

Part I

Working with women and children

The chapters in Part I explore innovative ideas related to intervention with women and children. Throughout the development of family violence as a field of practice, we keep ‘discovering’ yet more areas of abuse in intimate or private relationships. Contributors to Part I explore new fields of practice that are inevitably part of our longer-term move to deal with family violence — violence by women, violence in same-sex relationships, responding to children who are victimised, and lastly, the special population of women from gang backgrounds. These chapters do not seek to undermine the significant work done to highlight the disproportionate amount and severity of injury sustained by women compared to men within intimate relationships — they speak to areas that have traditionally been silenced.

CHAPTER 1

WORKING WITH WOMEN WHO ABUSE

Glennis Dennehy & Morrigan Severs¹

It has been acknowledged that little reliable data exists on women as perpetrators of violence and abuse, and debate has occurred over the information that has emerged (Campbell, Muncer & Bibel 1998; Hien & Hien 1998; Runggay 1999). Literature on appropriate interventions for working with women who abuse also is difficult to find. Likewise, there is little provision in New Zealand for women to access community-based violence intervention programmes where they can explore their use of violence, work to change violent behavioural patterns and develop risk management and safety strategies. A reason for this paucity is that men's violence and abuse has been long recognised as a major social problem, to the exclusion of women's violence. It is noted that men are more aggressive and violent than women. Thus they inevitably cause more harm and the overall cost to society of male violence is greater than that of female violence (Campbell, Muncer & Bibel 1998; Fletcher 2002; Moffitt et al 2001).

This situation notwithstanding, it is certain that women can be violent and abusive. In New Zealand a considerable number of women are convicted and sentenced for violent offending, although compared with male offending the number is small. The effects of female violence and abuse, though, are manifold and the costs to society may be severely underestimated. These costs can be particularly high when children's lives and futures are disrupted.

This chapter discusses female violence and abuse from the perspective of programme facilitators, and we the authors share knowledge gained through our involvement with stopping violence programmes for women. We begin by exploring women's violence and abuse, the rate of female offending, the associated contextual factors and theoretical viewpoints. We look at the resistance to acknowledging women's violence and openly

working with it. We then share our ideas about the development and delivery of violence intervention programmes for women. Our views have been informed by discussions with women attending the stopping violence programmes and the literature on the topic. We have also held five workshops, nationally and locally, where we invited reflection, discussion and feedback from academics and social service workers.

Women's violence — the reality

In New Zealand, as elsewhere, a “curious excitement” (Rumgay 1999:106) has emerged around the issue of women's violence. While researchers, academics, and social service workers begin to take a serious look at the problem, the filmmakers of the 1990s have glorified women's violence to arouse feelings of intrigue, excitement or unease. Then controversy erupts when the news media link real incidents of female violence and crime to the fictional characters in movies. For example, the women portrayed as erotic objects or cult heroes in *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and *Natural Born Killers* (1994) have blurred the boundaries between the real and the unreal, the acceptable and the unacceptable, contributing to dubious and uncertain notions about violence by women (see Chesney-Lind 1993; Boyle 2001).

Nevertheless, it is a fact that males are still convicted of violent crimes far more often than women are. The New Zealand and international literature indicates that women's violence represents between 7 to 11 percent of all violent offending (Spier 2001; Home Office 1997). The following table, drawn up from a Ministry of Justice report (Spier 2001:198-199) shows the total number of cases resulting in convictions for violent offences by men and women in New Zealand from 1991 to 2000.

In all years, men have been convicted and sentenced more often for violent crimes than women. In the year 2000, women were convicted for only 11 percent of all violent offences while men were convicted for 89 percent. Violent offences are defined in the Crimes Act 1961 ss 158-216, and include all offences that “involve either a direct act of violence against a person or the threat of such an act” (Spier 2001:9). Some sexual offences are under a different section of the Crimes Act (see ss 127-150).

Women in New Zealand prisons are most likely to have been convicted for violent offending or property crimes. On 18 November 1999, 206 women were serving prison sentences. Of these, 79 female inmates (38.7%) were incarcerated for violent crimes such as robbery (32), grievous assault (14), homicide (24), serious assaults (2), kidnapping/abduction

Table 1: Total number of cases resulting in conviction for violence offences, by gender, 1991 to 2000.

Year	Male	Female	Other	Total	% Female rate
2000	8,760	1,100	0	9,860	11
1999	9,145	1,078	0	10,223	11
1998	9,708	1,030	1	10,739	10
1997	9,660	1,020	1	10,681	10
1996	10,042	1,005	2	11,049	9
1995	10,490	946	2	11,438	8
1994	10,250	919	4	11,173	8
1993	8,336	677	2	9,015	8
1992	6,593	542	3	7,138	8
1991	6,060	456	1	6,517	7

(3), intimidation/threats (1), minor assaults (2) and group assemblies (1). In addition, three female inmates were serving time for sexual offences. Fourteen percent (28) of all women in prison had gang affiliations and 56 percent (111) of female inmates were known to be living with children under the age of 18 just prior to entering prison (Rich 2000:1, 18, 19, 27, 37).

