very helpful.

New Friendships

Most men described the new friendships gained in the group. These friendships became vital to feeling safe, maintaining changes, and having healthy relationships with other men.

“I’ve made some good quality friends. I think sometimes people look at us. There’s a couple of guys I get together with from different groups actually that I met, and we meet once a week and go to movie and a dinner and people are often wondering who they are listening to when they hear us in the booth next door because we are talking about our feelings. We don’t talk about sports or other things like that. This is a kind of forum for us to bounce our feelings off each other, because we all have different relationships. There’s some really positive things.”

“I’ve also got the guys from my group where we still meet once a month just on a personal level and have a barbecue at somebody’s place.”

“I keep in touch with these guys constantly. These are guys and they are like family to me. That’s how we feel about each other. We’re like family. We stand by each other. It’s really important. It’s an amazing thing that men bond, and we’ve bonded and connected at a level where we’re actually talking about our feelings. Men don’t talk about their feelings. These guys do.”

“It impacted me in setting up friendships. I made new friends through the group. People that I really believe are friends in the sense that it’s not a friendship just based upon physical activities we share; you know, men gather around things like competitive sports and different activities. These are guys that I’ll go sit and have dinner with and we’ll just talk about things or get together for activities that I think society wouldn’t think as being a manly thing to do. I say they are friends because I will share deep, dark secrets of what’s going on in my life and continue to do that and feel safe with them. I’m not going to be judged. I’ll be listened to, I’ll be supported, I’ll be cared for. So I developed friendships in group with a few of the fellows in the group that keep in contact. That I find to be important because of a sense of ongoing accountability to one another and just keeping track of one another, which I’ve been looking for all my life.”

Participants discussed the replication of the group process in their own new friendships where they benefit from the feelings of safety and acceptance. Men also spoke here of the genuine, non-traditional nature of the friendships. The men saw their friendships with these men as places where traditional male roles and expectations are rejected so as not to perpetuate societal norms.

Other Family Violence Services Used Since Leaving First Stage

Seven of the nine men have carried on in the program and moved on to Second Stage group. This group focuses on relationships and learning to maintain changes. The seven men were simultaneously attending the Alumni group which meets once per month

and is open to all men after First Stage ends. Several men had also participated in the parenting group through the program. Participants also discussed involvement with another agency that provides counseling services to men in the city. The centre serves men only for a variety of issues. The men's service collaborates with the men's domestic abuse program by offering peer mentorship programs and the parenting program now takes place there. A few of the men in the study were also currently involved in learning to become peer mentors. A few of the participants had called the facilitators of their group for a few individual counselling sessions and some men had received some individual counselling outside of the program. A few of the men had also facilitated First Stage groups with a staff facilitator, or discussed this as a plan for the future. Men also discussed being guest speakers at Prep groups.

"I'm in the Alumni group, and I'm also currently doing the Second Stage group, and I've also done a parenting group through the program. The programs just give me that credibility back in my life that I lost."

"I did the parenting group. It just ended. I go to the Alumni group and peer support also. I'll include facilitating the First Stage group as ongoing. I get a lot out of that."

"I've had a hard time trying to make it to Second Stage. I really miss not being able to go. They are very flexible, like the hours are good to come. It's great. It's

at 9:00 and 10:00. Everybody makes themselves available. I can't think of anything really bad."

The First Stage group is just the beginning of a long process for men in the program. They clearly identify that staying connected with the program is essential to maintain changes, coping, continued support and safety, and maintaining meaningful friendships. It is clear that the participants find the Second Stage, Alumni, and Parenting groups essential for continued support and change.

Partner's Difficulty Accepting Changes

The final theme in the findings is focused on the participants' partners. Men described their views about how their partners have been affected by the changes in the abusive behaviors of the men. This area was difficult for the participants to talk about and was similar to the discussion about relationships with kids. Men stated feelings of hurt due to their partners' skepticism and continued fear after the men had completed the group and implemented changes in abusive behavior, or stopped all abusive behaviors.

"I asked my partner, 'How did you experience what I said?'; and her experience was that it was critical of who she was, because that's what she hears. I believe she's still there because she's lived with that for years and years and years. So it's hard for her to hear those encouraging or positive words because there's so much going on when we're talking to one another and the fear is there with what

does she actually hear? 'Does she trust what I'm saying? Does she really mean that?' I think it was important for me to know that I need to be even more diligent in making sure that I'm supportive; that I use language that isn't critical of her, and I think my face must have looked quite shocked when she said she didn't believe me, but it was a wake-up call that the change has to be dramatic for it to have an impact. It can't be just one or two times. It has to be consistent over a long period of time. So there's lots of work to be done."

"I mean her self-confidence, she got to the point where she was questioning her own reality, she was fearful of me, and continues to be afraid of me. That's very understandable. She's loosened a little. She's come along a bit but that might just be because we've been away from each other for awhile."

