



Centre for Research
on Violence Against Women and Children



Working With Communities.

The Women's Safety Project Pilot Study

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THE WOMEN'S SAFETY PROJECT PILOT STUDY

Phase One: Evaluation of Batterer's Programs December 14, 2001
Phase Two: Interviews with Women March 6, 2003

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Study was undertaken in conjunction with the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto

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THE WOMEN'S SAFETY PROJECT PILOT STUDY: EVALUATION OF BATTERERS' PROGRAMS

This study was undertaken with the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto and is funded by the New Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Purpose of Pilot Study

Research on the effectiveness of group treatment programs for men convicted of partner abuse has been primarily quantitative in nature, and rarely incorporates the lived experience of the female partners of these men (Austin & Dankwort, 1999). As one of the central goals of batterer's programs is to increase women's safety by ceasing men's violence, and to increase men's accountability and responsibility for their violent behaviour, it makes sense that women's perspectives should be included in efforts to evaluate this intervention. As the PAR program already includes a component that involves women's perspectives and experiences through the Partner Contact service, research including women's voices fits practically and philosophically within the current framework of the program. Women's responses therefore should be included in all aspects of the program: in evaluating practice interventions, making policy recommendations and in research about program effectiveness. The purpose of piloting the study was to test out the interview guide (See Appendix A), to gather initial data that would help us to refine and develop further research questions for Phase Two of this study and to provide a preliminary evaluation of the strengths and limitations of the PAR programs (Process evaluation).

Research Methods

Prior to this study there had been no evaluation of the PAR program from the women's perspectives. As such, this process evaluation was largely exploratory. The pilot study used a qualitative research design and included 10 in depth interviews with women

whose partners had been through a court mandated batterers' program. The interview guide was developed through consultation with the Women's Accountability Committee of the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WACT), service providers from PAR agencies and the PAR committee of the WACT, staff at WACT and from interviews with participants. As is consistent with grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), the interview guide was revised as we learned new information through the interviews. Interviews were conducted by trained research assistants and by the principal researcher. Interviews were conducted from mid-December, 2000 to the end of May, 2001. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 2 hours. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed with the participant's consent. (One participant did not want her interview to be tape recorded, so the researcher took written notes. The other nine participants agreed to the tape recording.) Participant's were also paid \$25.00 in recognition of our appreciation of their time and knowledge and childcare and transportation costs were also covered if needed. The research team also provided women with resource information and phone numbers to access services. Each participant was given a copy of her transcript after it was transcribed and, when possible, were met with a second time so that she could make any changes necessary to the interview before it was included in the analysis phase of this study. (We were unable to contact one participant for a second interview and another repeatedly forgot about the scheduled interview so she was sent the transcript in the mail and provided written feedback to us). The second interview also provided an opportunity for the researcher to go back and ask follow up questions or request further clarification. In one instance the participant had been extremely positive about her life's direction during the first interview as she had left her abusive partner. However, by the second interview this participant had reunited with him and was feeling extremely negative and somewhat defeated by her situation. This fluctuation reminds us that our interviews, like all research, simply capture a moment in time. The discrepancy in the women's circumstances between the first and second meeting also points to the importance of providing a model for follow up with women whose partners have

attended a batterer's program. This will be discussed later in this report. In addition, it also points to the potential relevance of further research that captures women's experience both during the time her partner attended the PAR program and at a later date, in order to track the partner's behaviour and her own experiences. This methodology is currently being employed in Phase Two of the Women's Safety Project.

Referral Sources

The participants were referred to us by several Partner Contacts at the various PAR agencies. Once the names of potential participants were forwarded to us they were then contacted and a time and location for the interviews was arranged. Several agencies allowed us to interview in their space. We also posted information sheets in the courts but did not receive any participants from this recruitment method (Appendix B).

The Participants

The eligibility criteria for participants was that their partners should have been in the program for a minimum of 12 weeks and should not have completed the program any longer than 4 weeks prior. The reason for this was so that we could focus directly on the women's perspectives/experiences of the batterers' program while her partner was currently attending. However, some participants did not meet this criteria as their situation had changed by the time the interview was conducted. If they did not meet the eligibility criteria at the time they were contacted by the research team they were not interviewed however. All but two women contacted agreed to participate in the interview.

At the time we conducted the pilot study, we had not yet obtained funding for translation services for interviews not conducted in English. Therefore, all women were interviewed in English and although it may not have been their first language, they were comfortable and fluent in conversing in English. Since the time of the pilot we

have received a small grant from the Scotiabank Community Research Grants Program to cover the translation costs of interviews with non-English speaking women. These women are currently being included in Phase Two of the Women's Safety Research Project.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

Ethnic/Cultural Background

The demographics of the 10 women who participated in the pilot study, while not representative of all populations served by PAR programs, do represent a fair diversity of communities. Of the ten women interviewed, four were Anglophone and six reported being from Aboriginal, South East Asian, South Asian, Eastern and Southern European backgrounds.

Age

Participant's ages ranged from twenty-four to sixty-four years of age.

Women's Relationship's with Batterer

Six of the ten women reported that they were still living with their partner (either married or common-law). Four of these women had no plans to separate or divorce and continued to be committed to the future of their relationship. Two of these women were contemplating the possibility of separation or divorce and stated they would have ended the relationship if they did not have children (*"Yes, if I didn't have the boys, I would just say goodbye"*). One woman was living separately from her partner but continuing a relationship. Three were separated with no plans of reconciliation and of these, two women were involved in complicated custody or legal separation issues with ex-partners.