Unfortunately, crime statistics are based on incidents that come to the attention of the authorities and those presented here merely illustrate convictions and sentencing. Many cases of violent offending do not come to the attention of the police and some cases, particularly child abuse, are processed through the Child, Youth and Family Service (CYFS). Self-reporting about violence and abuse, however, provides a startlingly different picture. Clearly, female violence may be more prevalent than we, as a society, care to admit.

Many studies, including robust New Zealand ones (see Moffitt et al 2001; Magdol et al 1997), have found that women self-report partner-violence perpetration at a similar rate to men. In many cases, “women report striking the first blow in an argument as often as men” (Fletcher 2002:238). It is still acknowledged that men are more likely to inflict greater physical harm through their strength and size, and that they generate fear in intimate heterosexual relationships more readily than women do. Some researchers claim that “minor violence by wives increases the probability of severe assaults by husbands” (Hien & Hien 1998:421). Recent studies on violence in lesbian relationships further substantiate the fact that many

women struggle with violent and abusive behaviours (Kaschak 2001; McLeod 2001; Ristock 2002). Recent literature suggests that domestic violence in lesbian relationships, reported to occur at a rate of between 25 and 33 percent, is comparable with violence in heterosexual and gay relationships (Mantilla 1998 in McLeod 2001:42-43). Research on female violence has generated much debate and, as Fletcher (2002:233) points out, these findings have provoked a storm of controversy. More research is needed to uncover the contextual aspects and motivations involved, to increase understanding of the personal and societal consequences, and to reframe the debate so effective interventions can be secured.

Explaining women's violence

Many theories of female violence and aggression have been put forward over the years. Some of these are limited because they do not consider external social factors, or have been developed using male definitions of female criminality (Hien & Hien 1998). Recently feminist scholars have argued that women's issues, and hence women's violence, need to be examined in their own light. While comparisons with men's violence may be useful, they do not acknowledge women's reality or experience and fail to uncover the true characteristics of women's violence or crime (Rumgay 1999). In this section, we describe the theories we have found useful: they fit the narratives of the women we have worked with and have enabled us to help them find appropriate interventions.

In the mid-1970s Freda Adler discussed the masculinisation of female behaviour. Her liberation theory explains women's crime in terms of increased gender equality and opportunity. She suggested that "new freedoms, increased opportunities, and stresses and strains put on women, [have] caused them to react in ways in which only men had previously acted" (Hien & Hien 1998:3 of 15). In some respects, the women's movement, which encouraged women to be more assertive and to stand up for their rights, has been blamed when women adopt traditionally male behaviours like violence. Subsequent research, though, highlights the significance of class, ethnicity, culture and victimisation. Risk factors that often precede female delinquency or violence have been noted and victimisation features predominantly in this regard (Weiler 1999).

Deprivation theories link women's violence to inadequate resources, high expectations and life's greater stresses and strains. Arguments generally emphasise low socio-economic conditions, limited employment opportunity, mother burnout, and minority social or ethnic settings where

support and resources are inadequate. Therefore the increase of violence and crime among women is often associated with a high number of families being headed by young, single women responsible for running a household with minimal education, skill and resources (Hien & Hien 1998; Thorpe 1996). The associated stress facilitates violence.

Socio-cultural, social learning and behavioural theories emphasise the interpersonal nature of anger. These theories suggest that individuals learn to express emotion in a cultural context and, consequently, men and women develop gender-specific responses to anger and anger expression. Everyday interaction and social factors such as gender, age, ability, family, role, socio-economic status, educational achievement, culture and ethnicity contribute to the development of a set of attitudes, beliefs and values associated with the expression of anger. The motivations, rationalisations, and justifications for the use or non-use of violence and abuse are also learned from and influenced by the social environment (Crump 1995).

Some psychologically-based theories highlight the link between victimisation and offending: these include the well-documented concepts of battered women's syndrome (BWS), learned helplessness, and cycle of violence (Walker 1993; Barnette & LaViolette 1993). Theories of post-traumatic stress disorders provide understanding of the psychological consequences of abuse and trauma and are generally well-accepted. Nevertheless, these victim-focused theories have not evaded critique. Anne Hoff (1991), nurse-anthropologist and crisis specialist, argues that many women fitting the clinical diagnosis of BWS and the like are hardly helpless. In fact her research shows that many such women strategise to reduce the likelihood of harm and to increase their safety. Delays in leaving violent relationships occur for a range of reasons and some women make rational choices about leaving based on risk factors and likely consequences.

Recent childhood victimisation studies and research on "pathways to criminality" (Belknap & Holsinger 1998:39) have broadened our understanding of the victimisation-to-offending cycle and highlight the prevalence of physical and sexual abuse in the backgrounds of women who offend. Studies on female offending report that 40 to 73 percent of female delinquents have been abused, and that incarcerated females report markedly high rates of sexual abuse (Belknap & Holsinger 1998). These theories do not argue that all girls who are abused will become violent or take up other forms of offending. Rather, they emphasise the need to formulate intervention strategies that effectively respond to women's

victimisation and their offending or violence.