Women partners were described as confused and unsure how to handle the changes. Ultimately the changes which were positive for the men ended up being difficult for woman partners to interpret and accept as real.

"She's quite surprised by the changes and doesn't really know how to handle it. That's not the guy she knows. It's the guy she'd like to know, but unfortunately it's not the guy she lived with."

"Unfortunately my wife is very sensitive now, so any time I step out of line she feels that that is abusive, which I understand. It's a difficult thing to swallow

sometimes when I don't feel I've been abusive, yet because of the sensitivity of the situation she's willing and it's going to take her a long time. Her and my daughter are healing."

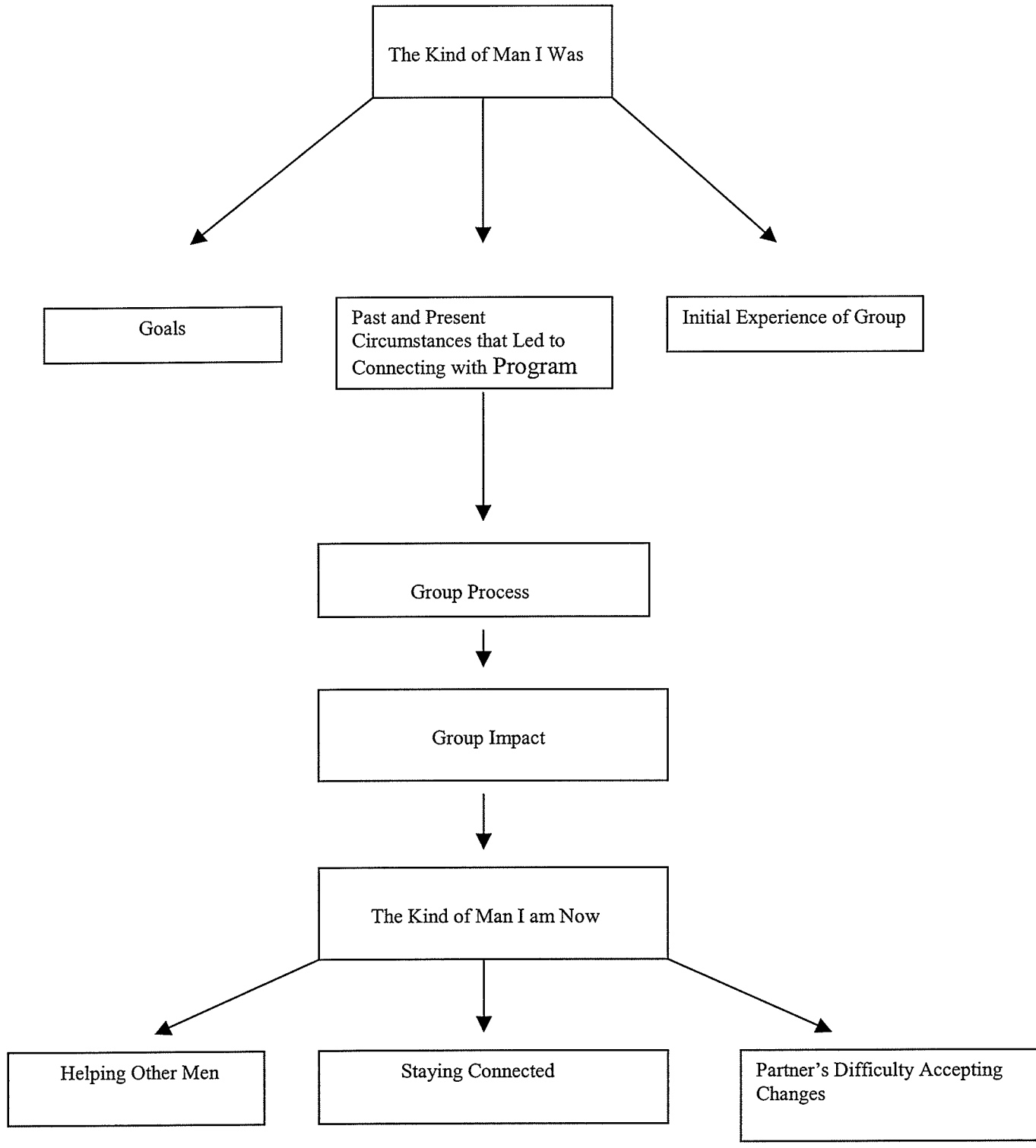
"I offered to take the kids for the times when she is working nights. She initially hung up on me crying and said, 'Why don't you leave me alone?' She said, 'you weren't like this and now all of a sudden you want to spend several days in a row with your kids and look after them and take them to their activities?' I said 'yes, that's part of my responsibility as a parent."

