



Brief interventions: their role in the broadening landscape of perpetrator responses

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This review was instigated by QCDFVR's work in supporting the Queensland Government's commitment to making available a diversity of perpetrator interventions across a continuum of risk and need, and we gratefully acknowledge funding from the Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety. We would also like to thank Dr Brian Sullivan for his input in this brief review, along with Dr Brodie Evans and Mr Mark Walters for their initial advice on existing brief interventions.

Introduction

Domestic and family violence (DFV) remains a pervasive issue in the Australian community with around 1 in 4 women having experienced violence perpetrated by an intimate partner or family member (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Accordingly, national and state governments have called for a greater focus on intervention and justice responses for persons using violence (PuVs) (Lloyd et al., 2023; Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021).

Outside of criminal justice interventions, men’s behaviour change programs (MBCPs) have been a “mainstay” of interventions to stop violent and abusive behaviour (Helps et al., 2025; Vlasis et al., 2017). Yet, the extent to which MBCPs can respond to the variety of risks and needs that PuVs present with has been called into question (Helps et al., 2025). In recognising the need to make available a diversity of perpetrator interventions across a continuum of risk and need (recommendations 25, 26 and 28 of Hear her voice: Report one (Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce, 2021)), the Queensland Government is trialling a range of interventions for PuVs, including a brief intervention.

Beginning with an introduction to MBCPs, this paper provides a review of the literature on brief interventions to discuss their purpose within this broadening landscape of perpetrator interventions.



Men's Behaviour Change Programs

MBCPs generally seek to address drivers of domestic violence at an individual level, such as the violence supportive views PuVs may hold (Helps et al., 2025). While typically delivered in group settings, MBCPs may vary in format to accommodate participants' diverse needs; some may be tailored to address specific cultural groups' risk factors for violence, target specific tactics of violence, or coexist with other supports provided to participants such as drug and alcohol counselling (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2023; Helps et al., 2023, 2025; Meyer et al., 2021). Participants across programs can have heterogeneous characteristics, such as the risk they pose to victim-survivors, their motivation to change, support needs, and use of specific tactics for violence (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2024; Vlasis et al., 2017). There is also diversity in the ways PuVs are referred to programs, e.g. through self-referral, court diversion schemes, and police referral (Chung et al., 2020; Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2024). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, MBCPs have further been adapted to online formats, allowing for greater accessibility and flexibility in delivery (Opoku and Heard, 2023)—opening new avenues for increasing program availability and engagement.

Despite the limited evidence base on the effectiveness of MBCPs, evaluation studies show positive change on a range of measures (O'Connor et al., 2021); however, as noted by Helps et al., 2023, p.10, "from the beginning MBCPs were conceptualised as one part of a coordinated community response to people using violence". This includes a system that integrates MBCPs, victim-survivor supports, and the criminal justice system alongside a range of community services that address co-occurring needs (e.g., mental health, alcohol and other drug use) (Helps et al., 2023).

Brief Interventions

As part of this broader systems response, it is important to consider the role of brief interventions. While there appears to be no consistent definition around what constitutes a brief intervention, for the purpose of this paper, a brief intervention is regarded as a program or intervention less than 16 weeks. This reflects the minimum program duration requirements by some jurisdictions; for example, the Queensland Government standards require a minimum of 32 hours over 16 weeks (Queensland Government, 2022).

This paper draws on a review of published studies on brief perpetrator interventions from academic and grey literature to explore their various interpretations and applications with the aim of better understanding their potential roles within the spectrum of perpetrator-focused interventions. Although numerous brief interventions are available across Australia ([NTV | Men's Behaviour Change Programs](#)), only brief interventions for which evaluation studies were identified have been included (see Table 1).

The review found a diverse range of approaches to support men's behaviour change, including pre-MBCP, standalone, and post-MBCP brief interventions, which are shown in Figure 1 and discussed below.