Also of interest are explanations that draw attention to expressive (or reactive) and instrumental (or operational) theories of aggression and violence. Expressive theories explain violence in terms of an instinct, drive, tension or suppressed emotions that build up until the pressure is so great that aggression or violence erupts. "The minute the lid of self-control is lifted, violence will out" (Campbell 1993:11). This type of violence is commonly associated with women (Hien & Hien 1998). But female aggression usually meets with social disapproval, and most women endeavour to exercise self-control. They go to great lengths to stay calm, to not 'lose it' and retain the 'good girl' or feminine image: 'Social control has become self-control' (Campbell 1993:10). Conversely, women who lash out with violence and abuse tend to be seen as either 'bad girls' in need of discipline, or psychologically unwell in need of treatment.

Instrumental theorists explain violence and aggression as a means to an end, i.e. people deliberately use violence for some benefit. This form of violence is more often associated with men and their need to maintain power over women (Hien & Hien 1998). Nevertheless, violence and abuse (also known as power and control tactics) can be used from a position of power or powerlessness, and women can and do use instrumental violence. Anne Campbell's research (1993) on women in street gangs demonstrates how women make use of instrumental violence and aggression. These women have learned that violence is power. They work on their reputations, adopt aggressive language and posturing, and develop a sense of pride in standing up for themselves. Some celebrate their use of violence through stories that are told repeatedly to provide evidence of their toughness. It is noted, however, that gang members and associates often come from vulnerable backgrounds where physical violence and sexual abuse have been prominent (Campbell 1993; Dennehy & Newbold 2001). The use of instrumental violence hides vulnerability, allays fear and reduces potential threat. The link to victim-based theories appears obvious but some women (particular in street gangs) reject the victim position. As Campbell (1993:140) explains, "Violence pays, materially as well as socially. ... Aggression in their lives is a means of survival. Reputation is about preventing victimisation."

No single theory offers an adequate explanation for all female violence. Nevertheless, these viewpoints provide a broad understanding of the complexity and diverse nature of the issue. Drug and alcohol problems and mental health concerns further complicate the picture. To view

women as mere victims can be problematic: if not careful, workers can reinforce the victim position and the process of reclaiming agency and self-power can be thwarted. Conversely, recognising instrumental theories alone minimises the complexity of the victim-to-perpetrator cycle. In our experience, multi-disciplinary, multi-theoretical approaches that acknowledge and value women's narratives are the most productive. As Celia Lashlie (2002:14) states:

The question for us all is whether we have the courage to listen with an open mind to the stories of the people [we work with] — to hear what needs to be heard and begin the process of truly understanding the connections that have influenced their journey.

It is not about seeking to excuse, it is about seeking to understand in order to learn. Only through understanding will we begin the process of identifying real solutions to real problems and come to know the part we all can, and must, play to make a difference.

Women's reality and experience differ; therefore, solutions inevitably vary as well. Hearing the women's stories builds on theoretical knowledge to help workers understand the women and their lives. Actively listening to their narratives often uncovers the motivational aspects involved in women's violence as well.

The context of women's violence

Women's lives are lived in a social context that brings together complex and inter-relating factors. A woman's gender, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture, education, ability, and age all influence her perceptions, beliefs, values and understandings. These key elements also affects how she interprets and responds to the situations and events in her life. Katherine van Wormer (2001:220-221) argues:

The conundrum of female crime and its relation to social and personal victimisation are facts of life virtually ignored by the mass media. Virtually absent from the lurid media crime accounts is any serious attempt to connect the dots between the myriad variables involving race, poverty and male/female relationships. ... [F]emale offenders do what ordinary women do; they become embroiled in family life and relationships and they try to make their world [habitable] and homelike for their loved ones. Even when violent, and women's capacity for violence is undeniable, this occurs in the context of highly gendered social relationships.

Gender dynamics must be taken into account when dealing with issues

related to male or female violence. Violence perpetrated by females often targets those with whom a woman has personal relationships, with the most likely victims being sexual partners and a woman's own children. While the range of victims includes siblings, mothers, friends and colleagues. Violence towards strangers occurs, but less frequently (Rumgay 1999:110).

As workers in the area of violence and abuse, we have explored our own positions of power as females. To a large extent, our sense of power and powerlessness shifts depending on the social setting and our role within it. Likewise, we recognise that our values, beliefs and attitudes influence perceptions of personal power. Recently, Janice Ristock (2002:121) validated our own experience. As she relates, power dynamics are understood more as "contextual and relational rather than absolute or fixed in one person or another." Our social position affects the way we speak about, experience and define relational violence or the misuse of power. "Terms such as victim/abuser, power/control, emotional abuse and sexual abuse each encompass such a wide range of behaviours" (ibid:77) and current usage of these concepts fails to capture the diverse range of meanings attached. The binary concept of victim/perpetrator and rigid dichotomies of women as victims and men as perpetrators oversimplify the issue and make it difficult to grapple with the complexities of female violence. This is particularly evident when attempting to understand women-to-women violence, or abuse in lesbian relationships.