Participants were able to be more understanding about the reasons why their partners were having difficulty accepting the changes in abusive behaviors. Men stated that they realized the change process is ongoing and is not a guarantee that their partners will want to resume the relationship.

Concept Map: Understanding how the Themes are Linked

Figure 4.1 is a concept map illustrating how the themes are linked together. It is clear through examining the findings that the themes are linked by a natural progression from the pre-group to the intervention, and the post-group experiences.

Figure 4.1 Concept Map



The concept map illustrates how the themes are linked sequentially, as events happened for the men. Conceptually, the themes reflect the men's process of change, from who they felt they were, their behaviors and beliefs; to what they learned in the group, who they feel they are now, and how the group affected their behaviors, and relationships. The relationship between the themes clearly illustrates a clear delineation between the pre-group, intervention, and post-group phases, with Group Process and Group Impact being strong themes that directly affected how the men saw themselves differently as a result of the impact of the intervention.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The goal of this study was to understand the experience and subsequent impact of a group intervention program on men who use abuse against their partners. The study also examined how men implemented skills learned through the group in their relationships and families. Several conclusions emerging from the study will be discussed including what this study tells us about why men enter the program, the parts of the group that made the most impact, what men took away from the group, and the importance of continued support.

Men tended to enter the program under threat of losing families with their partners having asked them to leave the home. Men viewed this as a serious threat to loss of control and a sense of safety and they took this threat seriously enough that they voluntarily looked for help. This sense of threat was observed in their initial goals of reconciling with their partners and doing anything they had to, to achieve that goal at that time. Most men were confused about what the group was about or what would happen in the group when they first entered, often, feeling they may be in the wrong place as they compared the abuse they have used with the accounts of others and judged the severity of it. Men's thoughts on what constitutes abuse centered on physical abuse. Some of the men said they did not realize that the verbal and psychological abuse they were using also constituted abuse.

The participants emphasized the importance of having a sense of safety in the group, and expressed that this was essential for their participation in the group process. Group process was the most important part of the group experience for the men and constituted the greatest impact. Men discussed the process of mutual aid as the single most influential aspect of the group experience. Sharing experiences and listening to one another had the largest effect on learning, contributed to safety, and offered alternative ways of dealing with anger. The group process can be credited as the vehicle for change for the men as it influenced so many areas in which change took place, for example, in increased empathy, self-awareness, increased knowledge and skills. The result was change in abusive behaviors with partners, children, and co-workers.

Group process has most often been cited in the qualitative literature as impacting on use of abusive behaviors and this study confirms that. This study is consistent with other qualitative studies that cite the mutual aid process as being the most important therapeutic tool for change (Bennet & Williams, 2001; Gondolf & Henneken, 1987; Pandya & Gingerich, 2002; Scott & Wolfe, 2000). Along with feeling safe and connected with the group members men reported that they gained increased awareness of what they have control over, and what their choices were and this led to taking responsibility for abusive behaviors. The participants' goals changed from focusing on their partners to focusing on themselves and learning to implement acquired skills.

The increased insight that men described about knowing why they are abusing, what abuse is, and the fact that they have choices in how they can handle conflicts seemed to make the most impact on behavior changes. Having the insight was seen as helpful, but with the insight came the tools and skills learned through the intervention.

These tools had to be implemented and once the men were experiencing their benefits and were discussing these with other group members they were more likely to continue using them.

The men left the First Stage group with knowledge, skills, and tools and had already begun to implement them in their relationships in general and found that the changes were positive, with verbal abuse still being a problem for most men, although not as severe. Physical abuse was no longer being used, and the men were finding that they had more options when it comes to controlling anger and not escalating. The men reported that they worked on their abuse issues daily and identified change as a continuous process that will most likely not end. The participants stated that staying connected with the program or at least with the other participants is very helpful and necessary to maintain changes. This is consistent with other studies where men have stated that continued meetings that focus on mutual aid are essential (Gondolf & Henneken, 1987).

The participants' relationships with their partners had in most cases been irretrievably damaged with woman partners deciding at some time during or after the group that they did not want to continue the relationship. Men had difficulty accepting this decision particularly because they had implemented changes and their partners responded with skepticism and continued fear. The participants however, expressed respect for the decision and empathized with their partners' situations.

Implications for Programs for Men Who Use Abuse

Several significant therapeutic implications can be drawn from this research that can help inform programs for men who use abuse. These focus on an emphasis on the mutual aid process, including discussion and exploration of family of origin abuse, considering contexts outside of the family such as workplace abuse, including additional group work on parenting, and more group work on relationships, maintenance of behavior changes and targeting verbal abuse.

