

Engaging Domestic and Family Violence Perpetrators as Fathers in service responses

Dr Silke Meyer (s.meyer@cqu.edu.au)
Lecturer in Domestic and Family Violence Practice (CQU)
Graduate Certificate & Diploma



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DFV, fatherhood and behaviour change

- Male entitlement and the need for a feminist framework
- Invisibility of fathers in policy & practice
- Fathering and child safety in the context of DFV
- Beyond the feminist framework
 - Addressing complex underlying issues
- Fatherhood identity as a motivational factor for behaviour change

Gendered nature of DFV

- Primarily male-to-female perpetrated (WHO, 2013)
- Patriarchy and male entitlement
 - Stereotypical beliefs around gender roles
 - Coercive control and systematic oppression
- Feminist framework needs to form foundation
- ***But:*** complex issues often require intervention beyond gender equality

Fathering and child safety in the context of DFV

- Relationships often don't end because DFV is present
- Ending relationship doesn't necessarily end DFV
- Ongoing contact between children and abusive parent (Hart, 2010)
 - Putting children at risk
 - Putting victims at risk
 - Children as ongoing tool of abuse and control
- Increasing victims' and children's safety by engaging with fathers?

Invisibility of fathers in policy and practice

- Historical invisibility of fathers in child protection (Humphreys & Absler, 2011; Featherstone & Peckover, 2007)
 - Focus on mothers as primary caretakers
 - Responsible for child wellbeing
 - ‘Failure to protect’
 - No expectation for fathers to engage
 - No expectation for fathers to change
 - ***Expectation to change and ensure child wellbeing*** placed on ***mothers***
- Problematic framing of parenting responsibility
 - Invisibility allows denial of accountability

Capturing your experience

- Who currently works with abusive fathers?
- What does this work look like?

Fathering in the context of DFV

- **Detrimental impact on child wellbeing and development** (Richards, 2011)
 - Behavioural
 - Education
 - Mental health
 - Respectful relationships
- **Impact on own ability to parent** (AIFS, 2010; Peled, 2000)
 - Rigid and/ or absent
 - Role modelling/ social learning
- **Impact on victim's ability to parent** (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001)
 - Undermined parent child relationship
 - Coping with own victimisation
 - Mental health issues

Recent shift towards greater accountability of fathers

- **In child protection** (DCCSDS, 2013; Stover & Morgos, 2013)
 - General
 - DFV-related
- **In family law** (AIFS, 2015)
 - Fewer cases involving DFV with shared custody outcomes
 - But: many children remain in contact with abusive parent
 - Overnight contact
 - Day contact
 - Supervised contact
 - Highlights importance of behaviour change to increase capacity to be a safe parent

Reliance on perpetrator intervention programs

- Increasing emphasis on **perpetrator accountability** through **behaviour change** programs
 - E.g. Qld Taskforce (2015), RCFV (2016)
- However, **evidence of effectiveness varies** (Day, Chung, O’Leary & Carson, 2009) with:
 - program content & duration
 - facilitator qualifications
 - varying needs of participants
 - **motivation to change** in mandated cohorts



***YOU'VE GOT TO BE COMMITTED IF
YOU WANT TO MAKE IT
PERMANENT. (SB 6)***

**BUT WHAT CAN COMMIT ABUSIVE
MEN TO CHANGING THEIR WAYS?**

The study

- **Interviews with 21 men**
 - 18 fathers
 - Age range 24-62years
 - 17 Australian-born (non-Indigenous)
- **Court mandated men's behaviour change program**
 - 'visible' cohort with complex needs
- **24 weeks duration**
 - Interviewees ranging from 3-24 weeks

Participants' lifestyles

- **'Chaotic lifestyles' (n=11)**

- Criminal histories
- Parents with criminal histories
- Histories of abuse and neglect

➡ note: inconsistency in intake records and interview descriptions

➡ suggests lack of awareness of what constitutes abuse/
normalisation of abuse

- Child safety interventions
- Inconsistent employment
- Education < grade 10

Participants' relationships

- **Volatile relationships (n=8)**
 - Alleged reciprocal violence (n=7)
 - Alleged drug & alcohol use by victim (n=8)
 - Drug/ alcohol misuse by perpetrator (n=10)
 - ***Patriarchal beliefs***
 - Poor conflict resolution skills
 - Poor communication skills
 - 'Revenge cheating'

Fatherhood

- **18 fathers**
 - 14 fathers of dependent children with most recent victim
 - **9 fathers of children aged 5 or younger**
 - Some also had children from previous relationships
 - **11 fathers still living with partner** (victim) & children
 - **Separated fathers:**
 - **1 with no contact/visitation**
 - 1 with supervised contact
 - 1 with 'regular' contact



Fathers continue to play a significant role in children's lives

Changing for the sake of the intimate partner?