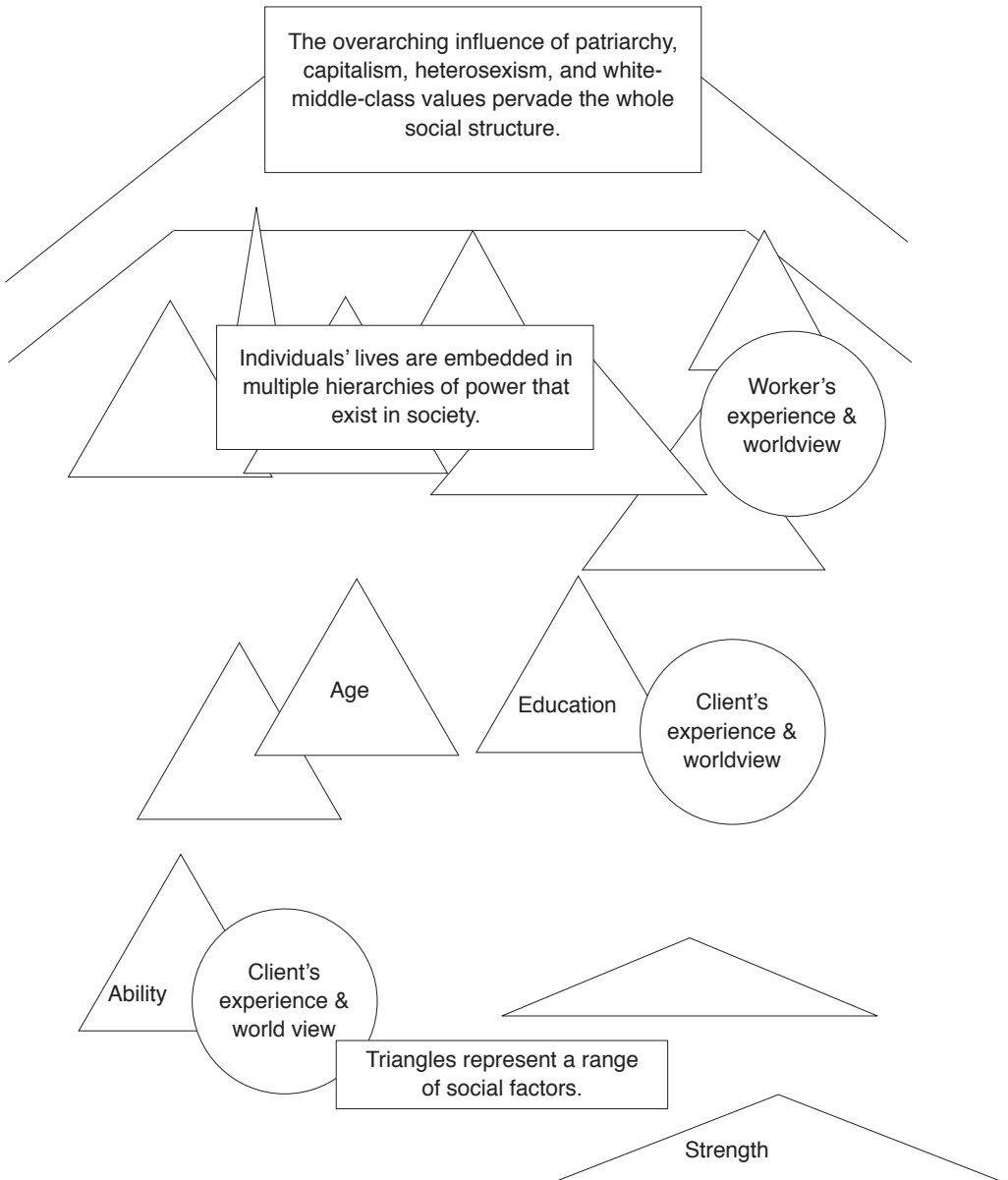
Furthermore, workers' experience and understandings of the world may differ significantly from their clients', so it is important to understand how the client perceives the world and his/her position in it. The following diagram invites a more complex questioning of power relationships and dynamics.

Interpersonal relationships occur in a complex web of inequality and power positioning. How an individual makes sense of power dynamics and issues of power or powerlessness largely depends on social factors such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, income, education, age, role and ability. A person's sense of personal power or powerlessness depends on norms and values that operate in a particular setting.

Resistance to acknowledging women's violence and abuse

While researchers have generated data on the realities of female aggression and violence, resistance to acknowledging female violence continues. The reasons for this, on both personal and professional levels, are many and

Figure 1: The web of power hierarchies in society that impact on individuals' lives.



varied. Discussions with the women we have worked with and that emerged in the five workshops held in Napier and Christchurch between 1999 and 2002² drew our attention to various themes. On a personal level, women report several consequential feelings — guilt, shame, and fear — that emerge after engaging in violence and this makes it difficult for them to discuss their abusive behaviours. They worry about the consequences — losing their jobs or having their children removed — or they are merely too exhausted to deal with it. Some deny the abuse while others minimise, justify or rationalise the abusive behaviour away.