Focus on Mutual Aid

In this study the group process of mutual aid can be credited as the major vehicle for change. This confirms other research that indicates this must be a strong focus in programs targeting changing abusive behaviors of men. This does not however come before some anger management techniques learned at the beginning of the program. Anger management can address plans for managing anger that in turn affects women's and children's safety. Many men referred to cessation of physical violence during the Prep Group and a continued desire to learn ways of controlling anger once they knew they had options and that they were not alone in their problem. Men in such groups should be encouraged to share experiences where the facilitators are willing to step back and allow the group members to learn from each other. Facilitators were only mentioned a few times in the interviews in relation to "keeping us on track", teaching some ways to deal with difficult emotions, facilitating discussion, and providing education.

Encouraging out-of-group contact may also be helpful as these men emphasized connections with other group members as another important and enduring aspect of the

change process. Group members act as a support system during and after group. Additionally, creating new relationships based on the values taught in the group is an excellent opportunity for group members to implement change in social relationships and is an area that feels safe to start making changes.

Abuse in Family of Origin

This research also points to the importance of including discussions on abuse in the family of origin and the significance of this context for using abuse in future relationships and parenting. This allows men to place their abusive behaviors and beliefs in a historical context where they are perpetuating communication styles that are familiar to them from parental communication they witnessed. Very often in groups for men who use abuse, this important piece of life experience is only briefly touched upon or ignored completely. However, the men identified this as an important area where opportunities for increased awareness exist.

Men are most often the perpetrators of family violence, but this does not preclude the possibility that they were victims of it at some time in their life span. In most programs for men who use abuse, men are categorized as perpetrators and other categories that they may belong to such as victim, are not included. Including the victim experience in groups for men does not excuse or lessen their acts of abuse, but allows them to see how the abuse effects their partner and children as it did them as a child. Men can also be aided in this way to understand the abuse over time and how the abuse was learned. Previous research (Heyman, 2002) in this area connects victimization with perpetration for some men and this study adds to that body of literature. This research

offers some insight on how men become abusive when they themselves have been abused in childhood, and/or are raised with a rigid set of beliefs around male and female roles. This study does not seek to establish a cause for abuse behaviors. However, it is consistent with the vast literature which supports that use of abuse in adult relationships is connected with a history of victimization in childhood (Heyman, 2002). Experiencing abuse in the family of origin reinforces and encourages abusive behaviors in adult relationships as they are seen as a viable method of communicating that increases power and control over others. There may also be some utility in conducting a group for men who use abuse and have experienced abuse in childhood. This form of intervention is in agreement with Gondolf's findings from men's groups (2000) where more individualized treatment is recommended.

Abuse in the Workplace

Use of abusive behaviors in the workplace was a common theme of this study that was seldom mentioned in the literature but represents a significant and troubling area that requires further exploration. This research suggests that there is a connection between the use of abusive behaviors in the workplace, the home and the family of origin. The respondent men spoke of using abuse in the workplace in relation to family violence. Anger was the common factor in both of these situations. However, physical abuse was not used in any case at work; verbal abuse was the only form of abuse indicated in a workplace setting. The verbal abuse in the workplace was also reciprocated by male co-workers and was not disciplined at any time. This speaks to the belief that abusive behaviors are a choice and perhaps in the company of people who are the same

gender and level of physical strength physical abuse is not chosen due to the physical risk. However, in the company of people who are women and children who are physically weaker and seen as vulnerable, physical abuse becomes an option for control. This information is important because it informs us that abuse is not just occurring within the family system where all of the research has focused. Abuse is a method of communication that also carries benefits of power and control at work and that tension is brought home to the family. This information may point to a need for programs for men who use abuse to include the whole context of a man's life, including work and social relationships.

This research, along with Melzer's (2002) study of men who use abuse at home and in the workplace suggest a connection between family of origin and family violence. Following from Melzer's research and my own beliefs in this area, it is theorized that men may stay in jobs where abuse is accepted because it is their primary means of communication and one they are most familiar with. They may also perceive they have few resources other than abusive means by which to communicate and feel that they are gaining control through these methods. As in abuse in the family of origin, the workplace may provide an environment where abusive behaviors are enforced and encouraged as an acceptable way to communicate with others.

Parenting

The effects of abusive behaviors on parenting skills and relationships with children is another area where there appears to be little research, however it represents a significant area of the findings from my study. Baker and Perilla's (2001) study echoes

the findings of this study where men who use abuse against their partners lack parenting competence and skill. Feelings of remorse, guilt, and a desire to work on relationships with children were prevalent and represents a significant piece of this research. Children and partners are targets for the same types of abuse. Such abusive behavior causes extensive damage to relationships with children as well. As a result of going through the group, men reported acquiring greater empathy and an awareness of the effects that their abuse had on their children. They expressed the desire to implement their new skills with them as well as with partners. This was proven to be difficult due to the resistance on the part of the children and custody issues involved. Men identified repairing relationships with children as a major priority. This finding suggests that programs could certainly include material on parenting and repairing relationships with children as an option for men with children.