Five women reported the use of alcohol to be a significant factor in the abuse, many describing their partners as alcoholics. Many of the men were described as being quiet and uncommunicative: *"He's so quiet. He won't say anything, not unless you talk to him. I don't know what he wants and what he doesn't like, because he doesn't tell me"*. Women also stated that limited literacy and education, as well as English being a second language contributed to difficulties in communication. Most women reported that their partners held sexist views about heterosexual relationships and felt these perspectives played a large role in the men's abusive behaviour. Women described their partners as *"chauvinists"* or as *"having a mid-nineteenth century concept of family which I don't share..."* Other descriptors included childishness/immaturity, jealousy and insecurity. Four men were described as good fathers despite the abuse towards their partners. Two women reported that their partners were abusive towards their children as well as themselves. The men ranged in ages from their mid-twenties to early sixties. Eight of the men worked in either full or part-time jobs, one was involved in criminal activity (drugs/prostitution) and one man was on disability insurance due to an accident.

Work and Study

Nine out of ten women either worked outside of the home, were taking classes or training, or were both working and studying. One woman had upgraded her education and taken specialized training which she had hoped to continue but felt she was prevented from securing a job because of the demands of settling her legal issues with her ex-partner. The majority of these women identified that financial stress had been a considerable factor in the family and three women described being seriously financially disadvantaged as a direct result of the abuse.

KEY FINDINGS

Partner Contact

Whether women were still with their partner or not, the partner contact was generally appreciated by this group of women. There were differing degrees of engagement with the partner contact depending on whether a woman was still with her partner, or whether a woman felt that she wanted to utilize referrals to individual or group counselling or other support. Eight women reported that they had telephone contact only, which consisted of phone calls made by the partner contact to the woman's home. These phone calls were said to be "comforting" and helpful. The phone calls made them feel like they were not alone and that there was someone looking out for them.

"...if I had not had her [partner contact] and my family doctorI don't know what I would have done. She is wonderful."

"It was really comforting to have people calling and keeping me updated on what was going on."

"I like talking to people like that. Are they social workers? I like talking to them because they're nice. They give me a lot of support. They ask me how I'm doing and all that, and that counts a lot to me."

"You know, it feels like someone is looking out for me and somebody is there for me to contact if I have questions. "

One woman, however, did feel that the partner contact person was initially unsupportive and felt that she was being accused of being the abuser and feared her child would be taken away from her (this had been reinforced by her partner's threats).

Women reported that the partner contact asked questions about safety issues, answered questions or concerns and in some instances, asked for feedback as to what

areas of concern the woman would like to be particularly addressed in their partner's PARS group:

"Well when I talked with the lady that phones, she asked me, is there a certain subject that you would like to have come up in group?"

"She called and asked...pretty sure she asked how is the program helping him. And I told her it is helping him."

One of the most salient issues raised by participants is that they felt they had very little information about the PAR programs and what their partners were learning. The information that women received about the program differed considerably. One woman said she didn't *"remember receiving anything about it..."*. Others said:

"The first time he went I was very interested in knowing what they did there. I had no idea what it was. I thought maybe he was the only person, I didn't realize there were twenty or more."

"I don't know how the program is set up. What issues they deal with, is it just issues only, do they do any little quizzes, I don't know, any stuff like that."

Only one woman reported receiving a written outline of the PARS program with the start and finish dates and overview of the content.

Part of the problem with receiving so little program information was that women relied upon their partners to tell them what was happening in the group. This raised accountability issues for the women as the men were rarely forthcoming with information. Two women reported that their partners shared information about the content of the program. Others reported feeling "left out" and afraid that the men could say anything in the program and be believed:

"I asked him, so how many people were there and he told me "it's none of you

business."

When she asks, he tells her the group is to help him 'deal with crazies like you'...

(From hand written interview)

"He would ... not tell me and say that he wouldn't want to talk about it. Once in a while he would try not to tell me because he thought, oh, we shouldn't tell them anything because it's private."

Some participants reported that some of the men were using 'techniques' they learned in the group, such as a 'cooling off' period and the notion of 'verbal abuse' as way of controlling the women. For example, when some men felt like they were getting angry they left the house to 'cool off' but did not return for the rest of the day. This meant they did not have to discuss the issue or participate in resolving it. Also, some men told women that they were being 'verbally and psychologically' abusive and threatened to call the police on the woman.

"And how he had learned this kind of psychology and how he would go back there and it almost became like a new book he had written. And I'm thinking, it's such a shame- we are all trusting that these programs will work, so it will stop, so we won't have to break up with them, and we don't have to go through this anymore."

"He always tells me 'You cannot do this to me, this is the law.' Everything is legal, right now, so if you do blah, blah, blah, I'm going to call the police on you. I'm going to do this. So what I can do and what I cannot do also, he tells me..."

One woman said despite knowing that she was able to contact people should she feel threatened, her husband used his participation in the counselling program to undermine this ability:

"And so he was again manipulating me saying, 'I'm going to change and don't listen to this and don't contact my work, you'll just make it worse for me". And I

was in more danger if I would. So I would get calls from them (Partner Contact), and I wouldn't take them, I wouldn't..."