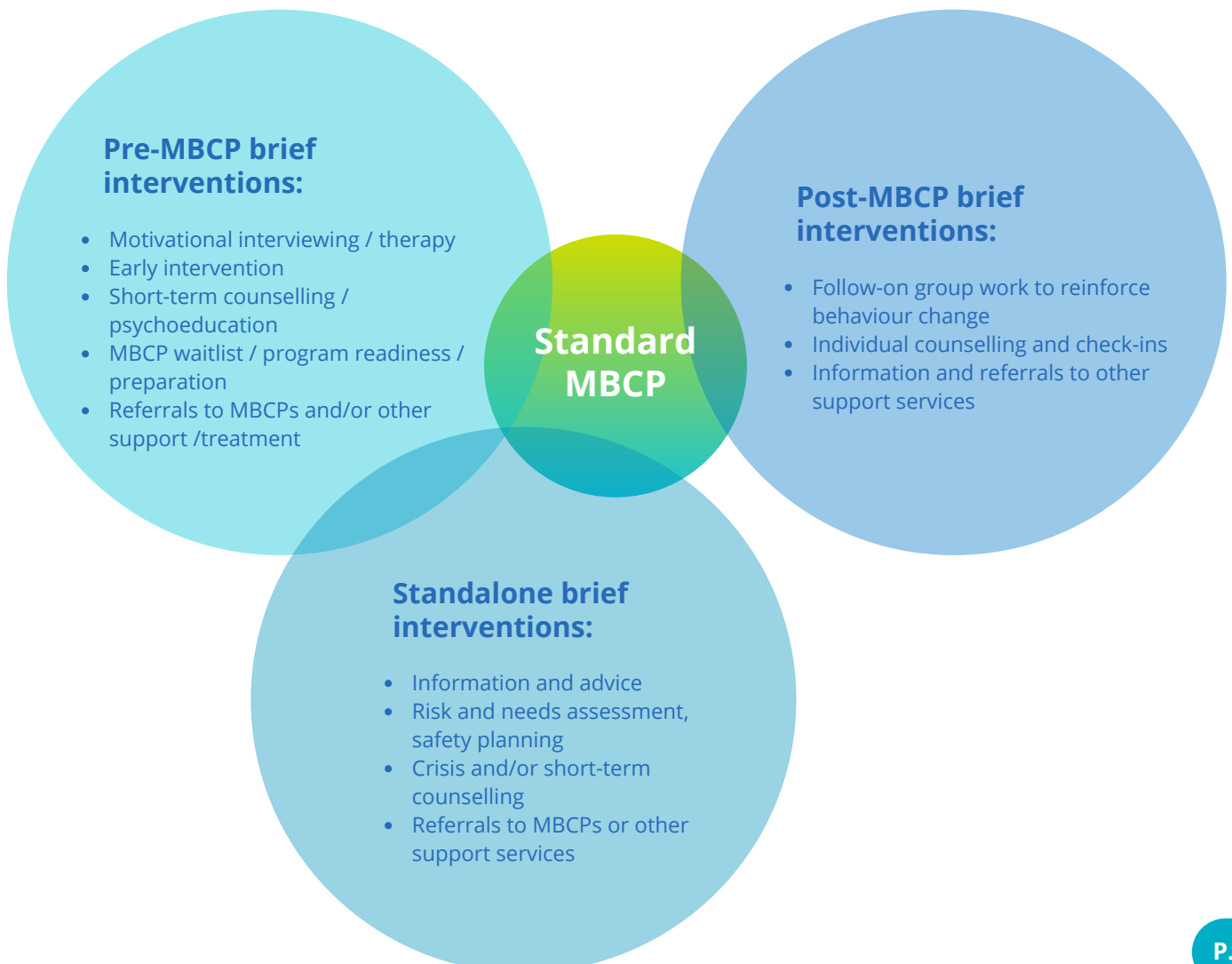


Figure 1: Different types of brief interventions

Table 1: Evaluated brief interventions

Source	Program Name/Type	Program/Study Details
Carswell, 2023 Australia	Men Sustaining Change <i>Post intervention</i> (Maintenance)	A weekly, facilitated peer-support group for men who have completed UnitingCare's <i>Men Choosing Change</i> (16-week MBCP) and wish to continue their behaviour change journey. Building upon progress made during the MBCP, Men Sustaining Change provides psycho-educational content in weekly group sessions and individual phone check-ins. It also aims to create pro-social networks through the group sessions and organised social events. Men's behaviour change is further aided by facilitating access to other support services through referrals and information sessions delivered by guest speakers. A DFV Advocate service provides continuity of support for partners/ex-partners and children of men accepted into the program. <i>Findings: The Men Sustaining Change pilot operated as intended, with participants reporting benefits in continuing their behaviour change and personal development, while acknowledging that change is a long-term process.</i>
Crane & Eckhardt, 2013 USA	Brief motivational enhancement <i>Pre intervention</i>	Study examined the value of a single brief motivational enhancement session (using motivational interviewing techniques) for male perpetrators of intimate partner violence—prior to their entry into a mandatory batterer intervention program—to determine its effectiveness in relation to program attendance and completion, and recidivism. <i>Findings: While participants of brief motivational enhancement interviews were more likely to attend the batterer intervention program sessions and comply with treatment, participating in the brief intervention was not associated with a reduction in recidivism.</i>
Department of Social Services, 2024 Australia	Men's Referral Service <i>Standalone</i> (with optional follow-up if required)	Not to Violence (NTV) Men's Referral Service (MRS) offers a 24-hour national telephone and online support service for men who have used violence or controlling behaviour. Tailored to the client's risks and needs, this service may include information and advice, risk and needs assessments, safety planning, crisis counselling, and referral to other services for support. <i>Findings: Around 2 in 5 MRS service users are referred to other services, mostly to other MBCPs. Although the MRS model is not intended for ongoing contact, many men reach out multiple times, relying on the service not only for referrals but also for crisis support and counselling. The MRS addresses a geographical barrier for men living in regional, rural or remote Australia where there may be no local MBCP or supports available.</i>
	Brief Intervention Service	NTV's Brief Intervention Service (BIS) offers a flexible, multi-session telephone-based counselling service for men who may be waiting to access a MBCP, or for whom a MBCP may not be appropriate.
	<i>Standalone & Pre intervention</i>	It provides up to 6 counselling sessions (with option for 10 if required) and referrals to other supports and programs (predominantly MBCP). <i>Findings: While self-reported data from BIS service users indicated a positive trend in behaviour change with reductions in harmful behaviour, it is important to acknowledge the propensity for individuals to under-report negative behaviours.</i>
	Changing for Good - Violence Prevention Program <i>Standalone</i> (Prevention)	Lifeline's Changing for Good Violence Prevention Program (VPP) is a telephone support service for men who are not yet using physical violence but are worried that they are at risk of doing so. This service includes 4 phone counselling sessions every 2 weeks for 2 two months, plus 1 follow-up session after program completion, alongside information and referral to support services. <i>Findings: The program evaluation reported some positive behavioural changes among its service users, however, there may be discrepancy between self-reported improvements and actual behaviour change.</i>
	Changing for Good - Post Men's Behaviour Change Program <i>Post intervention</i>	Lifeline's Changing for Good Post Men's Behaviour Change Program (Post MBCP) provides a follow up service to participants of MBCPs to reinforce what was learnt in the MBCP. This service includes 12 telephone counselling every 2 weeks for up to 6 months, plus 1 follow-up session for up to 6 months after MBCPs, alongside information and referral to support services. <i>Findings: Self-reported reductions in harmful behaviours among service users were supported by qualitative data showing commitment to long-term behaviour change.</i>