Relationships

In this study the majority of men lost their long-term relationships during or after the group. Most of the men expressed a desire to be back in the relationship but realized this was not a realistic option. This was a new and difficult transition where resources and coping skills were often lost. Support during relationship loss and moving on to relationships where abuse is not used, is indicated. Men may enter new relationships with a new set of tools and skills not present in previous relationships. Focusing on healthy relationships and implementing and maintaining changes are important post-group needs.

Another prevalent issue here is that of partner acceptance of changes. A popular misconception that exists about therapy is that after finishing group and implementing changes the woman partner will be accepting and that will be enough to salvage the

relationship. This study showed that stopping abusive behaviors does not necessarily lead to a reconciliation. This finding reinforces the need for a post-group focus on relationships where men can deal with loss despite the changes they have successfully made.

Maintenance

Encouraging men to continue the relationships forged in the group is beneficial, according to respondents who expressed a need to stay connected with their new friends and replicate the group process in these relationships. Post-group options are indicated as essential to men in maintaining changes and providing support for the next few months to several years after completing the group.

Verbal Abuse

Verbal abuse continues to be a problem for the men who completed the group. This echoes the findings of other studies which found that verbal abuse continued and physical abuse stopped (Gondolf & Henneken, 1987; Hamberger & Hastings, 1988; Tolman & Edelson, 1985). The men in this study indicated that the verbal abuse consisted of yelling and accusations and was less severe and more infrequent than before entering the program. They also stated that they could clearly identify when they are using verbal abuse and have the tools and skills to address it. This points to the need for more post-group focus on verbal abuse and staying connected with the program.

Suggestions for Further Research

Several questions and indications for further research emerged out of this study that would be worthy to explore further. Firstly, considering the significant connection that emerged regarding abuse experienced in family of origin, abuse experienced and used in the workplace, and abuse used in the family, it would be beneficial to explore abuse experienced by men over the life span. Interviews focused on this topic would likely yield useful descriptive results. Quantitative methods could also be utilized to test theories about connected contexts of abuse with men taking part in a group program. Questions about causation and how the three types of abuse are connected could be addressed here.

Secondly, it is clear that men require post-group work on a number of areas in order to maintain changes in abusive behavior and concentrate on areas that require a more specific focus such as relationships and parenting. Research on these groups would also be beneficial in addressing questions of their utility in helping with maintenance and implementation of skills and tools beyond anger management.

Finally, this study suggests that partners and children be involved in further research with men who have participated in a treatment group. Qualitative methods could probe into women's experiences of their partners' changes in abusive behavior, and verifying them simultaneously. This also applies to children who could speak to the impact of the changes in their fathers and how they experienced them.

Limitations

The sample of men who use abuse presented some limitations. Since the men's program involved in the study did not accept men with outstanding criminal charges into the first-stage groups this meant that a significant portion of this population could not be represented in this study. The majority of men who use abuse and are involved in the criminal justice system are men of color, men affected by poverty, and young men. My initial concern was that this omitted the opportunity to acquire an understanding of how group interventions affect these men. However, some of the participants had been charged at some point with domestic assault and they did share this information during the interview. I found this information to be helpful, however, these men expressed the same type of group experience as the men who were not charged.

Another limitation with this study was that the men's partners were not interviewed. The abusive behavior and group experience data was provided exclusively by the men. The disadvantage here is that women could not comment on their experience of their partner's changes. However, the men themselves may have provided information regarding their perspective of what partners and children experienced before entering the program and after changes had been implemented in the relationship. This is valuable information and the partner's feedback would be the best-case scenario. I believe that my findings were not negatively affected by the lack of partner's input, but they could have been enhanced and provided a broader context for understanding the impact of the intervention from the partner's perspective.

The sample also posed the potential limitation of participants not being completely truthful in their responses due to the highly personal nature of their

experiences. Shame is the predominant feeling for men who have used abuse as a means of controlling others. My concern was that participants would not disclose subsequent acts of abuse to avoid feeling or appearing shameful. I certainly did not get the impression at any time that the participants were being untruthful in their responses, and found them to be honest and genuine. This is reflected in the data and findings.

An additional limitation was the pressure participants may have felt to appear as if they were successful where at times during or after the group they may have used abuse and now feel they needed to make the program look effective. The risk of untruthfulness exists here again where participants may have been “too positive” in describing the impact of the group experience. The findings of this study were very positive overall, with few to no negative comments made on the program. Before the interviews started I emphasized the importance of honesty and that all comments regardless of the content were welcomed. Ultimately it is the participant’s decision whether or not they will be truthful and the overall positive nature of the responses did not affect the outcome of my study in a negative manner. One is left wondering what men who did not find the experience as positive would have to say. Including program drop-outs would have been one way of broadening the understanding of the group experience from all who participated.

