



Pathways model of family violence

Are there different pathways into violence?

To answer this question watch the media clip the 'pathway model of family violence' where Ken McMaster talks about different pathways into violence. After you have watched this clip answer the reflection questions below and continue with the remainder of this activity.

Reflection questions

After viewing to the media clip consider the reflection questions below.

- *What were the points you found most interesting and why?*
- *What implications do these points have for your practice*

Understanding the pathway model of family violence

A common misconception people have is that all men who are violent towards their family members are reasonably similar. Not all of these men are the same. Levels of violence and what motivates people to act in a certain way can be very different.

Family Violence exists on a continuum. Lower levels of intermittent physiological abuse, without physical violence, would sit at the lower end of the scale. On-going high levels of physiological abuse and physical violence would sit at the higher end. Any behaviour which exists on this continuum is abusive! Whether the abuse is at a low level or a high level it is destructive to all adults and children involved.

So, does one size fit all when it comes to family violence offending?

The relevant literature by Holtzworth-Munroe and Stewart would suggest no, one size most certainly does not fit all. Therefore do we need to be more thoughtful when considering how we work with various men who use violence in the family?

There are three groupings that are discussed below. These are...

1. **Pit bulls**
2. **Cobras**
3. **Family Violence only**

Pathways task

Read the following information about the three distinctive pathways into violence aimed at building on your understanding of the 'pathway model of family violence' media clip.

After reading the information on each pathway watch the three associated media clips, which are:

1. **Pit-bull pathway**
2. **Cobra pathway**
3. **Family violence only pathway**

Once you have done this complete the activity reflection questions at the bottom of the page.

Group 1 - Pit bulls

Pit bulls can be slow to become enraged but once they get aroused they find it difficult to let go (this could mean letting go of the issue or the relationship).

Characteristics

- Emotionally dependant
- They fear abandonment
- Often fears of abandonment produce jealous rages (e.g. social situations can be a high risk time)
- Often attempt to deprive partners of an independent life and monitor their partners behaviour constantly (e.g. constant phone calls home, checking up on the whereabouts of their partner)
- Prone to fits of rage over small things
- Hypersensitive to any indication of a change in the power balance within the relationship
- Capable of chronic and savage brutality towards their partners
- Women often describe these men as having another child in the house
- Very demanding in their relationships
- Partners of pit bulls are angrier and less fearful in their relationships. They often want their partners to grow up and stop controlling them
- Tend to confine their violence to family members, especially their partners
- Seldom violent outside of their intimate relationships
- Most dangerous post separation because they have a heavy emotional investment in the relationships
- When separated they can become intensely focussed upon their partner and children
- They are at a high risk of breaching protection orders
- Stalking harassment and murder suicide post separation
- Their emotional mood states are changeable and can be unpredictable

Managing pit bulls

- Set very clear limits as to the level and nature of contact
- Key task for pit bulls is to work on mood regulation
- Pit bulls need to learn to recognise what is occurring within their bodies and thinking in order to control their behaviour
- Understanding of triggers and strategies to deal with situations where triggers may occur
- Focus on effective ways of interacting positively with others

Group 2 - Cobras

Overall Cobras can be best described as bullies that have a high propensity towards violence as a mechanism for sorting out any differences.

Characteristics

- Most likely to be engaged in antisocial behaviour since adolescents
- Likely to be known to traditional criminal justice agencies
- Often hedonistic and impulsive which involves high rates of alcohol and drug use
- Want things their way and beat their partners to stop them interfering with what they want
- Violence often more severe compared to the overall domestically abusive population
- Outwardly they appear to be aroused but become quiet on the inside, their heart rate decreases as they become more verbally and physically abusive
- Their anger can be described as a controlled rage and they often strike swiftly
- Incapable of forming truly intimate relationships and often view their partners as convenient steps to gratification e.g. sex, social status or economic benefits
- Are most dangerous when their partners demand more intimacy from them
- They are most difficult for women to leave because they live in constant fear
- They are quick to react and their responses are belligerent and contemptuous
- Use violence, intimidation and threats to deal with any challenge to their sense of entitlement and will have no issue with engaging in violence outside the home
- Not particularly clingy or jealous in their relationships and often taunt their partners to leave or have affairs as they have the view that there is always another woman they can find
- At the outset of relationships they can often be charming in a roguish sort of way
- Most dangerous to live with due to the calculated nature of their violence and abuse
- During post separation they are less likely to stalk and harass
- Not emotionally reliant on others and will often move serially from one relationship to another
- Their patterns with relationships include use of uncaring aggression and affection that is controlling and detached
- Often show a reckless disregard for safety of themselves and others and show a lack of remorse by being indifferent or rationalising having hurt, mistreated or stolen from others
- Often deceitful, use aliases or con others for personal profit or pleasure

Managing Cobras

- Exhibit low motivation towards the prospect of change
- Hard to engage because they are experts at understanding power
- They will show little gratitude towards efforts made to assist them
- Cobras are likely to emerge from intervention with their understanding of themselves and their behaviour unchanged
- Cobras respect power so professionals should be honest and firm and never self-disclose due to the cobras tendency to use information to manipulate
- Professionals should work on developing empathy

Group 3 - Family Violence only

Men who use violence within their families differ from pit bulls and cobras in that their behaviour is driven more by external factors rather than core beliefs regarding violence towards women.

Characteristics

- Not likely to exhibit attitudes supportive of violence or misogynist ideas
- Often remorseful and able to generate empathy towards others affected by their violence and abusive behaviour
- Often no attachment issues
- Often responsive to interventions
- Low to moderate impulsivity
- Doesn't usually have deviant or anti-social peers
- Able to demonstrate a moderate to high level of social skills outside of intimate relationships but may have difficulty sustaining intimate relationships
- Childhood mostly free from parental violence, witnessing abuse and being abused
- Abuse will often be the result of an external source of stress or pressure e.g. breakups, financial difficulty, employment issues
- Severity of physical violence is likely to be lower

Managing family violence only

- This group is the easiest group to manage due to their mainly pro social attitudes
- Interventions should focus on generating understanding of circumstances, thoughts and emotions that occurred at the time of abuse, and development of relationship skills
- Possibility of involving partner in interventions if they are willing
- May be embarrassed at the thought of attending programmes
- Often be motivated to change their behaviour but may not be sure what to do

What do pathways mean when considering how I should work?

When considering pathways it's important to note not all men who are violent within families will present like Jake Heke (character from 'Once were Warriors'). Often the characteristics of each pathway can be subtle; therefore each of the categories needs to be viewed as a continuum with different men occupying different positions. It is also worth considering where the victim may place the abuser on this scale given how they present to the professional may be different to how they behave at home.

Pathways activity reflection questions

- *What were your overall impressions or thoughts about the pathways model of family violence?*

Considering how you thought about men who use violence within their families prior to reading about pathways into violence...

- *Did you consider all men who use violence in their families to be similar? If yes, why? If no, how did you make the distinction between them?*
- *Did you consider different approaches when working with various men who use violence within their family? If yes, briefly consider these various approaches. If no, what would you now consider?*

Get aware and get real about family violence and what you can do to help! Would you like to become more effective when working with family violence offenders and become an advocate for those who need help the most?

[Click here to discover how we can help you](#)