

## CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

### *BRIEFING DOCUMENT*

#### **ISSUE: Treatment for Assaultive Men**

There are a number of challenges that need to be addressed in the funding and delivery of treatment for men who have assaulted their intimate partners (“assaultive men”).

#### **KEY POINTS**

- Treatment for assaultive men is one of the essential elements in an effective, coordinated response to domestic violence.
- The most pressing issues in terms of the funding and delivery of assaultive men’s treatment are: 1) lack of access to treatment for “voluntary” men (non-court-mandated); 2) infrequent second level (the “treatment” phase: *Relationship Violence Treatment Program*) assaultive men’s treatment groups, due to lack of numbers to justify groups; 3) lack of culturally-specific and aboriginal-specific treatment; 4) need for improved communication with victims and current partners of assaultive men and with the service providers who are assisting them; 5) increasing use of inappropriate services that are not specific to domestic violence and therefore may not address the power dynamics of these crimes; and 6) need to involve assaultive men’s programs in coordinated responses to domestic violence at the local level.
- As a result of restructuring community-based assaultive men’s treatment contracts, program mandates have been narrowed to: include only sentenced offenders, completely excluding voluntary participants; and restrict second level programs to medium and high-risk offenders, admitting court-mandated low-risk offenders only to the first level (the “educational” phase: *Respectful Relationships*) and only as space is available. The Hadley inquest in Ontario recommended that “post-conviction limitations... regarding admission to many programs for abusers must be changed to allow for voluntary, community referred as well as court mandated admissions for abusers” with the rationale that “individuals in need of this kind of counselling should not have to be convicted before they can get help” (Coroner’s Office of Ontario 2002).
- Outside large urban areas, ongoing challenges are reported in accessing assaultive men’s treatment groups for court-mandated offenders. There is also a province-wide lack of funded treatment for assaultive men who voluntarily seek treatment, resulting in a serious lack of services that could prevent future violence. In the absence of appropriate, funded assaultive men’s treatment options, assaultive men are increasingly relying on other counselling resources that are not designed to address the dynamics of power and control and the recurring nature of domestic violence, which may inadvertently reinforce attitudes and behaviours that support domestic violence.
- There is a serious lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate assaultive men’s treatment groups for immigrant men and aboriginal men.

- There is a critical need for victim services/women-serving agencies to work in conjunction with assaultive men's treatment providers and to help women realistically assess potential impacts of men's participation in treatment/educational groups and develop safety plans.

## THE CONTEXT

- Safety for women is emphasized as the first priority in the longstanding *Guiding Principles for Services* for assaultive men's programs, prepared for an Inter-ministerial Steering Committee with representation from the Ministries of Attorney General, Health, Social Services and Women's Equality, and maintained by the Ending Relationship Abuse (ERA) Society.
- Corrections Branch of MPSSG funds three Lower Mainland agencies with extensive experience in delivering assault men's treatment to men from specific immigrant communities, to provide treatment groups for assaultive men with English as a second language.
- Assaultive aboriginal men may access a range of services, depending on their community, but many of these are not specific to domestic violence and therefore may not address issues of power and control, the recurrent nature of domestic violence, or women's safety. A pilot project has been undertaken with the Stoh:lo Nation, where the *Respectful Relationships* (RR) program has been offered on reserve, delivered by Community Corrections staff and an aboriginal justice worker. Corrections staff has been exploring a larger training initiative for aboriginal justice workers to enable co-facilitation of RR in locations across the province. Programs for voluntary aboriginal men are particularly important because of the low rate of reporting of domestic violence in aboriginal communities.
- There are a number of advantages to combining court-mandated and voluntary men in the same group. For example, it increases the likelihood that there will be enough participants to run groups in small communities. Highly motivated voluntary men can also have a positive impact on court-mandated men when they are in the same group<sup>1</sup>.
- The primary contractor for assaultive men's treatment programs confirmed that they will support sub-contractors to participate in community coordinating committees.

## SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Increase funding for assaultive men's treatment in order to:
  - Remove restrictions on participation of voluntary men as space permits in both levels of assaultive men's programming and/or fund voluntary community-based services
  - Increase the number of culturally/linguistically-appropriate programs for immigrant men
  - Increase the number of culturally appropriate programs for aboriginal men
  - Facilitate the participation of all assaultive men's programs in local domestic violence coordinating initiatives
- Develop mechanisms (policy, guidelines and contract language) to ensure that assaultive men's treatment providers work closely with victims, current spouses and victim support services to ensure the safety of women and children.

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<sup>1</sup> However, caution must be exercised in including men with charges pending because of the possibility that their motivation may be to avoid or reduce the consequences rather than a genuine interest in changing their behaviour.

- Develop and implement domestic violence training for other treatment services that assaultive men are likely to access, including addiction services, aboriginal justice services and mental health services.

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## References

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