Female social service workers and academics we have spoken to identified with the points mentioned above, but many reflected on the wider social consequences of formally recognising female violence. Some feared that acknowledging female violence would support men's rights groups and the 'women are violent too' excuses for male violence. There was some resistance to moving from the 'men are perpetrators and women are victims' stance and this made it hard to acknowledge female violence. Furthermore, workers we spoke to were overwhelmed by the complexity of women's violence, which made it difficult to contemplate the establishment of intervention strategies.

Male social service workers we talked to found the issue of female violence difficult to discuss. There was ambivalence because they were uncomfortable discussing women's issues. They said that did not know the 'rules' for this discussion or 'the tricks of the trade' (how women's violence operates), and some men said that our bringing up the issue of women's violence came as a surprise: "Hey, violence is men's territory. What are women doing there?" Overall, the issue of men's violence towards women and children is recognised as more severe than women's and energy is therefore channelled towards working with men.

The following are barriers to acknowledging women's violence, and to working with abusive women, identified by workshop participants:

- The women's guilt, fear, embarrassment, and shame
- Loss of mana for women which may lead to stigma, exclusion, and isolation
- Workers' ignorance, apathy, and denial
- Women are too tired to deal with it
- Consequences for women who abuse: might lose job, draw attention to self
- Threatens our idealism about women

- Unease about making women appear just as violent as men
- Personal loyalties
- Workers unsure where female violence fits within feminist frameworks
- Loss of professional credibility and status for stepping outside current theoretical frameworks
- Resistance to moving from the political stance of men as perpetrators and women as victims
- Fear of minimising men's violence and men's responsibility
- Empathy for women
- Concerns about collusion and supporting excuses for violence
- Lesbian fear of comparison to men's violence
- Concerns about lesbians being stereotyped even further
- If we admit that women can be violent it opens the floodgates to men avoiding responsibility/blaming women/supports men's excuses
- Fear of losing ground — male violence now considered a major social issues
- Fear of a backlash blaming women
- Challenges the belief that men are the perpetrators
- Easier to deny and minimise women's violence because men are worse
- Too complex: women's violence is easier to rationalise
- Battered Women's Syndrome explains all
- Don't want to paint an image of women as 'bad girls'
- Women's violence is rare, less visible and hard to recognise
- Acknowledging how difficult it is to relate to where they are coming from
- The belief that all women's violence comes from men's violence

Our journey

In spite of the above resistance, we recognise that a number of women have struggled with their own violence and abuse. Acknowledging this, though, has not been straightforward. We have both worked intensively with women and children who are victims of male violence, but female perpetration of violence has been, and still is, rarely discussed. However, events happen in life that challenge preconceived ideas and understandings. Due to the controversy over the Oakes case, we were brought face-to-face with female violence, our illusions were shattered and we were made to

face a new reality.

The story of Gay Oakes began in 1993 when she poisoned her estranged partner, Doug Gardner, and buried his body in her back yard. Fourteen months later, after a defence of 'self-defence' failed, Oakes was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. Much controversy arose over the trial, heightened by the fact that two workers from West Christchurch Women's Refuge had allegedly helped Gay to dig the grave and dispose of his body, and a debate over battered women's syndrome ensued.

The ramifications of this case have been felt far and wide. In the community at large, opinion has been split. Women who had worked together collectively in the refuge movement promoting safety for women and children became sharply divided and set against each other. Long-standing friendships and relationships were destroyed. Previously-negotiated ways of working were challenged and disrupted. Women on both sides felt betrayed, and mistrust, fear and mixed loyalties pervaded personal and professional relationships. The lesbian community, which had worked in unison to foster strong supportive and caring networks, fissioned. As lines were drawn and group dynamics strengthened, women were forced to make personal choices about whether to support Gay and her co-accused or not. There was no middle ground: you were either for or against.

Some women, like us, tried to choose a middle ground. While we acknowledge BWS, some women expected more than we were prepared to give. Consequently, we were spat at, threatened, bullied and abused, and some of our acquaintances even feared for their lives. As a result we could no longer deny the deliberate power and control tactics that were being employed by these women against us. We struggled to understand what was happening. As the dust began to settle, we were able to step back from the situation and reflect on the issue of women's violence in a more general sense.

A part of this reflection drew attention to women's violence towards their children. Since the 1990s there have been many high-profile cases where children have died at the hands of their parents. The deaths of James Whakaruru, Craig Manukau, Jordan Ashby, Tishena Crosland and Hinewaoriki Karaitiana-Matiaha ('Lillybing'), among other cases, come quickly to mind. These deaths caused heated discussion and much media debate (see Coddington 2000; McLoughlin 1994), which subsequently

led to a ministerial review of CYFS services (Brown 2000). As children's safety is a critical concern, ongoing discussion around men and women who abuse their children occurs in many social service agencies. Staff at Women's Refuge and Stopping Violence Services (SVS) have recognised for some time that some clients using their services have been abusing their children. As the authors' interest in female violence has increased, we have focused some attention on women who abuse.

