Exploring a South African Intervention for Violent Men: A Phenomenological Analysis of Women's Experiences

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ABSTRACT

South Africa has one of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world. However, very little research has been done in South Africa on the interventions that combat this violence. This study investigated an intervention for violent men through the experiences of six female partners during programme participation. Interpretative phenomenology was used to analyse in-depth interviews of women's experiences. During programme participation batterers continued to dominate female partners by keeping information about domestic violence secret and accusing the female partner of being the abuser. Female partners continued to experience psychological abuse and were ambivalent about the long-term effectiveness of the programme. The study highlights the importance of hearing women's voices when assessing programme effectiveness, predicting future abuse, and increasing the long-term efficacy of batterer interventions.

Keywords: Interventions violent men, domestic violence, batterer, intimate partner violence, gender-based violence, patriarchy, South African interventions, interpretative phenomenology.

CONTENTS

South Africa has one of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world (Jewkes, Levin, & Penn-Kekana, 2002; Seedat, Van Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla, & Ratele, 2009). One method of reducing the amount of violence perpetrated against women is through interventions for violent men. Although interventions for violent men are the standard court response to domestic violence (Gregory & Erez, 2002), the effects of interventions on batterers' behaviour and the well-being of female partners is largely unresearched in South Africa.

This study investigates a South African intervention by listening to female partners' experiences of the intervention. Six in-depth interviews were conducted with women whose partners were attending an intervention programme. Using interpretative phenomenology to analyse female partners' accounts, this study produced new insights on female partners' experiences of an intervention, the batterers' behaviour during intervention, as well as their suggestions for increased effectiveness. This study makes a valuable contribution to what is known about intervention programmes in South Africa and expands the literature on interventions for domestically violent men by showing the importance of listening to female partners' experiences and perspectives.

The effectiveness of batterer interventions is defined by the cessation of violent behaviour and is typically reported by batterers themselves (Gregory & Erez, 2002). However, research shows that batterers are likely to underreport their violent behaviour (Buttell & Carney, 2004). Moreover, measuring programme success through the cessation of physical violence alone does not acknowledge the presence or rise of psychological abuse, which has been found to be as damaging to female partners' well-being as physical abuse (Sartin, Hansen, & Huss, 2006). Research has found that while physical abuse may end other forms of abuse may escalate for men who have attended intervention programmes (Rothman, Buchart, & Cérda, 2003; van Wormer & Bednar, 2002).

Researching female partners' experiences of an intervention provides important information on the intervention's effectiveness in changing batterers' behaviour (Gregory & Erez, 2002). Research has found that female partners are more likely to be accurate in their predictions of future perpetration of abuse (Bell, Cattaneo, Goodman, & Dutton, 2008). Thus, incorporating women's voices into the evaluation of intervention

effectiveness and prediction of future perpetration of abuse can enable interventions to more accurately predict and prevent future abuse.

In light of the above, this research aims to address the following questions: What are women's experiences of male partners being in an intervention programme? How do these experiences inform one about the intervention programme and its ability to change and influence the behaviour and attitudes of violent men towards women?

The Prevalence of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a major social, public health and human rights problem internationally and in South Africa (Boonzaier, 2008; Fikree, Razzak, & Durocher, 2005; Geffner & Rosenbaum, 2001; Jewkes et al., 2002; Smith & Randall, 2007; Stuart, Temple, & Moore, 2007). Over 1.3 million women are physically abused by an intimate partner each year in the United States (Stuart et al., 2007). Domestic violence is estimated to occur in one in every six households annually (Rosenfeld, 1992). Research has suggested that the majority of violence perpetrated against women is done by an intimate partner: over twelve percent of the women treated for injuries in emergency hospital rooms are victims of ongoing domestic violence (Sartin et al., 2006).

The initial response to high levels of domestic violence was the creation of shelters for battered women (Geffner & Rosenbaum, 2001). However, providing a protective environment for abused women did not stop the occurrence and prevalence of domestic violence. Batterers find new partners to abuse and abused women have been found to return to the abusive partner either for economic reasons or with a hope that he has changed (Geffner & Rosenbaum, 2001). A more extensive response to domestic violence was needed. Intervention programmes for perpetrators of gender-based violence were first established in North America during the late 1970s (Gelles, 2001; Rosenbaum & Leisring, 2001).

The rate of gender-based violence in South Africa is extremely high, with the death of women by the hands of an intimate partner being six times that of the global average (Jewkes et al., 2002; Kim et al., 2007; Seedat et al., 2009). Violence has become a normal way of asserting one's masculinity and is seen as a socially acceptable method of exercising power over women (Boonzaier, 2008; Jewkes et al., 2002; Seedat et al.,

2009). There is as yet very little literature reporting on the efficacy of batterer interventions aimed at reducing the amount of violence perpetrated against women in South African.

Interventions for Violent Men

The most common approaches used in interventions for violent men involve psycho-educational and cognitive-behavioural techniques with a pro-feminist theory of domestic violence (Geffner & Rosenbaum, 2001). Intervention programmes educate men that their violence is used to dominate women and that it is unacceptable (Rosenbaum & Leisring, 2001).

Efficacy of Batterer Interventions

It is difficult to draw conclusions about the successes of batterer interventions due to the methodological problems involved in assessing their efficacy (Hamberger, 1997; Sartin et al., 2006). These problems include differing definitions used by different researchers of what constitutes abuse as well as where information on recidivism comes from: female partners, police records, or batterers themselves.

Recidivist rates of men who have undergone feminist interventions are high (Babcock, Green & Robie, 2002; Daniels & Murphy, 1997; Hamberger, 1997; Jackson et al., 2003; Stuart et al., 2007; Wilson, 2003). However, some reviews estimate that sixty to eighty percent of men completing treatment are no longer physically violent at treatment conclusion (Buttell & Carney, 2004; Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, & Lewis, 1996). In addition, there are high intervention drop-out rates, which range between forty and seventy percent (Dutton & Corvo, 2006; Dutton & Corvo, 2007).