Cultural Needs

Many women, including those from mainstream populations, acknowledged the importance of cultural specificity and in offering groups which reflect the culture and language of the participants. Women believed that this would enhance their partner's ability to learn new skills and to be able to communicate within the group and be understood. One woman who reported attending a support group for abused women, felt it was useful for her to be in a group of women from the same culture:

"... they understand...because they themselves are from that background they understand the background, the culture and you don't feel ...there are certain little things that the [members of that culture] do, you know, and...so...you don't feel intimidated by mentioning it..."

She also felt she was faring better because she grew up in Canada. She reported that her knowledge of English and "Canadian Ways" has helped her advocate on her own behalf and to find out how to obtain resources. She described her experiences in accessing some services as very difficult. She said she could imagine that many women in her group who do not speak English very well would be at a disadvantage and would likely not have been successful at getting services.

One woman who felt that the program did not change her partner, stated that she felt it was impossible to provide a group that would satisfy the needs of different races, classes and ages. She reported that her partner was older than the other group members and he felt he had little in common with the group so he could not relate. She felt this contributed to his experience that *"it was a waste of time"*.

Parenting Issues

Women who had children with their partner, particularly the women who continued to live with their partner, emphasized the importance of focusing the men's group on parenting issues. Two women, separated from their partners, recognized the impact the abuse has had on their children and have sought counselling for them. Most of the interviewees had an awareness of generational abuse and concerns about the impact of their children witnessing violence and perpetuating a cycle, especially in their male children. Many women recognized the patterns of violence and alcohol use in their partner's family, and also in their own family history.

"He's a small guy and his father was abusive to his mom so there's a history of it in the family and it was something that I always feared and his mother always feared. But it's something that I never thought he would do. But just one night I guess, life was too stressful and he was drinking..."

One woman and her partner experienced a devastating loss which she emphasized had a unique impact on her and her family. She indicated that she was thankful that her husband was in a program and that he was learning about power and control issues. Observing him interact with their son and seeing him react differently confirmed that the group was being helpful. However, there was no indication that he was getting any kind of support around his specific loss nor was there marked improvement in their relationship as a couple except for the absence of physical abuse. There was, she described, a "cold...silence" between them.

IMPACT OF BATTERER'S PROGRAM

Relationship with Batterer

Although most of the women reported that there had been no more incidents of physical violence, of those still in relationships (7 of the 10), all reported many problems, tensions and stresses. Two factors contributing to this were: *Woman's lack of trust*: the incident that precipitated criminal justice involvement seems to have been that 'last straw' in terms of the woman's ability to trust that her partner will truly change. Although most women reported feeling confident they had resources should violence reoccur, they felt less certain and safe that when their partners got angry that they would not hit them again. They described this not as fear, but as *skepticism*. This skepticism also extended to whether the changes (no physical violence) in their partners would be lasting. Some suggested the men were not violent because they were being monitored and wondered if these changes would last after the program ended. The other problem women identified in the relationships was *communication problems*. Most women said that their partners were unable/unwilling to share feelings and experiences and to discuss relationship problems. Some of the women also acknowledged their own difficulties in communication although they also said they would like help in this regard.

Catalyst for Personal Change

The most significant finding related to the role of the program in these women's lives was that calling the police, charging the partner and having him enter the counselling program provided a *catalyst* for many of the women to change their lives. The ability

to make personal changes was facilitated by the knowledge that they were not alone with the abuse any more. Many women spoke of the safety they felt knowing that their partners were being 'monitored' and that they could call the police, the program facilitators or the partner contact person if their partners were violent. For the most part, they felt that all these individuals were helping to protect them and this knowledge significantly *decreased* feelings of isolation and *increased* feelings of safety.

Experiencing the absence of physical abuse and the increase in feelings of safety gave women the space to re-valuate their own circumstances. One woman, for example, found a counsellor and stopped drinking. Another woman returned to her home country while her partner was in the program to receive nurturing and guidance from her family and friends. As a result of these and other events women experienced a renewed sense of self-worth:

"I know how valuable I am. What I am angry about is that it took me so God damn long to find out."

"Being offered group therapy made me decide to go back into my own therapy, and that's been really excellent. "

"What you see now is a total re-invention of what I was six years ago. I have found out that I am the woman I always wanted to be."

One woman recognized her own need to get therapy and look at her life patterns with alcohol and relationships. Another woman, who disclosed she has been in abusive relationships in the past, sought strength in her *"power to walk away..."* from the relationship which she had done successfully in the past. Leaving the home and going away for a visit to seek support from friends and family helped two women, one of

whom described that she reached the point of feeling suicidal and had to leave to restore her mental health. Several women who were not in counselling stated that they would like to seek counselling if they could, particularly if it was somehow connected with their partners counselling. Two women indicated that they felt no need for counselling for abuse.

Talking About the Abuse

The biggest personal change many of these women spoke of, precipitated by the partners' involvement with the criminal justice system, was that women began *talking about the abuse* - talking to friends, to family, to neighbours. As they had spent considerable amount of energy keeping the abuse a secret and feeling shame because of it, this shift is considerable.

"...there was a part of me that wanted to say, okay, it's my fault and be embarrassed about it. And then I realized that in order to not have it happen again and to sort of educate people I had to be really up front about it.. I told everyone I knew. I wanted to just hide, and I was then like, no. I wanted to tell everyone, all my neighbours, all my friends ..."

Five women stated it was important that they informed everyone they knew (neighbours, friends, family and co-workers) about the abuse and charges against their partners. No longer being secretive about the abuse was experienced as personally empowering for these women:

"It is not a secret. The more people know the better it is for me. Just to show him, I am not going to hide from you."