My own biases present a potential limitation of the study. In qualitative studies the researcher is the research instrument, in contrast to quantitative studies which use standardized measures and tools. Due to the fact that my gender is female I had to consider the power imbalance between the interviewees and myself. This could have potentially affected my comfort level during interviews. My perception of the

participants' feelings during the interviews was of respect for the study and the men's program. I never felt intimidated or in a power-down position in relation to the participants. I was careful to conduct the interviews with the same philosophy that guides the men's groups, approaching the men as objectively as possible, debriefing with colleagues and my advisor around any issues of personal or professional bias that may arise.

An additional limitation pertains to the sample of men. The sample for this study consists of nine men. All nine were successful at changing abusive behaviors and continuing on in the men's program. This presents a limitation because men who did not finish the group, men who did not have a good experience, and men who did not change abusive behaviors were not interviewed. Many men who go through the men's groups do not continue and/or do not have a successful outcome. This is the reality of any treatment program. This may speak to the fact that men with a good experience are more likely to talk about it due to a sense of pride in their accomplishments. The opposite may be true of men who are not successful. Speaking with these men could certainly provide an interesting perspective as to why they didn't continue or succeed.

As with most qualitative research, the findings cannot be generalized to the greater population of men who use abuse. In addition causation of changes cannot be known because the study does not aim to produce such conclusions.

Conclusion

Partner abuse is a serious social issue that affects men, women and children over their life span. Knowing what helps to stop or lessen partner abuse is essential to the

social work field as social workers are in a unique position to help people who perpetrate abuse and the people who are directly and indirectly affected by it. The men in this study were successful at changing their abusive behaviors and they were honest about what is still a problem and the work still remaining. I would like to conclude with the account of a man who participated in this study and who, in his own words, sums up the heart of what this research communicates.

"You are starting to understand how you feel, but how do you think she felt when you told her she was a bitch? Sorry about my language – that's the kind of language I used. Or, how do you think she felt when you told her to fuck off? So all of a sudden you gain a whole new level of awareness. You know what, most men are very compassionate men and passionate as human beings, and we are sensitive and we have needs. I think sometimes we're conditioned to be competitive and a number of other things that make us forego our own feelings and forget about our own feelings, and in the process we forget about other people's feelings. The program helped us to bring us back to caring about ourselves and realizing that we did a lot of damage, and that we have to face that and be accountable and accept that. One of the best things they taught us is that you can feel guilt because there is good guilt and bad guilt. I feel guilty that I treated my wife so badly, but I don't feel ashamed about it. I chose that behavior. It was my decision to behave that way. I can say I didn't know – it's not an excuse, it's an explanation. But, the end result was that I did a lot of damage, and I have to accept that I did it. Through this program, I was able to do that, and in doing so I learned to calm down and not to get angry anymore. I learned that when things come up that are going to be a problem to step back. The most noticeable thing has been in my children. My children often call me

and they both say, 'Daddy, you just never get angry anymore', and I don't. I've learned and my kids have learned. I'll give them time-outs now and separate them when they fight because I've learned that by example. I'm learning to try to teach my son so much that people have feelings and that you could hurt somebody's feelings, and I'm going to continue to be like that. I do not want my son ever to become a man of the house. I'm going to work hard all my life to prevent that. I learned it from my dad and I did, and I don't want my son to learn that behavior from me. It's not right. It was a great experience."

References

- Adams, D. (1989). Feminist-based interventions for battering men. In P. L., & K. L. Hamberger (Eds.). *Treating men who batter: Theory, practice and programs*. (pp. 3-23). New York, New York: Springer.
- Adams, D. (1988). Treatment models for men who batter: A profeminist analysis. In K. Yllo & M. Bograd (Eds.). *Feminist perspectives on wife abuse* (pp. 176-199). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Allen, K., Calsyn, D. A., Feherenbach, P. A., & Benton, G. (1989). A study of the interpersonal behaviors of male batterers. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 4 (1), 79-89.
- Baker, C. K., & Perilla, J. I. (2001) Parenting stress and parenting incompetence among Latino men who batter. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 16 (11), 1139-1158.
- Bennet, L.W., & Williams, O.J. (2001). Intervention programs for men who batter. In C. Renzetti, J. Edelson, & R. Bergen (Eds.). *Sourcebook on violence against women* (pp. 261-277). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Brown, P. D., O'Leary, K. D., & Feldbau, S. R. (1997). Dropouts in a treatment program for self-referring wife-abusing men. *Journal of Family Violence*, 12(4), 365-387.
- Canadian Oral History Association. (1992). Ethics: Guidelines for research with human subjects. *Canadian Oral History Association Journal*, 12,12-13.
- Dankwort, J., & Austin, J. (1999). Standards for batterer intervention programs in Canada: A history and review. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 18 (1), 19-37.
- Dobash, R. E., & Dobash, R. P. (1998). Violent men, violent contexts. In R. E.