Batterer intervention programs have been found to either have no impact on reducing emotional abuse or increase emotional abuse (Daniels & Murphy, 1997; Rothman et al., 2003; van Wormer & Bednar, 2002). It has been argued that batterer interventions teach perpetrators of violence against women how to conceal their abuse (Buttell & Carney, 2004). From existing evidence (Buttell & Carney, 2004; van Wormer & Bednar, 2002), there appears to be a lack of psychological change in the men after interventions. Increased levels of psychological abuse post intervention could suggest

that men redirect the anger from physical violence to more emotionally abusive behaviours in an attempt to conceal their abuse (Buttell & Carney, 2004).

Hearing female partners' experiences

Very few studies have researched female partners' perceptions and perspectives on intervention programmes and their efficacy (Goldman & Du Mont, 2001; Grauwiler, 2008; Gregory & Erez, 2002). The primary goal of batterer programmes is the safety of women (Goldman & Du Mont, 2001). Female partners have direct experience of the batterers' behaviour and are the best predictors of future abuse by their partners (Bell et al., 2008; Feder & Wilson, 2005). Therefore, listening to female partners' voices is invaluable when investigating programme effectiveness and future perpetration of abuse. Hearing the woman's experience of her partner being in an intervention is extremely important as it is the female partner who experiences the batterer's violence. She is therefore the person who will physically, emotionally, and psychologically experience the effects of the intervention programme on the batterer.

Hearing female partners' voices illuminates what the intervention programme means to them and how it impacts on their daily living and sense of well-being (Goldman & Du Mont, 2001; Gregory & Erez, 2002). The 'victim' of the abuse is able to voice her experience of the batterer and his behaviour.

Because female partners' accounts of batterers' levels of violence are generally very different from the accounts of the batterers themselves, it is important to hear from the female partners what their experiences are of their partners' violence or decrease in violence during the programme (Buttell & Carney, 2004; Dutton & Corvo, 2006; Gregory & Erez, 2002). Violent men tend to deny their violence and often do not identify with being violent (Boonzaier, 2008; Buchbinder & Eisikovits, in press). It is therefore important to hear from female partners how they experience the man's behaviour during the intervention programme as she may provide information that is not attainable from the batterer.

Hearing from South African women how they experience the intervention and the batterer's behaviour and attitude towards her during intervention is essential when determining the impact that the programme is having on the batterer. Understanding how

women experience the intervention and behaviour change in the unique South African context will provide researchers with information that has not been documented in the literature. Moreover, hearing women's experiences of interventions currently running in South Africa may provide invaluable information about how these interventions can be improved, which can contribute to the cessation of violence against women in South Africa.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

An interpretative phenomenological theoretical framework was used to investigate how women experience interventions for violent men. Interpretative phenomenology is a method of deriving knowledge about a phenomenon by looking at how people experience that phenomenon (Willig, 2001). The theory argues that how a phenomenon is experienced is the *reality* of that phenomenon – how it is experienced is what it is. This means that there is no objective reality to what a phenomenon is: the experiences of those who are in contact with it will differ depending on who that person is, their viewpoint, orientation, beliefs, and life history.

This theory is appropriate for this study because it emphasises the importance of subjective experience when deriving knowledge about a phenomenon (Audi, 1999; Spinelli, 2005). And it is subjective experience that this project uses as its data about an intervention for violent men. By making experience important the theory allows the researcher to effectively use the experiences of female partners when forming an understanding of what an intervention for violent men *is* to those who are the recipients of the batterer's violence. I argue that these experiences are extremely important when learning about an intervention because it is the female partners who experience the effects of the intervention programme. Therefore, using interpretative phenomenology, the researcher is interested in the intervention as it is experienced by female partners.

Moreover, interpretative phenomenological analysis provides a method of thinking that is sensitive towards the accounts of the experiences given by interviewees. Interpretative phenomenology is able to look at the different *layers* of meaning that are presented in the accounts. The analysis goes beyond what is simply said in the interviews. It looks at the mental orientation of the interviewee and explores to what extent this

determines what is being said. Phenomenological analysis focuses on meanings. It positions itself so that the subjectivity of the interviewee is fully acknowledged when reading and transcribing the interview. Phenomenological analysis gave the researcher a method, a style of thinking, with which to analyse the accounts of the interviewees.

The knowledge produced in interpretative phenomenological analysis is reflective in that it acknowledges its dependence on the researcher's own perspective and goals for the research (Willig, 2001). The resulting analysis of the data is therefore both phenomenological, it represents the interviewees experiences of the world, and interpretative in that it is dependent on the researcher's view of the world.

Experience and Outcome

Using interpretative phenomenology as a theoretical framework for this research brings with it the assumption that how the intervention is experienced influences how successful the intervention is in reducing domestic violence. I argue that understanding how the intervention programme is experienced by female partners provides invaluable information and insight into how the programme is functioning, what is effective and what not, and what needs to be changed.

A further assumption is that we will never be able to access what the intervention is without the experiences of those who are involved with it. The objective intervention is not accessible. The accounts, perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of those involved with the intervention programme shape what the intervention is. Language plays an important role here: the words interviewees use and the way these are understood by the researcher will determine how the researcher interprets the experiences of those she interviews, which will in turn impact on the write-up of the research.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research

For the qualitative researcher human experience and the meanings attributed to that experience are most important when generating knowledge about a particular person, situation, or phenomenon. Qualitative research is interested in 'what is it like?' to experience certain life events and what do people do in order to cope with pain, personal

struggle, and social inequalities (Willig, 2001). When using qualitative research the researcher takes the standpoint of there being no objective truth to be discovered. Qualitative research acknowledges that there are multiple truths, and that a person's interpretation of their experience is dependent on the social context that they are in (Goldman & Du Mont, 2001).

The techniques used in qualitative research are flexible enough to accommodate new or unanticipated categories of meaning and experience that may come up during the research process (Willig, 2001). The type of data collected is naturalistic and contextual. The research question is open-ended and able to change during the process of research. The research question acts as a guide that points the researcher in a direction without predicting what will be found (Willig, 2001).