"...one of the things that I did to help is I almost created a neighbourhood watch. I told everyone in the neighbourhood. It's a very tight community there, so I made sure I told all these guys and girls in the areas, so whenever I was walking up the

street, there were people who knew me, who knew and knew him."

Two women reported that confiding to close friends and some family members had mixed consequences as they at times felt pressured to meet the expectations of the supporters. On the whole, though, women said that it was " ...very important that women talk and talk and talk" in order to both increase a sense of personal efficacy and increase their own safety by making others aware of the danger they were in.

Other Factors Impacting Women's Safety and Independence

The Role of Work and Studies for Women

Most of the women indicated that their work and/or studies were an integral part of their well-being as it gave them the possibility of financial independence and a way to support their families (especially if their relationship does not last with their partner):

"If it happens again, that's it, you're out. What I'm going to do if your out, I'm just going to work full time, make money, support my kids and that's it. No more school. That's how I see it, if anything like that happens again. No more schooling for me."

One woman indicated that working and making her own money allowed her to feel independent:

"You know, so independence is something that I live for. I will never be dependent on a man, ever. It just gets you into trouble. It just like allows them to treat you wrong. Like I said, I never once gave a man an opportunity to say, who pays the bills? You know, I pay the bills just as well as you do."

Safety Precautions

There were a number of strategies that women employed to increase their feelings of

safety as well as actions they would take if they needed to in the future. Two women, separated from their partners, described “*sticking close to home*” and making sure they had a friend with them if possible. One woman used a cell phone and carried it with her at all times. They also depended on neighbours to keep an eye out for their ex-partners and to give them feedback about their partner’s behaviours. One woman said that maintaining emotional boundaries with her partner, being “*stand-offish*”, gave her a sense of safety. All the women stated that they would call either the police, contact person, parole officer or CAS worker if they needed to and these resources and the knowledge that they could do this, increased their sense of safety. In five cases, women indicated that they had developed a safety plan which was suggested by the partner contact person.

The fact that their partners knew that if they used violence again that they would be charged and given a sentence, was unanimously reported to be a significant deterrent. It helped women feel more confident that the violence might not reoccur. However, many of these same women and others, indicated that it was difficult to trust their partners fully and they could not be altogether sure that they “*wouldn’t turn*”. Women who were separated from their partners and had restraining orders and other parole or probation stipulations in place feared that their partners might try something and “*stalk*” them or approach them.

SUMMARY

Despite the variety of experiences and perceptions of the ten women interviewed, there was a consensus that it was very important to have a program available for their

current or ex-partners. Even if they questioned the long term effectiveness of the program, or if in fact they believed the program was able to address their partner's specific issues, it was consistently reported to be important to have something in place which emphasized that what their partners did was wrong. The women believed without exception that their current or ex-partners had to learn different ways of dealing with anger, conflict and parenting issues. Education and learning the "law of the land" was essential to any possibility of change in these areas.

The data identifies some common patterns but it also reveals diverse needs and experiences. Some women felt it was important to disclose and talk to everyone about what was happening to them. Some also felt the need to protect their families and utilize and depend solely on professional intervention. Cultural factors may play some part in this in that some of the women who were explicit about not seeking support from family and friends were of diverse cultures. The data does support that culturally-specific group services are effective for both men and women. It is also important to highlight that women who remain with their partners have different priorities than those that are separated, ie: the focus of the former is to stay together and improve the relationship and in contrast, the focus of the latter is for the acceptance of the separation and of getting their ex-partners to *let go*.

Although the integration of the partner contact person was for nine of the ten women very helpful, there does seem to be inconsistent information provided about the PARS Program. Most women knew very little about the framework and content of what was being offered, and the majority of women, whether they were still living with their

partner or not, indicated that they would have liked more information, including the dates of the program, the structure of the group and the subjects discussed. The women still in relationships with their partners felt it was important that they share in the responsibility of the program, however what they knew of the program and what they could contribute to it, was at the discretion of their partner. Although the partner contact invited specific concerns from two of the women, concerns which could be brought back to the group anonymously, women felt that the program excluded their experiences of the abuse.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that these ten women reflect a wide range of strengths, personal resilience, resourcefulness and capacity for growth. They were also extremely generous in sharing their insights, feelings and experiences and expressed hopes that their words would have an impact on improving the PAR services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:

Increase Accountability to Women Who Want to Stay with Partner

Five of the women stated that they would like to be included in some sort of counselling with their partner at the end of their PAR program. Not only did they feel

that they wanted to learn new communication skills as well, but they also said that their experiences needed to be included in order to increase the program's accountability to them. Some women suggested a form of couple counselling or at least involvement at the end of the group counselling. They felt there would be some value in having a 'witness' to both partners feelings and to receive some help in negotiating where to go from here.

"... if both sides could explain what's going on, so the women really know what's going on with the men and the men know what is going on with the women and they are able to come to a mediation situation and try and work on, like they would do in marriage counseling of some sort. I really think that would be really important because ...I think it's more dangerous leaving the situation."

"....I know this is not marriage counseling or anything, but at the end of the sessions, I think it would be nice if there was a session where you know, it was just like both partners to come together. I don't know exactly what they had in their sessions, but if there was something for both of us to be there."