Since at least 1994, we have both worked with male perpetrators at SVS (then known as Men's Violence Project). This agency assists men to stop using violence towards women and children, and to develop relationships based on trust, respect and equality. As new workers, in 1993-94 we were invited to explore our personal power and control tactics; thus women's violence and abuse came into focus again. This not only helped us come to terms with the events surrounding the Oakes case but also encouraged us to reflect on the lack of programmes for women who abuse.

Although there has been ongoing discussion for some time by lesbians around violence in their relationships, minimal research or analysis has been undertaken in New Zealand. The events above prompted some lesbians to come together to explore the wider issues of violence in their communities and its social implications. These cumulative discussions and changes to the Domestic Violence Act 1995, which provided protection from violence in same-sex domestic relationships as well as heterosexual relationships, prompted SVS staff to initiate support services for lesbian perpetrators.

Consequently, as our interest in female violence grew, we came together as lesbian and heterosexual women to talk through our experiences. While recognising and respecting difference, we value and draw strength from our shared learning and analysis. Understandings gained from these processes and discussion on the victim-to-perpetrator cycles of violence and crime were then pulled together to develop our stopping violence programme for women.

Our practice: group programme

The development of the Women's Living Without Violence Programme (WLWVP) has been influenced by our work in the women's refuge movement. Refuge policy and practice place much importance on hearing women's narratives to validate their reality, to allow the release of emotion, to foster motivation and support for change. Likewise, we see the need to acknowledge women's stories, experience and understanding

when working with women who abuse. We also recognise the need to keep abreast with current research and debate in the area and to gain feedback from women participating in the programmes. This ensures the intervention strategies remain effective.

The Women's Living Without Violence Programme was first piloted in 1999 at SVS in Christchurch. Since then the programme has been further developed as more understandings about female violence in the theoretical and practice sense have emerged. The programme involves 16 sessions: a one-hour assessment and 15 weekly sessions. Each session ranges between two to three hours depending on the number of women attending. The programme, which is still developing, aims to provide a safe environment for women to explore, understand, reflect and find respectful, non-violent solutions for problems. We have found that women are relieved to find a place where they can talk about their violent behaviours. Their stories are heard with acceptance and respect, and we express a confidence in the women's capabilities to work towards change. As facilitators we have a programme outline, but in identifying the need to model respectful behaviour and to build collaborative working relationships, we invite the women to establish a group contract and to contribute to the programme schedule through setting goals and learning objectives. Following the ARC acronym (awareness invites responsibility which leads to change) we assist women to explore their lives and to take responsibility for their own behaviour, safety, and change. The women are encouraged to consider the social context in which they live and to draw on their own strengths and resources to stop violence and abuse. Their own aspirations and goals are used to inspire hope, generate confidence and motivate change.

While SVS offers both individual and group programmes, the agency prefers that clients attend group programmes. Group programmes provide a sense of connection with others who are working on similar issues. Group members experience reciprocity through sharing their stories, problems or life difficulties, and in giving and receiving help. Support networks are strengthened and respectful challenge or feedback from peers is beneficial. Group participants also value a place to rehearse new skills and celebrate their successes in achieving change. Women can be mandated to the programme from the Department of Corrections, the Family Court, and the District Court. CYFS and community agencies encourage some women to attend, while others self-refer. Some women who self-refer are highly motivated and come because they realise the negative impact of

their behaviour on themselves and others. However, where the woman's partner or family members have prompted her to attend, the woman's motivation may not be so high. Motivations and restraints relating to programme attendance are important issues to explore at assessment.

The assessment is a collaborative process that determines whether a stopping violence programme is appropriate or not. For some women, their own current victimisation and safety factors may need to be addressed first. A few women come with multiple issues, particularly alcohol- and drug-related problems, mental health concerns and sometimes limited cognitive ability, hence assessment is required to determine whether a group or an individual programme is more appropriate or if a referral to another service is required.

The Women's Living Without Violence Programme has an eclectic-educational framework, and a range of therapeutic models are incorporated to assist the women in dealing with grief, shame and guilt, to increase their understanding of their own anger processes and to work through feelings of powerlessness. It is important to note that these are stopping violence programmes designed to change abusive behaviours, as opposed to therapy groups. However, we have found that time is needed for reflection, exploration of feelings and the consolidation of change, so a balance between education and working with individuals' processes occurs. Some women, though, are supported to seek counselling or to engage other forms of social work assistance as the need (issues/problems) is identified. Therapeutic models used include:

- Motivational interviewing
- Narrative Therapy
- Solution-focused counselling
- Cognitive-behavioural theory
- Rational-emotive behavioural theory
- Strengths-based counselling and social work techniques.

