Who are you?

Characteristics of DFV offenders who strangle their intimate partner: a document analysis.

A study completed for a Master of Research
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QCDFVR
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Background to the Study

Strangulation is known to be a major warning sign and cause of serious harm and even death. Data from Queensland's Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Board showed that in nearly one quarter of intimate partner homicides between 2001 and 2015, the victim had previously been strangled. This prompted the research question: What do we know about the men who use this level of violence? Not all men who kill their partners have used strangulation before, so understanding what sets this group apart may help us identify risks earlier.

With strangulation now a specific criminal offence in Queensland, it is even more important to understand these patterns. By exploring the characteristics and histories of men who strangle, this study hopes to support better risk assessment, improve safety planning for victim-survivors, and strengthen how behaviour change programs and Queensland Corrective Services work with this high-risk group.

Method

The study involved a document review and analysis of 31 intake forms filled out by men who had been referred to the program with strangulation identified as one of tactics used.

The intake form was a comprehensive 22-page self-assessment form asking about their background, lifestyle, attitudes, relationships, and reflections on their behaviour. The form also captured information from referrers (e.g. Queensland Corrective Services, Domestic Violence Court) and notes from victim advocates describing the abuse.

A scoping review had identified key themes from literature regarding men who strangled in the Domestic Violence (DV) context. These themes were linked in analysing the data including:

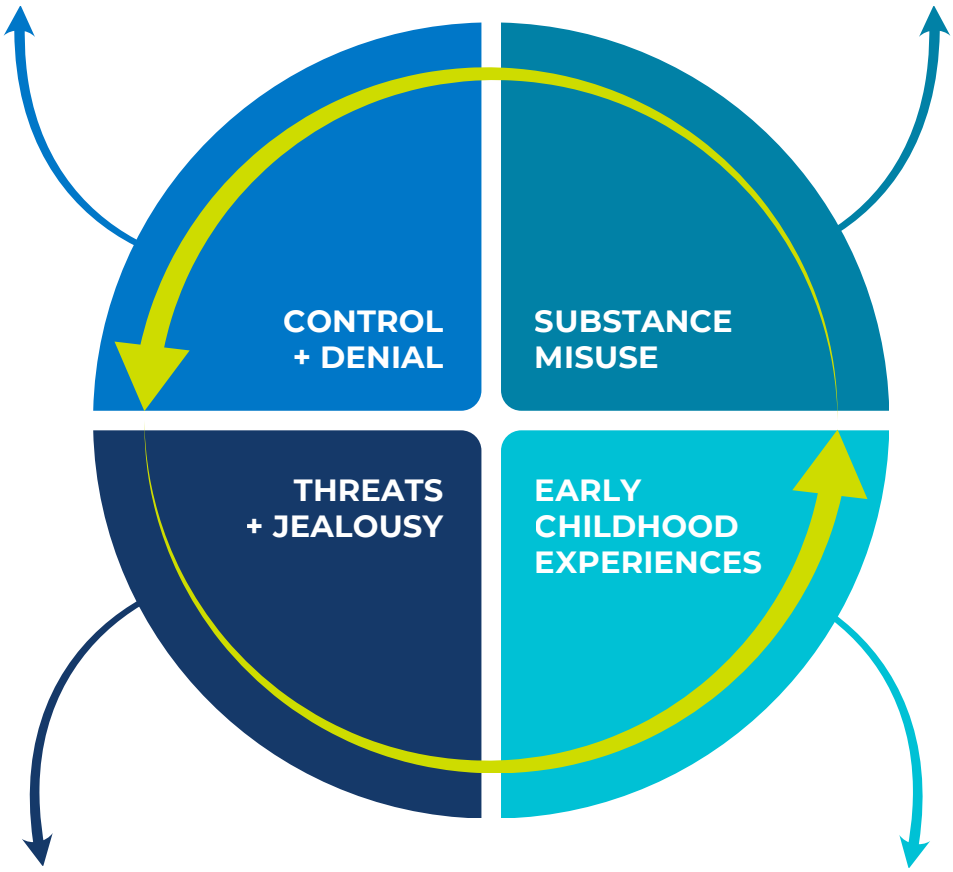
- How the men used control or threats
- Their alcohol or drug use
- Their ideas about masculinity and their childhood experiences
- How they understood violence
- What they saw as their "triggers" or intentions
- How they managed their emotions
- How they responded to Domestic Violence Protection Orders

Because this was a qualitative study focused on understanding patterns—not measuring exact numbers—the results are described using simple fractions just to give a sense of scale.