Source	Program Name/Type	Program/Study Details
Kistenmacher & Weiss, 2008 USA	Motivational interviewing <i>Pre intervention</i>	Study examined the value of a single brief motivational enhancement session (using motivational interviewing techniques) for male perpetrators of intimate partner violence—prior to their entry into a mandatory batterer intervention program—to determine its effectiveness in relation to program attendance and completion, and recidivism. <i>Findings:</i> While participants of brief motivational enhancement interviews were more likely to attend the batterer intervention program sessions and comply with treatment, participating in the brief intervention was not associated with a reduction in recidivism.
Mbilinyi et al., 2011 USA	Motivational enhancement therapy <i>Pre intervention</i>	Study evaluated telephone-delivered motivational enhancement therapy (MET) interviews with substance-using male perpetrators of intimate partner violence (IPV). The study aimed to engage participants early (before arrest) and facilitate motivation for them to initiate positive changes in their IPV and/or substance abuse. MET consisted of a phone feedback session (60-90 minutes) with a counsellor, a Personal Feedback Report, and an optional learning session (OLS) with a counsellor “Learning About and Considering Options in the Community” to learn about IPV and/or substance abuse resources available in the community, and a 10-minute video of interviews with men who had completed IPV treatment programs. <i>Findings:</i> Participants who received MET demonstrated greater interest and willingness to change, were more likely to attend the OLS, and self-reported a greater reduction in IPV compared to those who did not receive MET. No intervention effects were observed for substance use, which was strongly linked to baseline levels and showed no association with intervention condition.
Mbilinyi et al., 2023 USA	Motivational enhancement therapy <i>Pre intervention</i>	Study evaluated the effectiveness of telephone-based motivational enhancement therapy (MET) to motivate untreated and unadjudicated men who have used IPV to explore treatment options. Similar to the original trial above (Mbilinyi et al., 2011), the MET intervention group received 2 feedback sessions guided by a personalised feedback report on participants’ IPV and substance use while the comparison group were mailed printed educational materials. <i>Findings:</i> Overall, there were no significant differences between the MET intervention group and the mail comparison group in reducing IPV behaviour or substance use and seeking treatment across the follow-up period. However, more than half of all participants were successful in at least one category (having a conversation with an IPV agency counsellor, ceasing IPV behaviours, or initiating contact with an IPV of substance use disorder agency).
Meyer et al., 2021 Australia	Short term MBCP <i>Standalone (early ‘combined’ intervention)</i>	Windana’s U-Turn is a 12-week group intervention program targeted at men who are alleged perpetrators and respondents on a Family Violence Intervention Order (FVIO), and who engage in problematic alcohol and other drug use (AOD). The program aims to address the intersection between family violence and problematic AOD use with men referred through the magistrate’s court. U-Turn is framed as an ‘early intervention’ with its key objective to keep men who have had minimal or no prior contact with the criminal justice system out of the system. While it is a shorter term MBCP, participants complete a 3-week orientation prior to commencing the 12-week group-based intervention. <i>Findings:</i> The majority of U-Turn participants and affected family members reported reductions in men’s alcohol use (which was the predominant substance used), and improvements in understanding its impact on behaviour, ability to moderate alcohol intake, and compliance with FVIO conditions. Participants also reported improved understanding of family violence, its effects on family members, and improved ability to manage negative emotions and self-regulate to prevent escalation into abusive behaviours.

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