Recommendation 2

Increase Accountability to Women Who Want to Leave Partner

One woman, who did not wish to reconcile with her husband, had concerns that issues in regard to separation, parole stipulations and accepting the demise of the marriage were *not* addressed in the group. She felt that the focus of the group was on reconciliation and *improving* the relationship, and did not teach men to "let go", accept that the relationship is over, and to "move on with their lives". Several women said they felt pressure to remain with their partner because he was receiving help. Although the physical violence had ceased, they still wondered if they would stay in the long run, but were anxious about how her partner would handle it should they decide to leave. *Providing education and support for the men around the possibility that their partners may decide to leave the relationship, despite his attendance in the program, might increase women's*

safety should she eventually decide to end the relationship.

Recommendation 3

Use Holistic Approach to Foster Change

Participants recommended that more attention be paid to the physical and mental health of women in the program. They also suggested that the program should be more holistic, addressing the physical, mental, and emotional needs of women.

When asked what changes they would like to see in the program, participants suggested that the program should be more holistic, addressing the physical, mental, and emotional needs of women. They also suggested that the program should be more supportive, providing women with the resources and information they need to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

Another woman suggested that the program should be more holistic, addressing the physical, mental, and emotional needs of women. She also suggested that the program should be more supportive, providing women with the resources and information they need to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

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Recommendation 4

Ensure Women Have Complete Information About the Program and

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Recommendation 3

More Holistic Approach to Program Content

Several women recommended that men be assisted in dealing with other problems that were relevant to his aggression and violence. Such issues were parenting, childhood trauma and addictions.

While some women remarked that they saw changes in how their partner related to their children, several felt that child care and fatherhood issues should be integrated into the batterers' program content. *In particular, women felt that men needed to know how to communicate better with their children and to understand that they have responsibilities as a father to care for the children.*

Another woman suggested that individual counselling for childhood issues should be part of the PAR program, suggesting that group counselling was not enough to make a lasting change:

"...besides the group, he needs psychotherapy because there's a lot of issues to deal with in his life. As far as coming from an alcoholic background on his mother's side and his father was a gambler. And he knows being put up for adoption. And that's where his issues with women come in too."

These comments reflect the challenges of dealing with one particular behaviour in isolation from other aspects of an individual's life. However, they also suggest the need to examine whether cognitive behavioural programming for batterer's should also include an insight oriented or psychotherapeutic component.

Recommendation 4

To Ensure Women Have Complete Information About the Program and Follow-Up

All the participants said they appreciated been offered counselling and support. Many of these women did not accept counselling services offered by the agencies primarily

because of the difficulty juggling all their responsibilities. This group was a group of extremely busy women - employment, studies and childcare responsibilities made it very difficult for most of them to take time for counselling/support. As a result, they were left with many questions/concerns about the program and/or their personal circumstances. Almost all the women in this study felt they had very little information about what the men learn in the batterer's program and felt it important that they be provided with more information. *It is recommended that in order remedy this gap in information, the partner contact should meet with the woman mid-way through the counselling program and at the end of the counselling program.* These meetings could then ensure that women obtain as much information as possible about the batterer's programs and conversely to ensure the Partner Contact person has as much information as possible about the woman's level of safety.

Many women felt that they wanted to take some responsibility, not for the violence, but for the problems in the relationship and therefore strongly recommended that they had the opportunity to meet with a professional together with their partner. Although one woman said that the program exceeded her expectations, the majority of women felt that the program was not enough. Individual counselling, as well as extended and follow-up support were also felt to be needed to help sustain the effectiveness of the program. One woman who did feel that her partner was committed to the program and got a lot out of it, felt that the program should have been longer and should *"wean them off more gradually"*. She reported a backslide in her partner's behaviour immediately after the end of the program. Adding a *follow up component*

for women partners is also recommended. We do not yet have research on how women's circumstances may change after the completion of the batterer's program. We do know from this study however, that the knowledge that the men are being monitored helps women feel less alone and more justified in claiming that abuse is wrong. However, after the man has completed the program and is no longer monitored women may feel less able to reach out when she and her partner no longer have contact with the agency. As stated above, many of the women expressed skepticism and worry that their partners would continue not to be abusive after the program ended. *A follow-up component in which women would periodically be contacted would help to both track men's behaviour and also assess women's risk post batterer's program.*

Appendix A

Women's Safety Project: Interview Guide

Individual Interviews

With Women Whose Partners Have Been in Partner Abuse Response Program

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The reason we are asking to speak with women whose partners have gone through the PARS program is that it is important for us to find out from women what works with this program and what needs improvement. It is very important to us that we hear from women about their opinions and experiences in regard to partner violence. The overall purpose of the program is to help keep women safe from violence. Some of the questions that I will be asking you then, relate both to the PARS program and the kinds of things that help make you feel safe from violence from your partner.

1. Can you tell me if your partner's involvement in the batterer's program (PAR) has effected your life in any way?

Probes: Has anything changed for you? In what ways was the program helpful/unhelpful? Would you recommend any changes?

2. Can you tell me about any involvement you have had with the agency that ran the batters's program your partner attended?

Probes: What kind of contact (eg. Partner contact, counsellor...), with whom, contact helpful or not? *How much information did you receive about the batterer's program (what they learn, how long it is, what they tell the men)* In what way was this contact helpful? Not so helpful?

3. If involved in an ethno-specific agency:

What was helpful? Why were you involved in this agency? (Language, culture, comfort, referral, etc).

4. Can you describe your current relationship with your partner/ex-partner?

Probes: Do you feel safe around him? What makes you feel safe/unsafe; specific examples, situations

What happens now when there is an argument or conflict? How do you respond? How does he respond?