What was found

- ¾ of men denied being controlling
- Violence was often framed as self-defense
- A clear pattern of Deny–Justify–Minimise–Blame (DJMB)

- Substance use was common
- Nearly ¾ reported daily alcohol use
- These patterns highlight the need for tailored responses



- Nearly ½ admitted to being jealous
- Some admitted to threatening partners, children, or family members
- ⅓ reported suicide attempts

- ¾ were exposed to violence in their childhood homes
- Childhood experiences included severe trauma
- Some described their childhood as “normal” or positive

One of the strongest findings was men’s perception of *control*. When asked, “Would you say you're a controlling person?”, 70% of the men said no. It raises important questions about how these men understand the word control, and whether they recognise their actions as controlling at all.

Interestingly, nearly half of the men admitted to being jealous. This suggests that *jealousy* may feel more acceptable to acknowledge than *control*, even though both can be linked to abusive behaviour.

A third of the men reported having attempted suicide at some point, and a similar number admitted to threatening their partners or children with violence, both documented tactics of coercion.

Substance use was also common, but the reasons varied. Most said they used alcohol or drugs to cope with trauma or major life stress, while a smaller group linked their use to lifestyle or workplace culture.

Experiences of violence in childhood were widespread. About two-thirds of the men described growing up with harsh punishment, abandonment, or sexual abuse. Some reported “normal” or positive childhoods which could suggest other influences (gender roles, stereotypes, cultural attitudes) or their use of violence as adults.

When asked, **“Would you say you're a controlling person?”**, 70% of the men said no.

Emotional Regulation

Most reported being "triggered" by partner's behaviour.

7/10
reported some mental health concerns.

4/10
had formal diagnoses (anxiety, depression most common).

Many of the men said their partners "triggered" them or set off their violence. However their response to other questions—such as whether they had ever fought with police or been involved in serious conflict at work— revealed that very few reported losing control in those situations.

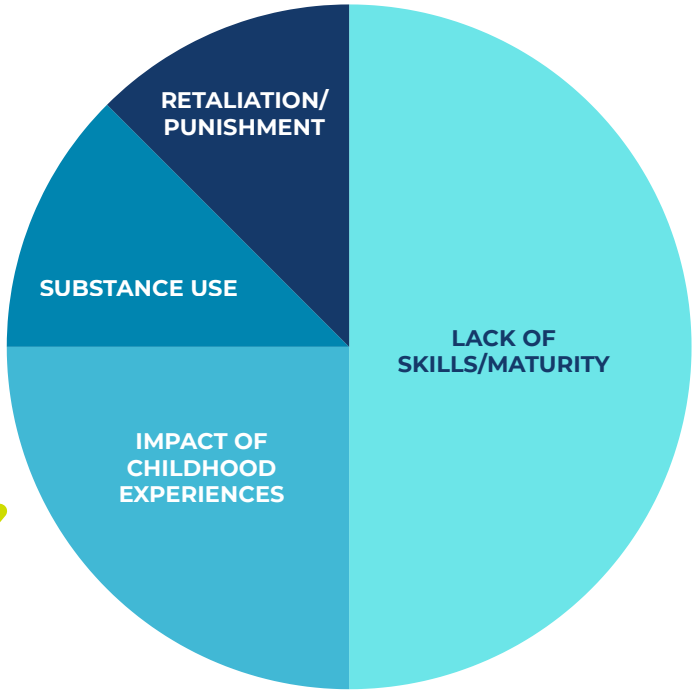
This suggests something important: that violence was a choice, not driven by forces they didn't understand or that they were unable to control.

A large number reported having mental health concerns.