These methods facilitate shifts in understanding and support behaviour change. The educational component is twofold: one part involves an analysis of gender and power dynamics in society and interpersonal relationships, while the other part centres on stopping violence and developing life skills.

Assisting the women to develop an awareness of gender and power relations in society and their personal relationships allows them to contextualise their lives, facilitating their understanding of how broader

social and cultural factors impact on their lives and of the way they respond to particular situations or events. This focus encourages:

- Recognition of the close connection between women's marginalised status (e.g. poverty, abuse, sexism, racism, heterosexism) and their criminal violent activity
- Appreciation of women's ability to resist violence in its various forms and to find creative ways of coping
- The belief that, as women develop a deeper awareness of their own strengths, they will take greater control over their own lives.

(Kendell 1994, in Van Wormer 2001:309)

The other educational component is centred on understanding anger, emotional processes and violence. This is where stopping violence becomes the major focus and offence mapping (from relapse prevention models) is drawn together with the basic concepts of Narrative Therapy. Thus, dominant narratives are deconstructed so that alternative narratives can be realised. The women are invited to revisit past and recent incidents of violence and abuse, and these are mapped or processed on a whiteboard or paper so they can be deconstructed. This brings an awareness of the anger-to-violence process that occurred: what happened, how and what they were thinking, what they did and how they did it becomes visible. Thoughts, attitudes and beliefs about the particular person, situation or event are unpacked further to uncover any motivational aspects that may be related to the violence or abuse. High-risk situations and trigger events are uncovered to allow safety plans to be developed.

Entertaining certain attitudes and beliefs or unhelpful/negative thinking can exacerbate anger and other vulnerable emotions, so, as the incident of violence is mapped, feelings and emotions are reflected on. The relationship between thinking processes, emotion and violence, and the differentiation between feelings and behaviour, are fully discussed. Once the violent incidents have been thoroughly considered, healthy option maps are constructed and drawn up alongside the offence maps. These maps draw on alternative stories and trace a time, or times, when the women have dealt with similar situations or events in a positive, respectful manner without violence or abuse. Thus the women are more able to draw on skills that they have previously developed and used successfully in place of violence and abuse. Incorporating these narrative concepts and strengths-based principles generates self-confidence and fosters a positive outlook as healthy options are realised.

Further to this, the impact of violence and abuse on self and others is examined. Again, the women's own narratives are helpful. In connecting with their own experience of victimisation they come to appreciate the effects of their abuse on others. Family script work and theories of socialisation provide understandings of how violent and abusive behaviour patterns have developed and can be passed on to children. This learning provides the impetus to respond non-violently to stressful situations and events, as most women do not want to model negative behaviour patterns for their children to learn. In addition, learning new life skills facilitates and reinforces positive change. The life skills we teach include:

- Communication skills
- Self-care and boundary setting
- Relaxation exercises
- Problem-solving and conflict resolution
- Negotiation and decision making
- Giving and receiving feedback (positive and constructive)
- Assertiveness skills
- Developing support networks and using support services
- Constructing safety plans (safety planning is a multi-faceted process that deals with securing safety from both victim and perpetrator positions)
- Risk management and relapse prevention

Overall, feedback from women completing the programme has been positive. Many report that their lives become more manageable and less chaotic. They say that the programme has helped them gain a better understanding their abusive behaviour, and to find safer options for dealing with life's difficulties. Those close to the women have occasionally provided feedback to the agency and report that a particular woman's behaviour is less threatening and more respectful. Thus the women and the people around them feel safer.

Our learnings

We have obviously learned a great deal from the women involved on our WLWVP. Here we highlight the violence and abusive behaviours that women acknowledge and our thoughts on the skills we have found useful when working with the women.

Women's violent and abusive behaviours

Drawing on the women's experience and understandings, the following list illustrates the violence and abuse engaged in by the women and the types of violence that we as group facilitators have worked with.

Physical abuse

Murder, stab, kick, head butt, scratch, pull hair, punch, bite, hit, smack, use weapons, push, shove, throw things at others, contract or influence others to do physical harm, drown, poison, run over with car

Using emotional abuse

Sarcasm, name-calling, put-downs, silence, withdrawal, conditional love, manipulation, mind games, humiliation, making others feel guilty, sulking, tricking others to do your own stuff

Coercion and threats

Threaten suicide, threaten to leave, emotional blackmail, threaten to withhold sex, making others do things that they don't want to, present emotional vulnerability — making out that you can't manage without someone/something, etc

Intimidation

Making others afraid by using angry looks, actions, gestures, smashing things, slamming doors or cupboards, destroying others' or your own property, abusing pets, displaying weapons, silence, pressuring others to do something for you

Using children

Stopping others from seeing the child/children, using children to relay messages, using children as an excuse to get what you want, using children as part of a threat or in emotional blackmail, blaming the children

Using isolation

Silence, not speaking, gratuitously criticising other person's friends and family, sulking, not being available, controlling other people (who they see, what they do, where they go), limiting information, back-stabbing, using rejection

Economic abuse

Withdraw excess money from bank, taking others' money without permission, not paying back loans, charge debts to others' accounts

Sexual abuse

Unwanted sexual approaches and touching, harassment, using sex as a means of coercion or threat, calling other women sluts, whores etc.