Qualitative methodology can be used to explore what contextual issues are impacting on the intervention (Goldman & Du Mont, 2001). The context of the intervention, the social reality of the women and their male partners are key aspects of how the intervention is running and how effective it is in reducing domestic violence.

From a phenomenological framework the experiences of female partners of the intervention programme are important in gaining knowledge about what the intervention is in the world. Therefore, a qualitative methodology is appropriate for this project as it prioritises the experiences of those it studies. Qualitative research emphasises the subjectivity, individual perspective and context of the meanings that people give to their experiences. Interpretative phenomenological analysis uses the accounts given by the interviewees as the phenomenon to be analysed. Qualitative research provides a method to attain those accounts. Moreover, using qualitative research allows me as the researcher to reflect on my own subjective contribution to the research, which is a fundamental part of using the phenomenological framework.

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative research does not aim to work with representative samples whose data can be easily generalised to other groups or populations. Rather, it is interested in emphasising the uniqueness of a person, group, or situation. Being able to replicate the research is not

an important concern (Willig, 2001). Qualitative research acknowledges that every piece of research has its own unique context, participants, and researchers.

Validity is the extent to which I research what I aim to research; it is the extent to which the data collection and data analysis answer the research question (Willig, 2001). Participants in qualitative research are free to challenge or change my assumptions, methods, or emphasis. In this way, the participant contributes to ensuring validity in the research process.

Qualitative research takes place in the real life setting of the phenomena studied. The research is engaging with the phenomenon *as it is* in the world. This promotes validity because the phenomenon has not been changed, reduced, or removed from its natural context, which means that the conclusions drawn relate to the phenomenon as it naturally occurs. This provides qualitative research with high ecological validity (Willig, 2001).

Sampling

I gained access to participants through contacting the Western Cape area manager of an intervention organisation. The manager gave contact details of two social workers who were in contact with female partners of batterers currently in the intervention programme. I contacted the social workers and received the contact details of eight female partners. Interview meetings were arranged and conducted with seven of the women. The eighth woman was unable to meet with me. Six of the seven interviews were used in this study. The seventh was not included because the male partner of the woman was not attending an intervention programme.

Data collection methods & Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from female partners of men attending intervention programmes. The semi-structured interview gave me an opportunity to listen to the experiences of the interviewees from their point of view using their language (Esterberg, 2002).

The structure of a semi-structured interview involves a small number of open-ended questions that can be modified during the interview process. The research question

acts as a guide to what the interviewee will talk about. Questions asked by the researcher work to prompt the interviewee or ask for elaborations on what has already been said. The interviewee's responses are what shape the structure of the interview (Esterberg, 2002). The interviews made available the accounts of women's experiences, which I could then analyse using the chosen theoretical framework.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were conducted I listened to the data and transcribed it. The transcribed data was analysed using the proposed method of analysis. When analysing the interview transcripts the interviewees' accounts became the phenomena with which I engaged. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, I first recorded my own reactions to the text. Examining my own reactions was a way for me to explore how I might have influenced the interviews and research process. Following this I organised the text into themes and theme clusters. The themes are used to organise the transcript in order to gain a conceptual understanding of what was presented by the interviewee.

Power & Reflexivity

Qualitative research is concerned with issues of power and political agendas (Parker, 2005). It aims to empower marginalised or unheard groups of people and thereby challenge social dynamics of power. Qualitative research and phenomenological analysis hold that the researcher can never access the objective reality of a phenomenon (Willig, 2001). Therefore, the insights and conclusions gained from this study are filtered through my ways of thinking, assumptions, and agenda. The insights gained are a product both of the female partners' experiences and my interpretation of those accounts.

Researchers are generally seen as authoritative, educated, advantaged, and perhaps even all-knowing. Being a student from a university with a research project and money to reimburse participants may have created a picture of me as being knowledgeable and advantaged, which could have influenced the way participants related to me and presented their experiences of the intervention programme. It was therefore important to challenge the assumption that I as the researcher was more powerful than the

participant. This was done through emphasising the female partner's opinion of what was important over and above my own.

Who I am and how I responded to the female partners and their accounts may also have influenced the direction of interviews and the topics that participants chose to highlight. I had a distinct feeling of entering the participants' world – a world foreign to me – and gathering information about that world. In this sense I may have also been experienced as an outsider by the participants, and as someone who could not understand their experiences. I often felt that I was taking from the participants and not giving back. This feeling may have come across during or at the start of interviews and may have influenced what participants chose to share with me.

However, I felt that being a woman gave me entry into the women's personal experiences of gender-based violence and the intervention programme. Participants often acknowledged my gender and indicated a type of commonality with me on the basis of this. Interviewees also often assumed that I was experienced in speaking to survivors of domestic violence, which may have also influenced how and what the interviewees chose to share with me.

This research project is part of a larger aim to change male attitude towards women and the patriarchal ideology that often shapes men's violent acts towards women. Importantly, my own aim of ending gender-based violence contributed to the research process as well as what aspects of the interviews were highlighted and the types of conclusions and suggestions that were made.

Ethics

A consent form was given to the participant informing her of the research and the voluntary nature of participation (see Appendix A). Participants were reimbursed for their travel costs. No monetary gain beyond the reimbursement was offered for participation in the study. All information given by the interviewees is kept confidential and used solely for the purpose of the study. Excerpts were kept as few and as short as possible in order to prevent participants from being identified. Participants were informed of their right to end their participation at any time without any penalty, negative consequences, or loss of their right or their partner's right to receive assistance from the

organisation. I also made contact with a coordinator at the organisation who gave details of a counsellor who participants could contact if necessary. At the end of each interview I gave a debriefing to the participant.

The interviews were tape recorded. Before the interview I explained why a tape recorder was used and how it worked. The participant had control over the tape recorder and was able to switch it off at any time during the interview. The participant also had the opportunity to request that anything that they said be removed from the research and kept my contact details should they decide at a later stage to withdraw from the research.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee at the University of Cape Town.