- Dobash & R.P. Dobash (Eds.) *Rethinking violence against women* (pp. 141-168). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Dutton, D. (1995). *The abusive personality*. New York: The Guildford Press.
- Dutton, D. (1986). The outcome of court-mandated treatment for wife-assault: A quasi-experimental evaluation. *Violence and Victims, 1*(1), 163-175.
- Edelson, J., & Gruszynski, R. (1989). Treating men who batter: Four years of outcome data from the Domestic Abuse Project. *Journal of Social Service Research, 12*(1), 3-22.
- Edelson, J., Miller, D., Stone, G. & Chapman, D. (1985). Group treatment for men who batter: A multiple base-line evaluation. *Social Work Research and Abstracts, 21*(2)18-21.
- Edelson, J. & Syers, M. (1991). The effects of group treatment for men who batter: An 18-month follow-up study. *Research on Social Work Practice, 1*(3), 227-243.
- Eisikovits, Z. C., & Edelson, J. L. (1989). Intervening with men who batter: A critical review of the literature. *Social Service Review, 63* (1), 384-414.
- Gondolf, E. W. (2000). Consumer recommendations for batterers programs. *Violence against Women, 6* (2), 198-218.
- Gondolf, E. W. (1999). Characteristics of court-mandated batterers in four cities: Diversity and Dichotomies. *Violence Against Women, 5* (11), 1277-1293.
- Gondolf, E. W. (1997). Batterer programs: What we know and need to know. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 12* (5), 83-97.
- Gondolf, E. W., & Henneken, J. (1987). The gender warrior: Reformed batterers on abuse, treatment, and change. *Journal of Family Violence, 2* (1), 117-189.

- Hamberger, L., & Hastings, J. (1988). Skills training for treatment of spouse abusers: An outcome study. *Journal of Family Violence*, 3(2) 121-130.
- Harrell, A.V. (1991). Evaluation of court-mandated treatment for domestic violence offenders. Final report submitted to the State Justice Institute. Washington DC: The Urban Institute.
- Heyman, E., & Slep, A. M (2002) Do child abuse and interparental violence lead to adulthood family violence? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64 (4), 864-871.
- Holtzman-Munroe, A., & Stuart, G. L. (1994). Typologies of male batterers: Three subtypes and the differences between them. *Psychological Bulletin*, 116 (3),476-497.
- Hotaling, G. T., & Sugarman, B. (1986). An analysis of risk markers in husband to wife violence: The current state of knowledge. *Violence and Victims*, 1 (1),101-124.
- Jasinski, J. L., & Williams, L. M. (1998). *Partner violence: A comprehensive review of 20 years of research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Johnson, H. (1996). *Dangerous domains: Violence against women in Canada*. Toronto: Nelson Canada.
- Korbanka, J. E., & McKay, M. (2000) An MMPI-2 scale to identify history of physical abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 15 (11), 1131-1140.
- Melzer, S. A. (2002) Gender, work, and intimate violence spillover and compensatory violence. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 64 (4), 820-833.
- Miller, S. (2002). Child abuse and domestic violence. *British Journal of Midwifery*. 10 (9), 565-569.

- O'Neill, D. (1998). A post-structuralist review of the theoretical literature surrounding wife abuse. *Violence Against Women*, 4 (4),457-489.
- Padgett, D. K. (1998) *Qualitative methods in social work research: Challenges and rewards*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Pandya, V. & Gingerich, W. J. (2002). Group therapy intervention. *Health and Social Work*, 27 (11), 47-55.
- Patton, M. Q. (1980) *Qualitative evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Rohrer, G. E., Thomas, M., & Yassenchak, A. B. (1992). Client perceptions of the ideal addictions counsellor. *International Journal of the Addictions*, 27, 727-733.
- Scott, K. L., & Wolfe, D.A. (2000). Change among batterers. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 15 (8), 827-843.
- Tolman, R .M., Beeman, S., & Mendoza, C. (1987). The effectiveness of a shelter-sponsored program for men who batter: Preliminary result. Paper presented at the Third National Conference for Family Violence Researchers. University of New Hampshire, Durham, July.
- Tolman, R .M., & Bennet, L. W. (1990). A review of the quantitative research on men who batter. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 5 (1), 87-118.
- Tolman, R. M., & Edelson, J. L. (1995). Interventions for men who batter: A review of research. In S. Stith & M.A. Straus (Eds.), *Understanding partner violence :Prevalence, causes, consequences and solutions* (pp.262-274). Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations.

Tutty, L. M., Bidgood, B .A., Rothery, M .A., & Bidgood, P. (2001). An evaluation of Men's batterer treatment groups. *Research on Social Work Practice, 11* (6), 645-666.

Tutty, L. M., Rothery, M., & Grinnell, R. M. (1998). *Qualitative research for social workers*. Boston, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon.