Men's Theories About Their Violence

4 MAIN EXPLANATIONS OFFERED:

Reflects rationalisation and denial of control



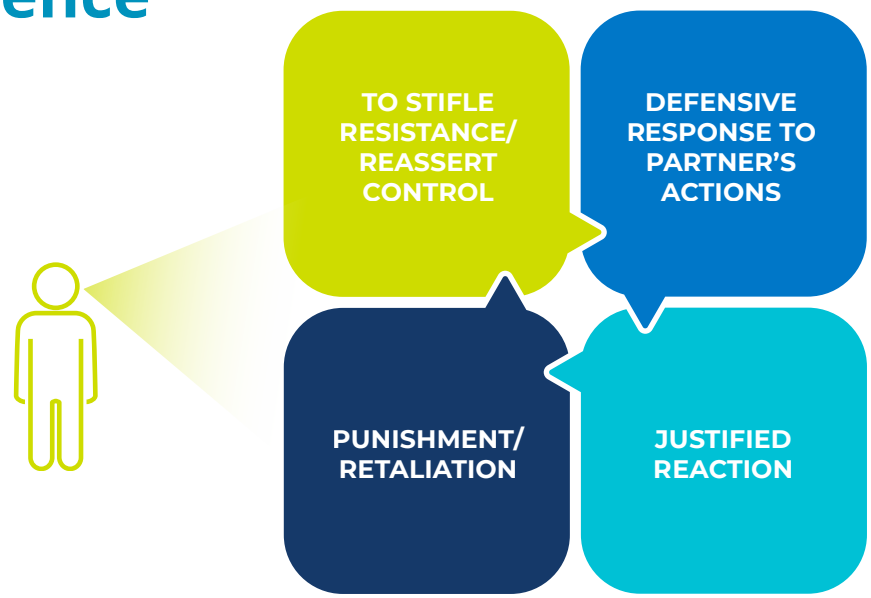
When the men were asked, "What's your theory about why you use violence or abusive behaviour?", the most common answer was that they lacked the skills to manage conflict or calm situations. This suggests that behaviour change programs can play an important role in teaching safer, non-violent ways to deal with situations that hold the potential for violence.

The next most common explanation was childhood trauma. One quarter of the sample said their early experiences—such as growing up with violence or instability—shaped how they behave in adult relationships.

Intent of Violence

MEN'S VIEW

The attribution of their violence as justified alluding to actions or behaviours of their intimate partner as the cause was very apparent.



Triggers

A strong theme of partner blaming was apparent, with men attributing their violence to a reaction to something their partner supposedly did. More than half used words like threatened, belittled, attacked, or insecure. Some suggested alcohol or drug use as their explanation.

DVOs

A key finding was that Domestic Violence Orders (DVOs) had little effect on stopping the violence. Two-thirds of the men said the DVO did not prevent them from continuing abusive behaviour. Considering these men had already used one of the most dangerous forms of assault—strangulation—this raises serious concerns. It suggests that for some offenders, a civil court order offers very limited protection for victim-survivors.

The data also showed that some men had access to weapons. The term weapons wasn't defined in the forms—it could mean anything from tools to knives—and the question asked whether they had ever threatened someone with a weapon. This highlights the need for more specific, detailed information about men's access to weapons, as access to weapons significantly increases risk.

Practice Implications

Taken together, the research findings offer important insights for practitioners about the attitudes, beliefs and complex ways men who have used strangulation understand and explain their violence. While many men acknowledge conflict, jealousy, or stress in their relationships, they rarely recognise the controlling dynamics underlying their behaviour; often presenting themselves as the victim. Based on this research practitioners are encouraged to consider:

- Strangulation is a critical risk indicator and reports of strangulation should be treated as a serious escalation
- The need to maintain a clear focus on safety, accountability, and collaboration with victim-survivor service
- Many men who use strangulation do not identify themselves as controlling.
- Jealousy may be more readily acknowledged than control. Exploring how jealousy is used to justify monitoring, intimidation, or violence can be an important point of intervention.
- Explanations that frame violence as being "triggered" by a partner should be carefully examined. Evidence that men maintain control in other settings may help challenge narratives of loss of control.
- Trauma-informed engagement is important, acknowledging childhood trauma and mental health concerns etc, but it should not dilute accountability for the use of violence.
- DVOs alone may have limited deterrent effect for this group; ongoing collaboration between behaviour change programs, victim-survivor advocates, and the justice sector is essential for managing risk.

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