FINDINGS/ANALYSIS

The first theme highlights the safety and control that women felt with the batterer in an intervention programme. Secondly, women felt guilty, blamed themselves for the abuse, and wanted to help the batterer. These were linked to femininity and female socialisation. A third theme is women's experience of positive behaviour change and their predictions of future violence. Women's experiences of non-physical forms of abuse is the fourth theme. Lastly, women gave suggestions for increased programme effectiveness. Please refer to Appendix B for transcription notation.

Increased safety and control

Women felt more in control, safer, and less isolated with the batterers participating in a programme.

More in control

A battered woman's life is usually controlled by the batterer (Seedat et al., 2009; Walker, 1984). Control can range from controlling what she does in the home, where she goes, who she sees, to controlling what she says, how she behaves, how often they have sex, what the nature of the relationship will be and ultimately what she thinks (Bensley, Macdonald & Van Eenwyk, 2000; Boonzaier, 2008; Hyden, 2005; Pressman, Cameron,

& Rothery, 1989; Seedat et al., 2009). When asked about how she experiences the intervention programme, one woman indicated that she had gained some control:

> I feel more like I'm in control of my life now.

This could indicate that having her male partner in an intervention programme has allowed the woman to be more in control of her life. Experiencing a greater sense of control over her life could suggest that having the batterer participate in the programme has empowered her. Violence is often used to control the female partner (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997; Schrock & Padavic, 2007). Fear of further violence prevents female partners from seeking outside help (Hyden, 1999; Rodriguez, Bauer, McLoughtin, & Grumbach, 1999). As expressed by an interviewee:

> Before I used to be very scared of him, I think that's why I never did anything about it before.

Battered women's lives tend to be dominated by fear (Hyden, 2005). The above excerpt shows that the woman's fear of her husband's violence prevented her from previously seeking help. It also suggests that the woman is less scared now than she was before. It is likely that having her partner participate in a programme has reduced her fear of her husband, which means that his threats of violence may no longer have as big an effect on her.

Safer and less isolated

Most female partners of batterers are isolated from outside help and support (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997; Hyden, 2005). This leads to her being more vulnerable to the batterer's abuse and control over her (Walker, 1984). Some women felt safer as a result of having access to an organisation that they could go to for help and support. As described by one woman:

> It has made me feel a lot safer because I knew I could go to someone if there was a problem.

Her feelings of safety are described as being a result of having someone to go to if she has problems related to the batterer. This suggests that simply knowing that someone is there lets the woman feel safer. Having access to social workers and feeling safer could suggest that the intervention organisation acts as a safety net for the female partner. This could indicate that having the batterer attend an intervention programme leads to women feeling safer and less isolated. Having the batterer in an intervention programme also led to female partners feeling relieved that someone else, other than herself, was going to help the batterer.

Femininity and female socialisation

The women expressed that they felt guilty, blamed themselves for the abuse, felt sorry for the batterer and wanted to care for and help the batterer. This may stem from culturally and socially prescribed female role expectations, such as being the care-giver and putting the needs of her romantic partner and family above her own (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997).

Feelings of relief

Some women indicated that they felt relieved that their husbands were participating in a programme. One woman felt relieved because she no longer had to try and fix 'the problem' and could hand it over to an organisation. She felt that because she was not a 'professional' she could not give her husband the help that he needed to end his violence.

> I was very *relieved* that he was going to go on a programme and then once the social worker explained to us, I was very relieved that he was someone else's problem because//…I'm his wife, I'm not his psychologist.

This could suggest that the female partner felt that the batterer needed psychological help to end his violence. She explains her relief as a reaction to her husband now being someone else's problem, and no longer her own. She seems to feel that as his wife she

cannot help him and that he needs further help, perhaps from a psychologist. When reading the above excerpt it appears that she feels to an extent responsible for the batterer and for helping him to end his violence. This could be related to her socialisation as a woman and her role as care-taker.

Violence rooted in his childhood

Women in this study did not attribute the violence to larger structures in society or patriarchal ideology but rather to the individual characteristics and childhood hardships of the batterer. Some female partners felt that because the abuse was rooted in the batterer's childhood he needed psychological help to stop the abuse. When talking about men's violence, one woman said:

> Those are eruptions because of..things that happened in their [batterers'] lives, mainly it's children I mean that's where we all get our scars from: as children, and I'm quite sure that he would..he will not heal completely he won't be the complete person that he can be unless he works on that.

The educational model of the intervention programme is not experienced by female partners as 'healing' but rather as teaching, which is not what the batterer 'really needs' to stop being violent. This could indicate that the female partner felt that the batterer needs to work through his childhood scars in order for him to stop the eruptions of violence. Understanding the battering as rooted in the batterer's childhood points to a type of understanding of abuse that can be viewed as relieving the batterer of blame and responsibility for his violence (Smith & Randall, 2007). Relieving the batterer of blame could stem from the woman's cultural role expectation of nurturing her romantic partner (Boonzaier, 2008). It also provides a reason for the woman to maintain hope that he will change with intervention. Additionally, because it prevents her from blaming the batterer, this understanding of the violence can make the woman more vulnerable to his abuse (Smith & Randall, 2007). Understanding the violence as rooted in childhood and the batterer therefore being a victim of childhood maltreatment can also allow the woman to feel sorry for him.

Feel sorry for batterer

Some female partners were unwilling to blame the batterer for his violence and instead felt sympathetic towards him. Female partners often withdrew the case against their husbands because they felt pity for them, as one states:

> I felt sorry for him so I withdraw the case.