How do you feel about your situation (re: abuse in relationship) now? What makes you

feel this way?

If she has children:

5. Have your children's lives changed in any way since your partner started the program?

Probe: relationship with father; her relationship to them

Do you have any types of support for your child/children?

Probes: counselling, day care, groups for children, etcetera) How are these supports helpful or not helpful?

6. Can you describe your life to me now?

Probe: Does she have supports in her life? How are they supportive? Does she have any community involvement (kid's school, religious communities, volunteer work.....) What is useful about these involvements?

Is she working, going to school, staying at home?

7. What makes you feel independent and in control of your life?

8. Overall, what do you think are the most significant things that have helped you get through this experience?

Probes: (program related and other factors)

9. Is there anything else that you think it is important for me to know?

APPENDIX B

Call for Study Participants!

**We want to hear *WOMEN'S*
opinions about the program for abusers (PAR)!**

The woman abuse Council of Toronto is conducting a study with women whose partners or ex-partners have been through one of the abuser programs.

- * Completely confidential
- * Travel and child care expenses covered plus small payment for your time
- * Meet at a time and place that is safe and convenient for you

If you are interested in helping us evaluate the program and to make it better please contact:

Kathy or Rashmee, Woman Abuse Council : 944 - 9563

SUMMARY OF PHASE TWO INTERVIEWS
WOMEN'S SAFETY PROJECT: WOMAN ABUSE COUNCIL OF
TORONTO

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March 6, 2003

During Phase Two of the evaluation of the PAR program we interviewed seven more women. Five of these women were also interviewed 6-8 months later. In addition, focus group interviews were conducted with the facilitators of the batterers' groups and with the Partner Contacts. The following is a summary of the key themes arising from these interviews.

A. Interviews with Women Partners

Between October 2001 and July, 2002 we interviewed an additional 7 women. We interviewed 5 of them women for a second time six to eight months later. We were unable to get a hold of the other two.

The first interviews from these women revealed similar themes as those that emerged from the pilot study: while in the program men were not physically abusive; while in the program men continued to be verbally abusive; and women found the Partner Contact helpful.

Recommendations for Improving the Program

There *recommendations* for improving the PAR program were the same as were found in the pilot study:

1. Make program longer
2. Make program more intensive so men can deal with own personal issues such as alcohol abuse and experiences of childhood abuse
3. Have joint sessions with both man and woman with a counsellor. This was suggested in order that women feel more involved and informed of what the men are learning in the group. Women also wanted the chance to tell their side of the story, with their partner present, to a third party.
4. Two women suggested that the Partner Contact be modified to involve face to face interviews since it was too difficult to find a private time to talk on the phone
5. Provide follow up services to the men in the form of individual session, group counselling, or telephone contact similar to the women's partner contact service.

Culture and Isolation

There were a few *differences* in the data gained from this group of women: four of the seven women were immigrants to Canada. Two of these women were interviewed in their

first language. The theme of *isolation* emerged in these interviews in relation to both the abuser and the female partner. Isolation was seen as a contributing factor, as was professional demotion as a result of immigrating to Canada, in the man's abusive behaviour. Women too were relatively isolated due to language difficulties and lack of family and social networks. Here the importance of ethnically/culturally specific services was evident. Women were able to speak to Partner Contacts in their own language and their partners were usually in groups designed for their own cultural group. The women also said that one of the positive aspects of Canadian life was that the legal system is 'on the side of the woman' by holding men accountable for their abusive behaviour.

Themes from the Second Interviews

Of the five women who were interviewed a second time, four were still living with their partner. Between the first and second interview the fifth woman had made her partner leave the home, as he continued to be possessive and controlling. Interesting, English was this woman's first language and she made use of many professional supports. She was very connected to a number of family services and individual counselling professionals. Other changes included one woman who previously reported being very isolated had recently started her own business from her home. This development had improved her self-esteem, increased her feelings of independence, and brought her out of the house into contact with her community. Another woman had begun both couple counselling and her own individual counselling. However, one woman who immigrated to Canada continued to be isolated. She had only 1 person she felt she could turn to if she needed help. She had no further contact with the PAR agency. In addition, two women reported that their husbands continued drinking and one of these men had been physically violent and the other continued his verbal abuse. At the time of the second interview, two women reported subsequent physical violence after the end of the program and two others said there was continued verbal abuse.

Three of the four women still living with their partner expressed a wish to leave their partners; they described the relationship as lacking in communication as well as warmth and caring. They felt their partners had no ability to share their feelings or even talk to them at all. Several women said that there had been times when she and her partner had not spoken for several days. Although there was less explosive anger in their relationships, what remained was a tense quiet. The reasons they cited for not leaving their partners were financial issues, guilt (they felt they should take care of him), and not wanting the upheaval of selling their home and moving.

B. Focus Group Interview with Facilitators of Batterers' Group

A focus group was conducted with seven facilitators (3 men and 4 women) of the batterers' group, each from a different PAR agency. The following is a summary of the key themes/topics that emerged from this focus group.

1. The Batterers' Program: Goals, Content, Methods and Evaluation

The goals of the batterers' group are to increase women's safety, educate men about abusive behaviour, provide men with alternative methods of handling anger and conflict, and to connect with women partners. The content of the batterers' groups, although offered at different agencies that serve various populations of men, revolves around the power and control wheel and abusive behaviour. The primary model used by facilitators draws upon cognitive behavioural techniques and educational strategies. The groups are flexible in that they allow facilitators to add to the curriculum depending on the needs of the participants and the cultural relevance. Additional educational methods involve videos and guest speakers. Most groups appear to be open-ended, with some agencies offering or thinking about offering a second phase voluntary close ended group.