Strategising with gender

Using traditional gender roles to get what you want, e.g. playing the needy or helpless female to get your needs met, to get support or to make others feel sorry for you, using your sexuality or gender to hook into male chivalry, avoiding responsibility for decision-making on grounds of your gender role

Minimising, denying & blaming

Blaming others, alcohol, drugs etc for your actions and choices, denial, shifting responsibility on to others, making light of the abuse, looking for the 'woe is me' approach to escape or avoid taking responsibility for your choice to use violent or abusive tactics

Self-harm

Inappropriate use of drugs, alcohol and other substances, over-eating, under-eating, over-shopping, using money that should be used elsewhere or charging it up on credit, gambling, physically harming yourself, e.g. burning yourself with cigarettes, cutting yourself, banging your head on the wall, etc, making yourself sick, contemplating or attempting suicide, avoiding friends and family and isolating yourself, ignoring or putting up with violence and abuse, not getting help or support when you know you need it

Clinical practice needs and training

As facilitators, we have become more aware how important a clear analysis of both women's victimisation and female violence is. Both areas need to be acknowledged and attended to throughout the programme. We have recognised that specific training for working with women who abuse is required. Simply modifying the men's programme, or making them gender-neutral, fails to acknowledge the difference between women's and men's reality and experience, which may mean specific needs are being overlooked.

At present our groups encompass a range of women from differing socio-economic groupings, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations and abilities. Sometimes women from gangs also take part.

This requires facilitators to have an in-depth analysis of oppression, as well as power and gender dynamics. They need to be experienced in working with difference to enable them to make the most of similarities between women while respecting, validating and celebrating difference. Competence in conflict resolution is essential to ensure tensions that may emerge are resolved. Timely, respectful challenge and the ability to politely confront unhelpful or destructive beliefs and attitudes are important components of programme delivery that facilitators need to feel comfortable doing. The ability to assist women to engage in self-reflection is important. Training, observing programmes in progress and working with experienced facilitators develop these skills.

Working with difference requires social service workers involved in this area to have examined their own beliefs, values, assumptions and attitudes towards people from cultural settings different from their own. Facilitators must be aware of how their behaviour and responses affect others. Inappropriate or personal reflections and comments impact on group dynamics and can hinder the women's overall progress. Hetero-normative attitudes and responses, negative feedback towards gang-related women, and racist comments impede the development of a positive working group.

Workers have to be competent and reflective in their practice and to have dealt with their own issues of violence and abuse. This is important because it can be easy for female facilitators to relate to the women's experiences, which may invite collusion with the minimisations and rationalisations of participants' abusive behaviours. Facilitators need to be able and willing to sit with and hear women's anger and other strong emotions. The women in the groups can sometimes get in touch with the deeper emotions that underlie their anger. We have found that women's stopping violence programmes are definitely more emotionally charged than the men's groups are. This is because most men, possibly fearing ridicule, tend to close off their more vulnerable selves from public view. Women, however, feel less threatened when sharing emotion.

Working in this area is both challenging and rewarding. Good supervision is essential to encourage reflection of practice and support professional development. Self-care is an ongoing issue for social service workers, particularly for those who deal with violence and trauma. To survive and thrive in the work and to prevent possible burnout, workers need to maintain balance in their lives and employ positive stress

management skills. Maintaining clear professional boundaries and getting some space from running programmes allows facilitators to sustain their energy and enthusiasm for the work.

Conclusion

Acknowledging women's violence and abuse is challenging, sometimes daunting, often frustrating, yet always rewarding. Working with women who abuse is important because women's needs in this area have previously been neglected. Their stories have been unheard and their fears about the possibility of inflicting grievous injury and harm to others have not been taken seriously in spite of evidence that many women struggle with these issues. Intervention programmes for women need to be gender-specific and to take into account women's realities and the social context of their lives to be effective. Programmes should be structured and multi-faceted yet be flexible enough to cater for a broad range of needs and abilities and to encourage participant involvement. Work in this area requires enthusiasm, energy and commitment. Clear boundaries and professional integrity ensure safety for both facilitators and programme participants. Finally, workers must model respect and equality and negotiate collaborative working relationships to encourage others to adopt non-abusive, non-violent approaches to life.

- 1 The ideas expressed in this chapter are the authors' and do not necessarily represent those of SVS locally or nationally. Nevertheless, we wish to acknowledge the support of SVS in Christchurch for enabling us to develop the service for women. We thank Shona McLeod, Barbara Birch, Annette Gillespie and Greg Newbold for their feedback. Likewise, we thank our partners and family for their support.
- 2 Workshops were held at the National Network Stopping Violence Services Women's Hui 2000, the New Zealand Women's Studies Association Conference 2001, the National Collective Independent Women's Refuges South Island Regional Hui 2002, and at local SVS gatherings.