The woman's compassion towards the batterer prevented her from doing something about the abuse. This is consistent with the social expectations of women to sacrifice their needs for those of their male partners (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). Feeling sorry for the batterer could also be related to the female partner's sense that she can or should help the batterer as opposed to ending the relationship. Feeling that she can help him or that his violence will end if he receives help can make her experience leaving him as unfairly or cruelly deserting him. Unwillingness to blame the batterer can also be rooted in female socialization and male dominance. Female socialization and sex role stereotyping in the context of a patriarchal culture encourage passivity and dependency in women (Walker, 1984). This increases a woman's vulnerability to abuse and the likelihood of her developing learned helplessness as a result of not being able to stop continual abuse (Walker, 1984). Part of a woman's socialization is for her to believe that she needs a man to have value (Boonzaier, 2008). This can work to keep women in abusive relationships. Smith and Randall (2007) argue that understanding the abuse as coming from childhood and wanting to help the batterer is a way for the female partner to justify remaining in the relationship.

Feel guilty

Female partners often feel responsible for the abuse, a belief consistent with their socialization as women (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997; Pressman et al., 1989; Smith & Randall, 2007). Breaking away from this socialization by seeking outside help for domestic violence may lead to feelings of guilt. This is expressed by a female partner when describing how she felt about contacting the police:

> I felt guilty about it, I felt *terribly* guilty about it, I felt terribly guilty.

It is possible that female partners felt guilty for laying a charge and contacting the police because they did not want to blame the batterer for his abuse or because she felt that she did not deserve to be helped (Grauwiler, 2008). Feeling that she does not deserve to be helped could be a result of both psychological abuse by the batterer and female socialization into passivity. Feeling sorry for the batterer and feeling guilty for seeking official help can be the result of the batterer's manipulation of the female partner in an attempt to disempower and prevent her from seeking outside help (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997).

Self-blame

Female partners have been found to feel responsible for the abuse (Hyden, 2005). Female partners blame themselves for the abuse in order to gain control of the abuse (Smith & Randall, 2007). Walker (1984) also found that battered women see themselves as having a great deal of control over what happens to them. They feel that if they changed then the abuse could stop. These women often have a need to manipulate everything in their environment to avoid the batterer getting angry (Walker, 1984). One woman describes below how she questions whether she was the reason for the batterer's anger:

> Ja maybe I was overreacting maybe I did cause him to get so angry.

This extract illustrates how on occasion the woman wondered whether she had caused the batterer to get angry, and perhaps caused him to be physically violent. This would make her a co-actor of the violence (Hyden, 2005). This could suggest that in the woman's experience there is a blurring of victim and perpetrator (Boonzaier, 2008). It could also suggest that female partners are unsure as to why the abuse is occurring (Hyden, 2005; Walker 1984). Not knowing why the abuse is occurring and not being able to stop it has been found to lead to learned helplessness in female partners, which often leads to them seeking outside help as a last resort (Hyden, 2005; Walker, 1984). Although the batterer

perpetrates the violence, this is attributed to his own childhood experiences of being a victim, which causes the woman to feel sorry for him and want to help him. She may therefore feel guilty, as mentioned above, for trying to punish him by contacting the police, because she at the same time feels sorry for him. These conflicting and contradictory feelings could be the result of psychological abuse, whereby the batterer convinces the woman that he is a victim and she is to blame even though he is physically abusing her (Bell et al., 2008; Grigsby & Hartman, 1997).

Wanting to continue the relationship

Seeking official help can work to empower the female partner and give her hope that an intervention programme can 'fix' or 'heal' the batterer (Smith & Randall, 2007). As found in my analysis, having the batterer attend the intervention programme gave women a sense of safety and hope that the violence would end. The sense of hope about the programme helping the batterer or healing him may be related to the woman's desire to remain in the relationship with the batterer. As Smith and Randall (2007) found, many female partners of batterers want to continue the relationship with the batterer but want the abuse to stop. As indicated below:

> I just want him to love me you know.

Female partners of batterers who are in an intervention programme have been found to decide to remain in the relationship because the male partner is in an intervention (Goldman & Du Mont, 2001). Sending the batterer to an intervention programme provides the female partner with the hope that the batterer will now change, and thereby provides her with a reason for remaining in the relationship.

Behaviour change and future violence

Two out of the six women experienced no behaviour change, while four experienced positive behaviour change. Behaviour change was expressed as the reduction of physical violence. The women who experienced positive change were ambivalent about the

sustainability of that change because they felt that the programme was not long enough and did not address the underlying issues that were causing violence.

No change

Two women experienced no change in the batterer's behaviour while he was in the programme. They attributed this to both the ineffectiveness of the group sessions and their own loss of connection with their husbands:

> There's actually, there's no change.
> //…I just think maybe we just don't understand each other any more.
>
> Actually that group has done nothing//…he hasn't changed a bit.
> //…He blocked us out already.

These excerpts illustrate that the women experienced no change and felt that the group was doing 'nothing'. They also mention that there is a loss of contact or connection between them and the batterers. They felt particularly cut-off from the batterer and experienced him as emotionally removed from her. Emotional distance is recognised as a form of emotional and psychological abuse (Bell et al., 2008; Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). These women felt particularly uninformed about the intervention process and experienced it as not working. One of them also complained that she had too little contact with the social worker. According to these women's experiences of the intervention, the intervention is not something that is helping or making the women feel safer. This experience can make the female partner feel further disempowered and hopeless because seeking help has not made any change to her situation (Grauwiler, 2008).

Positive change

Four women experienced a decrease in physical violence during the programme. They experienced the programme as producing a positive change in their partner's behaviour and interactions towards them:

> I do feel that it is a good thing that he's belonging to the group, definitely, because I can see the change//…I like that change. Because he's a different person now you know.

This extract shows that the woman liked the ways in which the batterer was changing and she attributed that change to the programme group. She describes the batterer as a 'different person' which indicates that the behaviour change is making an impact on how she experiences her husband. Four out of the six women experienced a positive change, which suggests that the programme was having an impact on the majority of the batterers' behaviour. This suggests that during programme participation the programme was having a positive effect on batterers.

Predictions of future abuse

However, despite experiencing positive change, female partners were concerned that the change would not be sustainable:

> But I don't know how sustainable that um behaviour is going to be.