Appendix A**ENDORSEMENT LETTER**

Dear men's group alumni member,

Date

This is a letter informing you of a research study that is being conducted by a social work student at _____ that I thought you might be interested in. The student, Mel MacPhee is working on her thesis as part of the Master of Social Work program at The University of Manitoba. She requires the participation of men who have completed the First-stage group. After having discussed the research with her I believe that it may contribute to learning how to help men who have used abuse in relationships.

Mel is looking to understand your experience of the men's group, and your life after the group. Mel will gather this information through an interview that will take place at the _____ where you have the opportunity to describe your experiences during and after the group. Your experiences and opinions are at the heart of this study, and I encourage you to participate.

Please note that your decision about participating will not affect services that you receive from _____. This letter is to merely inform you about the research. Your participation is completely voluntary.

If you are interested in participating in an interview please call Mel at _____. This is a confidential phone line.

All information gathered from the interviews will be kept strictly confidential. Mel will explain the terms of confidentiality and all other details of the research study on your initial telephone contact.

I hope all is very well with you, and thanks for taking the time to read this.

Sincerely _____

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title: Exploring Perceptions of Men Who Participated in a Treatment Group for Men Who Use Abuse.

Researcher: Mel MacPhee

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I agree to participate in the research project, Exploring Perceptions of Men Who Participated in a Treatment Group for Men who Use Abuse. I am aware that the purpose of this study is to explore and get an understanding of my experiences of participating in the _____ men's group and my life after the group.

I am aware that I will be asked to participate in one interview that will last about one and a half hours, and that there may be follow up contact if Mel has any more questions. I am aware that the interview will take place at _____. I understand that the interview will be audio taped and transcribed (written out by hand). I understand that they will be erased when the study is over and the transcripts will be shredded. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may drop out of the project at any time or decide not to respond to some interview questions without any consequences to myself and without compromising my treatment.

Information about me will remain confidential in the thesis with the use of code names or numbers. All information I provide will be kept in confidence by the researcher, except those legally or ethically required. If I disclose that I plan to harm myself (suicide) or I plan to harm others (homicide, assault) I understand that this will be reported to the Police and I will be informed that this action is being taken. I also understand that any abusive behaviors towards children that I disclose (past or present) will be reported to Child and Family Services if they have not already been contacted and I will be informed by Mel that this action is being taken.

The list of code names and numbers and the tapes will be kept separate from the transcripts, remaining in a locked cabinet that only Mel MacPhee will have access to. Any direct quotations that I provided that will be requested for the final thesis report will be read and approved by me if I choose before the thesis is handed in to the University.

I understand that the interview will be audio taped and that the tape may be turned off at any time during the interview if I choose.

I understand that I am invited to read any information provided by me that will be contained in the final thesis report before Mel submits it to the university. At this time I may discuss whether or not it reflects my experiences and if I want it included in Mel's thesis.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and that this decision will not affect my use of _____ services in any way.

I am aware that the data from the project may be used in the future in publications where no identifying information will be used about me.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. Please contact Mel MacPhee at _____ or Tuula Heinonen, the faculty thesis Advisor at _____ with any questions or concerns.

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba's Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board and if you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or contact the Human Ethics Secretariat (474-7122). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

I understand that Mel MacPhee will discuss the availability of resources with me if needed. If I feel I need counselling I can contact the following resources for help.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____
 Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C**INTERVIEW GUIDE**

In the following interview I will ask you some questions first, about your age, living situation etc. and then I will ask you some questions about your experience of participating in the _____ men's group. I will also ask you some questions about goals, and whether your life and relationships were affected by participating in the group. Please take your time answering the following questions and remember that you may choose not to answer a question, or we can turn the tape off at any time if you wish.

1. How old are you?
2. What is your employment status?
3. What is your living situation?
4. What level of education have you completed?
5. What is your current marital status?
6. Has your marital status changed over the last year?
7. Please describe how you came to be in the men's group.
8. What circumstances led to it?
9. Whose idea was it to enter the group?
10. What was your initial reason for entering the group?
11. What forms of abuse would you say were problems in your life then?
12. Please describe your experience of participating in the men's group.
13. Did you find that the men's group made any impact on your life? If it did please describe how.
14. Have you noticed any changes in your use of abusive behaviors since completing the men's group? If so please describe these changes giving examples.
15. Have you used abusive behaviors since leaving the group? If so, do you recall when this occurred?

16. Since completing the group have you seen how your conduct affect your intimate and/or social relationships? If so please describe how they have been effected. Can you give an example?

17. Please describe what your goals were when you started the group. Do you feel that you achieved any of your goals? If so did the men's group help with this?

18. Do you feel that anything else besides the group affected your goals?

19. Have you noticed any changes about yourself since completing the group? If so please describe.

20. Have you received any other family violence services since completing the group? If so please describe.