- Prevalence of victim-blaming attitudes
 - The victim as ‘the problem’
 - Little concern for their partner’s wellbeing or perceptions of the abuse
 - No ownership of their behaviour

[...] there wouldn't be no domestic violence and breaches in my life to start with if this girl never rocked up in my life because I've never been in trouble with police like this before. When I first met her is when I started [...] (sue 8)

[the program] won't make me a better person because I wasn't a bad person prior. I was always treating other women with respect. It's just singled out one person in 37 years and, I'm not trying to put myself on a pedestal, but I have dated a lot of women and nothing else has happened in those situations. (sue 1)

The role of children

- Many DVO breaches related to parenting and/ or visitation
 - ‘Breaching for the greater good’
- Fathers seemed ***stuck between reality of repercussions and their fatherhood identity***
 - Perception of needing to protect children
 - Desire to see children even if risking a breach
 - Some concerned about increasing severity of punishment
 - However: bottom line for most was, they’d behave the same way again ‘if they had to’

‘I would do it again despite the consequences’

I think it was rational and irrespective of the outcome if it was to prevent potential dangers that are involved with excessive alcohol intake and driving I'd probably go through the same actions again. (SM7)

As a breach, yeah. But then at that time I hadn't been in jail. I desperately wanted to see my son. I wanted to hear his voice. I wanted to know that he was okay. [...] I'd probably still do it again knowing what I know. (SM1)

Your views

- Do fathers you work with tend to have an understanding of the impact of their behaviour
 - On their partner?
 - On their children?

Impact and consequences of DFV

- Emerging themes
 - **Limited awareness of adverse impact of DFV on children**
 - ‘no direct exposure’
 - ‘I’d never hurt them’
 - ‘they’re ok’
 - However: **awareness of adverse impact on relationship/ contact with children**
 - Going to jail means ‘losing the children’
 - Starting to realise impact of limited contact with children
 - Missing out on children growing up
 - Disrupted parent-child relationship

Risking breaches to see the children

Legal Aid took nine and half months to finally get us into a mediation room. In that time I missed his birthday, I missed Christmas and it was the second Christmas I didn't get to see him in a row. My son had gone from two to three years old. I did find out where she was living, [...]. So I went in the [neighbours'] backyard and then I could hear my son playing in the backyard. I went down on their pontoon, [...], and I called out [my son's name] and straight away he was like, "Daddy, daddy". It just broke my heart. I just started crying. I left quickly before [my ex-partner] saw me and I got in my car and I was like determined, [...], I'm going to get my son back. I'm going to get to see him no matter what it is, I'm going to get to see him. [...]I wasn't allowed to turn up there to even see my son, because that would be a breach because I was not even allowed to go within 100 meters of her.(SM1)

Implications for engaging fathers

- Limited deterrent effect of CJS repercussions
- Limited concern for primary victim

➔ ***Yet interaction with victim is what causes impact on children***

- Highlights need for gender-focused behaviour change
 - ***BUT: suggests need for different angle around motivation for behaviour change***
- Engaging perpetrators as fathers early on in responses:
 - **places ‘spotlight’ on:**
 - Child safety/ family welfare services
 - Courts (DVO applications and breaches)

Using fatherhood identity as 'leverage'

Prioritising safety & wellbeing of children

- 'Naming the problem'
 - important to make fathers recognise their behaviour and its impact on others
- Early engagement ***needs to highlight***
 - impact of **DFV on children**
 - impact of **DFV on father-child relationship**
 - Impact of **repercussions on father-child relationship**

➡ To generate ownership of behaviour

➡ To generate motivation around broader DFV-related behaviour change

- e.g. for uptake of perpetrator intervention programs

Summary

Important to recognise that behaviour change around intimate relationships and parenting are inseparable

- Interventions still require gendered focus & relationship skills
- Motivation for interventions may need to centre on children given what we know

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