Also found by previous research (Gregory & Erez, 2002), although female partners experienced a reduction in physical violence they questioned the long-term sustainability of this reduction. Another female partner expresses her worry about how consistent the change will be:

> That is my only concern, is the consistency afterwards//…I'm just worried about where are we..six months or a year from here.

This excerpt indicates that the female partner worries about the batterer's behaviour six months or a year post intervention. When reading this excerpt it appears that she worries that the violence may return. This excerpt suggests that the female partner doubts that the batterer's non-violent behaviour will be consistent after the intervention programme. Women who have been physically abused by an intimate partner are at great risk of

future abuse (Feder & Wilson, 2005). Another female partner expresses her fear of future violence:

> I am scared that it might surface again later.

This shows how during the intervention programme the female partner feared that the violence would resurface in the future. This could suggest that the programme has not yet changed the batterer with respect to his violence or that the programme is not doing what is needed in order to permanently stop the batterer's violence. Another female partner clearly indicates her worry that the abuse will return post intervention:

> What is going to happen after the end of [the programme]? I mean, are they just now like okay class is finished you don't need to attend this stuff anymore, and it's almost like that *burden* that was on them is now lifted//…they just gonna think everything is back to normal now. He can now just go on with the abusive.

The female partner questions what will happen after the intervention programme and predicts that the batterer will continue the abuse because the 'burden' of the programme is lifted. This suggests that the female partner doubts that the programme is or will be enough to prevent the batterer from being violent in the future. She expresses concern that as soon as the programme is over the batterer will go 'back to normal' and continue the abuse. Research has found that female partners of batterers are more likely to be accurate in their predictions of future physical and psychological abuse perpetrated by the batterer (Bell et al., 2008). Therefore, at the time of the interviews, the batterer may have been more likely than not to perpetrate violence in the future.

Programme is not enough

Some female partners indicated that although the programme sessions were positive, they would not be enough to prevent future violence:

> This is definitely a good beginning but I don't think that it should be everything. Once a person ends up in court or with a criminal case against them for assault or abuse um..it can't be resolved in twenty sessions.
>
> It is very positive so far I'm just scared that it might not be enough.

These excerpts show that female partners felt positive about the behaviour change that was happening but indicated that they were wary of hoping that this change would remain for the long-term. Research has shown that interventions may result in suppressing violent behaviour for the duration of the intervention but not for the long term (Buchbinder & Eisikovits, in press; Dutton & Corvo, 2006). The female partners' positive descriptions of the programme are followed by 'but…it can't be resolved in twenty sessions' and 'I'm just scared it might not be enough' which suggest a fear that the programme is not enough to stop future violence. Some female partners also felt that the current behaviour change was due to the threat of incarceration and that abuse might return once this threat was lifted.

Threat of court as reason for change

Some female partners expressed that they felt that the threat of the court and going to jail was the main or only reason why their husbands had stopped physically abusing them. Female partners worried that the violence would resurface once the group sessions were over and the threat of the court was lifted:

> What is gonna [happen] afterwards when the report has been given back that there's improvement and he's doing better but there's no court uh sentence or anything like that hanging over his head how is he going to react? So that is my one *fear*.
>
> He's scared that he might not get a good report..you know because he *does not want to go to jail*.//…but that is hanging over his head so I don't know how much of the reaction [behaviour change] is truthful.

The two above excerpts suggest that some female partners felt that the batterer had stopped being violent because he feared not getting a good report and going to jail. This suggests that female partners feared that if this threat was removed and the batterer was no longer being watched by a higher authority then the abuse would return. This could indicate that female partners did not experience the reduction in violence as a result of attitude change towards her or a psychological change in the batterer resulting from the programme but as the batterer's method of remaining out of jail.

Although the intervention programme produced behaviour change during the programme it is vital to take seriously the female partners' concern that physical violence may return. A reduction in abuse does not mean that it has permanently ceased (Gregory & Erez, 2002). Research suggests that female partners' assessments of future risk of abuse should be given as much weight as professional assessments (Bell et al., 2008). Moreover, female partners' reports of abusive behaviour post intervention are considered the most valid indicators of change in the batterer (Goldman & Du Mont, 2001). Therefore, it is important for the intervention programme to maintain contact with female partners during and post intervention and to include follow-up interventions if seen as necessary by the female partner.

Behaviour change: New forms of abuse

During the batterers' programme participation the women continued to experience non-physical forms of abuse. Batterers used the intervention programme to their advantage by hiding information from the woman and accusing her of being the abuser.

Disempowerment

Female partners of batterers are often disempowered in terms of access to money, support, safety, and due to their socialisation as passive and dependent (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). During the interviews I found that the women experienced feeling disempowered and manipulated by the batterer during his programme participation. Batterers received information hand-outs about gender-based violence and its infringement on human rights. They attempted to use this information against the women

while keeping the hand-outs secret and not allowing the women to read them. As one woman describes:

> I saw the paper//…he said ‘it’s private, it’s not for your eyes’.

This secrecy could be aimed at disempowering the woman by the batterer making sure that she does not have information about domestic violence. It may also be possible that the batterer tried to keep the information away from the woman so that she could not see and read that how he had treated her was an infringement on her human rights. This could indicate that the batterer was keeping the information from the female partner as a way to disempower her. Keeping information away from her also appeared to be a tactic used by the batterer in order that he could use the information against her. By having access to information about abuse and keeping it away from the female partner, the batterer appears to have manipulated the situation into him having the knowledge to correct her behaviour. As one female partner expressed:

> He needs to rectify me because//…he can *know*, he knows better than myself what is abuse and the different types of abuses there is you know? Where now I would just say ‘no if you smack me that is abuse if you..swear me that is abuse and’..but he knows more than what I know you see?