In terms of evaluating the effectiveness of the groups, participants said that there is no formal means of assessing success. However, group facilitators have clinical and programmatic methods of gaining a sense of whether or not a participant is benefiting from the group. Group leaders often rely upon their clinical expertise to assess a group members' ability to grasp material and make behavioural changes. One method of assessing a participant's understanding is through observation of the group dynamics in which some men challenge the opinions and behaviour of other men. Facilitators also gauge whether or not a participant is absorbing the material by how they respond to group discussion and questions.

The partner contact was seen as an invaluable means of assessing the men's behaviour at home and most facilitators have devised creative methods of managing the delicate task of integrating women's concerns into the curriculum. For example, while some women partners prefer that their partners be directly confronted by group facilitators, not all women are comfortable with approach. In these cases, group facilitators might then integrate the issue into the group session and make certain to solicit responses from the man whose partner reported abusive behaviour at home. This is a complex issue for facilitators who place women's safety as paramount. It is sometimes challenging in group to have knowledge that a man is treating his wife badly at home and to find a safe method of confronting him. One participant summed up this balance as "walking a [line] not quite knowing what we know".

2. Challenges Facing Group Facilitators

Participants identified several challenges of doing this type of work. One challenge is that they report being referred men with more and more complex issues. For example, some participants reported being referred men whose abuse is very serious and/or who have severe mental health problems. Another challenge confronting facilitators relates to working with other types of 'systems', such as the police, the courts and parole services. At times it feels as though each 'system' has competing agendas and facilitators must find ways to negotiate these complications.

3. Recommendations

1. Increase length of group.
2. Mandate second phase of counselling in closed group. Currently program facilitators often feel as though they are just 'scratching the surface'.
3. Increase funding to programs.

C. Focus Group Interview with Partner Contacts

A focus group interview was conducted with 5 partner contacts from various PAR agencies from culturally specific programs. The following is a summary of the main themes to emerge from this focus group.

1. Partner Contact Roles and Responsibilities

Participants identified many roles of the partner contact:

- a) The partner contact sends the woman a letter of introduction to the PAR program and follows up with a phone call to discuss letter. Each partner contact makes a minimum of 4 phone calls to the women.
- b) The partner contact assesses woman's safety level and develops a safety plan and provides concrete information about the batterers' program, including duration, course content, and most importantly, the rules and expectations of the program (eg. That men miss no more than 2 sessions, that they not be abusive while in the program).
- c) Women receive information about counselling services, legal and employment services, social assistance.
- d) The partner contact provides emotional support. This is particularly important for newcomers who are often isolated and alone.
- e) Women are able to ask the partner contact to have group facilitators emphasize particular issues in group if the woman feels her partner has not understood or is misrepresenting the course content (an example of this is when a woman reported that her partner told her that throwing objects was not abuse. The woman was able to check out if this was what the facilitators were actually telling the men and then have the group session emphasize that object throwing *is* considered abusive).
- f) Newcomers to Canada receive information about Canadian law and the criminal justice system.
- g) The revocability of women's consent to allow her partner to live at home is discussed and evaluated. Women are informed that although they originally signed a consent form to allow their partner to come home, that this can be revoked at any time.

2. Cultural Issues

Women from various cultural/ethnic groups have specific issues with which they are dealing. One issue relates to being unaware of the Canadian laws around violence against women. Language barriers are also significant. Pressures from their cultural community and feelings of shame sometimes make it difficult for immigrant women to disclose abuse to police. In some communities there is a stigma attached to making 'private family' information public. Partner contacts identified the need to educate various communities about the importance of making woman abuse visible and not to blame the woman if she discloses the abuse. These issues, as well as patriarchal norms, values and social arrangements, compound immigrant women's isolation.

In some cases immigrant women are very relieved that the criminal justice system has intervened despite community and family pressures to keep abuse private. Some women report that police involvement has a major impact on men's behaviour. This is experienced as empowering for the woman because she knows the laws will protect her and the shame of having the police involved functions as a deterrent for men to re-abuse.

3. Confidentiality

Partner contacts are required to report to the batterers' group facilitator and, if necessary, other criminal justice representatives, if a woman discloses that her partner has committed further abuse. Women are informed of this limitation to confidentiality by the partner contact. Participants said that most of the time women are comfortable working together with the partner contact to find the safest means of transmitting information about continued abuse. However, partner contacts do sometimes have concerns that reporting the abuse will have negative repercussions for the woman's safety. Their communication with the batterers' facilitators was seen as a crucial component of the PAR program in enhancing women's safety and providing information about the men's behaviour that might not be elicited through the batterers' group.

4. Dual Charges

There appears to be an increase in dual charging (both male and female being charged with domestic violence). There has been much discussion among PAR agencies regarding how to handle this in terms of counselling services and advocacy. It seems that in most of the cases the woman has acted in self-defence, rather than being the primary aggressor. Some participants also said that they have seen an increase in situations where only the woman was charged with domestic violence. In these cases the women were also responding to men's abuse but when the police arrived they saw only physical evidence of abuse on the man. In some cases this has been purposeful as the men consciously employ methods such as pushing with their body and chasing that do not necessarily result in visible injuries to the women. A related problem is that police sometimes have difficulty understanding the dynamics and the specifics of the story when women do not speak English. As a result, they have to rely upon physical evidence when laying charges.

5. Follow up

Participants said that many women are very concerned about how their partner will behave after the 16 week batterers' group has finished. Women are often fearful and concerned that when the men are no longer monitored that they will revert back to their previous abusive behaviours. An example was offered of one woman who four weeks after her partner completed the batterers' group called to say that although he was not physically abusing her, the emotional/psychological abuse had intensified to an unbearable degree.

Preliminary Policy, Program and Research Implications

There is a great deal of congruency between the issues raised among the three constituencies interviewed for this study (women partners of abusive men, facilitators of batterers' programs and partner contacts). Similarly, the data during the first phase of this study (pilot interviews with 10 women partners) is consistent with that of Phase Two.

One important policy and program implication resulting from these data relates to the duration of the batterers' program. Women partners and PAR workers emphasized the need for longer groups for abusive men. Participants in this study expressed concern and provided evidence that men's emotional, verbal and psychological abuse may continue long after the program finishes. Participants thought a second phase of counselling might help address this issue.

A further related policy issue is the need for follow up on male participants in the batterers' program. It seems clear that women's safety would be enhanced if there was some means of assessing men's behaviour over time; that is, if there were follow up services for both partners to evaluate whether men had reverted back to former abusive behaviours. The issue of follow up relates to the need for formal evaluation measures to both assess women's safety and provide data related to the sustainability of changes in behaviour. It is recommended that future research involve a longitudinal study eliciting data from both male and female partners regarding the quality of their relationship and assessing the degree to which physical, verbal and psychological abuse has diminished.

The impact of culture, immigration and language barriers can not be ignored. These data provide substantial support for the necessity of culturally specific counselling services for both men and women in the PAR program. Although there are similarities across all groups of men and women in terms of ideologies and practices of gender and power, there are crucial differences resulting from immigration to Canada and culturally specific norms. Immigrant women in particular appear to be extremely isolated compared to their Canadian born counterparts. This speaks to the need to continue efforts to reach these populations and provide culturally relevant services.

Finally, several women partners in both Phase One and Phase Two of this study and the partner contacts raised the question of women being either co-charged or the only one charged with domestic violence. Research studies from both the US and Canada also indicate that this is an increasing problem. Future research should also involve an examination of this phenomenon and the extent to which women are acting in self-defence or are the primary aggressors.

Phase Two
Time One Interview Guide with Women Partners

1. Can you tell me about the situation that started your involvement with the courts and the batterer=s program?
Probes: what happened, who called the police, why did she call the police this time? How long ago did this happen?
2. Can you tell me about your experience with the police after you made the call? Can you also tell me about your experience with the court system?
3. What can you tell me about your partner=s involvement in the batterer=s program?
Probes: was it ethno-specific, what was his attitude about it, how much does she know about the program, if ethno-specific, what impact does this have for her partner and herself?
4. Has your partner=s attendance in the program helped you any way?
Why/Why not? How?
5. Can you tell me about any involvement you have had with the agency that ran the batterer=s program your partner attended?
6. If your partner physically/emotionally abused you again while he was in the program, how would you/did you handle it?
7. How do you feel about the rule that if you tell your Partner Contact that you were abused again that it must be reported?
8. Overall, what do you think is working about the program? How would you improve the program?

Appendix B

Phase Two

Time Two Interview: Sixth Month Follow up Interview Guide

1. Please describe your relationship with your partner since we last spoke (6 months ago).
 - *Has anything changed?
 - * Does she feel safe with him now? Why/why not?

- 1b. (If applicable) What is your partners=s relationship with the children like?

2. Looking back, what are your opinions about the PAR program (the batter=s program your partner attended)?
 - * Has it helped?
 - * If she reported changes in his behaviour or her feelings of safety during the last interview, does she still feel this way?

3. What kinds of supports or relationships do you have that help you?
 - * Has she had any contact with PAR program since her partner finished the group?
 - * Does she have contact with any professional service providers?
 - * Does she have supports for her children?

- 4a. What do you think are the most significant things that have helped you through this experience (ie. the abuse, courts and PAR program)?

- 4b. What kind of help do you wish you had received that you did not?

- 5a. If you were speaking to another woman whose partner was abusive, what would you tell them about the batterer=s program?

- 5b. What advice would you give this woman about how to make sure she is safe?

6. Is there anything else that you would like me to know about how your life is now or about your opinions about the batterer=s program?

Appendix C

Interview Guide for Batterers' Group Facilitators

- * Can you tell me what the purpose of the batterers' group is?
- * What is the format of the program? What techniques/ models do the groups use?
- * What criteria do you use to assess how well a man is doing in this program?
- * What are some of the challenges of running this type of program?
(Crim justice; confidentiality; burnout...)
- * What kind of involvement do the women partners have in the program?
- * What do you see as the usefulness of the program?
- * What do you see as the limitations of the program?
- * How can the program be strengthened to better meet its goals?

Appendix D

Focus Group with Partner Contacts

1. Can you describe your role and responsibilities as partner contact?
(What are some of the cultural issues in regard to your role as pc and the women you contact?)
2. What are some of the challenges of this position?
3. What are your thoughts on mandatory reporting?
4. What do you think helps women feel safe while their partners are in the program?
5. Are there other issues important to your role as partner contact that we haven't discussed?