The above excerpt illustrates how the woman experiences that because the batterer has information about abuse he can ‘*know*’ what abuse is and what the different types of abuse are. Her emphasis on ‘know’ suggests that the way in which the batterer knows about abuse is undoubtable and certain. She expresses that this knowledge puts him in a position of being able to rectify her behaviour. This shows her disempowerment in relation to the batterer as a result of him hiding information from her, a possible continuation of the broader disempowerment found in domestic violence relationships (Hyden, 2005). The female partner states that she thinks smacking and swearing are abuse, followed by ‘but he knows more than what I know’. This could indicate that her ideas of what abuse is are being countered by the batterer’s knowledge of abuse. This

shows a power imbalance between the partners, which can be understood as the male partner trying to dominate the woman by claiming higher knowledge of abuse and hiding the sources of information. This also led to batterers accusing female partners of being the abusers:

> And I'm the abuser and he's not the abuser, because for him he's learning all these things.

This excerpt could suggest that the batterer is using the information he is receiving and things he is learning about abuse against the female partner. He is using the information to deflect the blame of the abuse in an attempt to make the female partner think that she is actually the abuser. It is a way for the batterer to use the programme to his benefit by using it to accuse the female partner of being the abuser. One female partner states that the batterer is using the programme to convince her that she is abusive, while not admitting to his violence:

> He can now clearly see that um he's being abused instead of acknowledging that he is attending these classes because of what *he* has done.

This indicates how the batterer is using the programme and the information he is receiving to gain power of the female partner; he attempts to make her feel like she was wrong and that she is actually the abuser. This could be the batterer's method to appear innocent and unduly charged, as well as a way to punish the female partner for laying a charge against him. Connected to the batterer's attempt to appear unduly charged is how he positions himself as a victim to the woman's abuse. As described below:

> He would play this victim, he's the victim//…he's being abused.

This suggests that while in the programme the batterer took on the role of being abused himself and positioned the female partner as the perpetrator. This could indicate that the batterer was attempting to make the female partner doubt her feelings about him being

abusive and feel guilty for accusing him. Aiming to make the female partner doubt her feelings is a form of psychological abuse used to dominate the female partner and make her vulnerable to further abuse (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997; Walker, 1984). Female partners have been found to feel like they are going crazy as a result of the batterer's psychological abuse tactics aimed at undermining her sense of herself (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). It therefore appears that during the programme participation the batterer was continuing to psychologically abuse the female partner.

Changing forms of abuse: Psychological abuse

Participation in an intervention programme has been associated with a reduction in physical violence and a corresponding rise in psychological and emotional abuse (Daniels & Murphy, 1997; Gregory & Erez, 2002; Rothman et al., 2003; van Wormer & Bednar, 2002). Female partners in this study experienced continued or increased levels of verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse after the court referred the batterer to the intervention programme. Below is one woman's description of the continued abuse:

> He kept being rude still sending me threatening and horrible messages smses//…he kept forcing me to come live with him and if I don't live with him then he's gonna either kill himself or kill my father//…he just says he's gonna hit me and I'm a prostitute.

This excerpt indicates that the batterer was threatening future violence or murder as well as degrading the female partner and making demands on her. Degradation, threats, and demands are common tactics used by batterers to psychologically and emotionally abuse the female partner (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). These have been identified as particularly toxic for the woman's physical and psychological health and are strongly associated with physical violence (Bell et al., 2008). Another female partner described how the physical abuse was redirected into verbal abuse:

> But now he also know that he can't abuse me, he's not allowed to to touch me in a violent manner or so but now we just exchanging words to one another and I

> mean it's hurtful things man really//…I mean things that he's saying is hurtful man.

Educational intervention programmes have been found to create 'savvy abusers' who conceal their abuse by perpetrating it non-physically (Buttell & Carney, 2004, p.100). This female partner described the batterer as being knowledgeable that he is 'not allowed' to physically abuse her but that he now verbally abuses her. This indicates a lack of attitude and psychological change in the batterer. The continuation or rise of psychological and verbal abuse during the programme suggests that the programme is not addressing the abuse that the batterer is perpetrating on an emotional or psychological level. This means that the intervention may be successful in reducing physical violence but is not as successful in reducing psychological abuse, which has been found to be as damaging to the female partner's well-being as physical abuse (Bell et al., 2008; Grigsby & Hartman, 1997; Sartin et al., 2006). Psychological abuse leads to women having minimal or depleted emotional resources, which makes it harder for her to resist the batterer or try to leave (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997). There is a well-established link between psychological abuse and future physical abuse (Bell et al., 2008), which links females partners' experiences of psychological abuse to their fear that physical violence will resurface again later.

Women's suggestions for increased programme effectiveness

Female partners felt that more intervention was needed once the group sessions were over in order to produce long-lasting behaviour change in the batterer. Below are the female partners' suggestions about how to increase the effectiveness of the intervention programme.

More group sessions

Some female partners felt that increasing the number of group sessions that the batterer attends will help increase the chances of long-term violence reduction. Referring to the group classes, one female partner stated:

> I will really make it maybe another month or so.

This indicates that the female partner thinks another month or more of group sessions would be beneficial for the batterer. This suggests that twenty to twenty four sessions are not sufficient to stop the batterer's violence for the long term.

Individual sessions

Some female partners suggested that the batterer attend individual sessions with the social worker or psychologist:

> I just feel that maybe individual sessions would help him um uh get though the process faster or go in deeper.

> I do feel that there's maybe individual therapy needed as well.

The above excerpts illustrate that the female partner feels that the batterer needs individual and perhaps therapeutic intervention. Some research has emphasised the importance of batterers receiving individual therapy and building a trusting relationship with a therapist (Buchbinder & Eisikovits, in press; Corvo & Johnson, 2003; Dutton & Corvo, 2006; Stuart et al., 2007). The woman states that individual intervention might help the batterer 'get through the process faster' which could indicate that she views the group sessions as producing change at too slow or weak a rate. She also mentions that the individual sessions could help the batterer 'go in deeper', which could suggest that the female partner views long-term behaviour change as more likely if the batterer receives in-depth personal attention. This could be connected to some female partners' understanding that the violence is rooted in the batterer's childhood and requires psychological help in order for him to end his violence.

Couples sessions

Although couples counselling with the female partner and batterer has been criticised for putting the female partner at increased risk for abuse as well as blaming the female

partner (Feder & Wilson, 2005; Rothman et al., 2003), participants felt that couples session would be beneficial:

> //…some sessions where *both* parties are there, the husband and the wife, you know? Where they can basically do something for the both of us.

This excerpt suggests that the female partner would like the intervention programme to 'do something' for both her and her husband. This could suggest that the female partner feels left out of the intervention programme and would like to be included in sessions with her husband. The couples sessions suggested above therefore come across as needed by the female partners in order for them to be part of the intervention process.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICAN INTERVENTIONS

Having the batter in a programme led to female partners feeling more in control, less isolated and less scared. A battered women's life is usually controlled by the batterer and dominated by fear (Hyden, 1999; Rodriguez et al., 1999; Walker, 1984), therefore this is a very positive result and suggests that the batterer's programme participation gave her more agency in her life.

I also found that on the one hand women feel more in control, but on the other hand they are disempowered by not having access to the information that the batterers are using to manipulate them. This contradiction could suggest that the programme empowers women, but that this is countered by the batterer's attempts to use the programme and information against the female partner. Because the woman is not given the information, she is unable to defend herself. Therefore providing women with the same information that batterers receive may help further empower her and prevent the batterer from using this information against her.

The women suggested that more group sessions, couples sessions, or individual sessions with the batterer would make long term cessation of violence more probable. Some women viewed the battering as rooted in childhood and therefore suggested that the batterer receive individual or therapeutic intervention. Because the female partners have been found to have considerable understanding of the reasons behind abuse as well

as the dynamics that lead to domestic violence (Bell et al., 2008; Gregory & Erez, 2002), it may prove invaluable for intervention programmes to include sessions addressing childhood issues of batterers. Intervention programmes that are able to do this while continuing to emphasise that domestic violence is a symptom of patriarchal ideology may have increased efficacy in changing behaviour for the long-term.

Many of the women in this study experienced continued psychological abuse during the programme. This suggests that tactics specifically aimed at combating emotional and psychological forms of abuse should be included or further emphasised in the intervention programme. Because there is a well-established link between psychological and later physical abuse, it is important for the psychological aspects of abuse to be addressed in the intervention (Bell et al., 2008). It is therefore important to consider different types of abuse other than physical abuse when attempting to assess programme effectiveness and understand behaviour change in batterers.

During programme participation batterers used the intervention material to their advantage as a way to dominate and manipulate the woman into thinking that she is the abuser or that her behaviour needs to be corrected by him. Not allowing the woman to see the information about human rights and violence could be an attempt to continue to isolate and disempower her. His secrecy and manipulation point to a lack of psychological change, which is most likely connected to the continuation of psychological abuse and female partners' predictions of future perpetration of abuse. It may be important for the programme to be aware of the batterer's continuing abuse and his use of the programme as a means to dominate the female partner. Lack of psychological and attitude change towards the female partner could suggest that a broader societal change is needed beyond batterer interventions in order to seriously address and end gender-based violence.

In addition, it is important to maintain contact with female partners and to include them in the intervention process. Having frequent contact with female partners gives them an opportunity to voice what they experience as working or not working. It provides the programme staff with a direct account of how the programme is impacting on the batterer and what kind of change it is producing (Gregory & Erez, 2002). Importantly, hearing female partners' predictions of future abuse is vital in preventing future violence.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This project is limited by its use of interpretative phenomenology as its theoretical framework. Interpretative phenomenology is interested in how a phenomenon is experienced. When conducting the interviews, the participants use *language* to communicate their experiences (Willig, 2001). The experience is shaped and constructed by the language used to describe it. Therefore, the account given will be filtered through the interviewee's ability to translate their experience into language. This is further limited by the participant's language proficiency. Many of the interviewees were not first language English speakers. The interviews were conducted in English, which meant that if the interviewee was not sufficiently fluent in English then this may influence and limit the type of account she was able to present.

Hearing the experiences of more women could increase the amount that is known about female partners' experiences of intervention programmes in South Africa. In addition, listening to female partners' experiences before, during and after the intervention programme can provide valuable insights as to the impact and effectiveness of the intervention programme at different stages of involvement. Longitudinal studies that interview women during the programme and a few months or years after the programme could also provide researchers and intervention organisations with information about its long term impact.

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Appendix A

Consent form

You are invited to take part in my research project about intervention programmes for domestically violent men and support groups for women at NICRO.

I would like to find out how effective the intervention programme is in reducing domestic violence. I would also like to know what your experience has been of the support group.

The information you give me will be used to write a report and to help improve support groups for women and interventions for domestically violent men.

I am a student from the University of Cape Town. I am not connected to or working for NICRO or any intervention programme. I will not be giving any personal details that you give to me about your experience to NICRO.

Participating in this research will not affect your involvement with any intervention programme.

Participation

- Participating in this study is voluntary.
- You are free to stop participating in this study at any time with no penalty or any other consequences.
- Any information you give to me is strictly confidential and you have the right to request that any information that you have given be removed from the study.
- Participating in this study will involve an interview with a voice recorder.
- You will have control over the voice recorder and be able to stop it any time during the interview.

Benefits

The benefit of participating in this research is that you will be given a chance to voice your experiences and tell the interviewer about parts of the NICRO support group or the intervention that you are satisfied or dissatisfied with. Your information will form part of the researcher's understanding of the intervention which will contribute to the feedback that the researcher gives the intervention about how to improve.

Risks

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this research. All information will remain strictly confidential.

If you have any question about the study or decide that you would not like your interview included in the study, you can contact me on 082 084 4536 anytime or my research supervisor Dr. Floretta Boonzaier on 021 650 3429.

Counsellor
If you would like to contact a counsellor to talk further about your experiences, you can call this number 021 370 4220 and speak to Celeste Hamner at the Witness waiting room in Mitchells Plain.

Thank you.
Kim de la Harpe

Appendix B

Transcription notation

//…	Talk omitted from the extract
Italics	Emphasis, spoken louder
[word]	Transcriber's insertion
..	Short pause in speech