



**Evaluating behaviour change programs
for men who use domestic and family violence:**
Key findings and future directions

ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH
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ANROWS Research to policy and practice papers are concise papers that summarise key findings of research on violence against women and their children, including research produced under ANROWS's research program, and provide advice on the implications for policy and practice.

This is an edited summary of key findings from the ANROWS research project "Development of a best practice guide to perpetrator program evaluation". Please consult the ANROWS website for more information on this project and the full project report: Nicholas, N., Ovenden, G., & Vlasis, R. (2020). *Developing a practical evaluation guide for behaviour change programs involving perpetrators of domestic and family violence* (Research report, 17/2020). Sydney: ANROWS.

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ANROWS research contributes to the six National Outcomes of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. This research addresses National Plan Outcome 6—Perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account.

Acknowledgement of Country

ANROWS acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present, and future, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledge. We are committed to standing and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, honouring the truths set out in the [Warawarni-gu Guma Statement](#).

Evaluating behaviour change programs for men who use domestic and family violence

BACKGROUND

- Men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs) are increasingly included in policy as an essential component of any long-term strategy to reduce violence against women.
- Determining the extent to which these programs are effective requires high-quality evaluations. However, these have generally been lacking due to limited capacity and evaluation expertise among men's behaviour change program staff, and limited resourcing for the commissioning of independent evaluations.
- This research project developed an evaluation guide to assist MBCP providers in planning high-quality evaluations.

KEY FINDINGS

- Standards for MBCPs across Australia emphasise the need to focus on women's and children's safety as the primary outcome of programs. However, measuring women's and children's safety has generally not been prioritised in program evaluation.
- Measures commonly used to assess men's change are problematic.
- A number of validated tools exist that could be used to evaluate men's change as well as women's and children's safety.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Outcomes measured should include women's and children's safety and wellbeing, and men's long-term behaviour change.
- Evaluators should be aware of a range of practical and ethical considerations relating to domestic and family violence before undertaking evaluation activities.
- Program providers should be supported to conduct periodic process evaluations; when programs are evaluation-ready, sufficient resourcing to conduct high-quality outcome evaluations is required.

Evaluating men's behaviour change programs to find out if they work

The primary purpose of men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs) involving perpetrators of domestic and family violence is to keep women and children safe. MBCPs work to achieve this aim by:

- holding perpetrators accountable for their use of violence
- working with perpetrators to take responsibility for their use of violence
- monitoring and responding to women's and children's risk of violence.

Are MBCPs effective in achieving these goals?

This question is becoming increasingly significant, as policy at both national and state/territory levels moves towards including MBCPs as an essential component of any long-term strategy to reduce violence against women.

Answering this question requires high-quality evaluations, which to date have been somewhat difficult to achieve. This has been due to limited capacity and evaluation expertise among MBCP program staff, and limited resourcing for the commissioning of independent evaluations. High-quality evaluations require developing a program logic (if one does not already exist) that describes the program and its mechanisms, developing and prioritising evaluation questions relevant to the purpose and users of the evaluation, and choosing indicators and data collection methods appropriate to the evaluation questions selected. High-quality evaluations must be implemented with careful consideration of ethical and safety issues.

THE ANROWS RESEARCH PROJECT

“Developing a practical evaluation guide for behaviour change programs involving perpetrators of domestic and family violence” by Angela Nicholas, Georgia Ovenden, and Rodney Vlasis

This research project developed an evaluation guide for MBCP workers to support the planning of high-quality evaluations.

The project involved:

- a review of current Australian national and state/territory standards for MBCPs
- a review of measures used to evaluate outcomes of MBCPs, with a focus on the reliability and validity of these measures
- interviews with 6 individuals who have evaluated MBCPs
- a consultation held at the No to Violence Members Forum, with 13 members (majority MBCP facilitators and program managers) in attendance
- compilation of the Evaluation guide.

The project involved an expert review panel comprised of six members with expertise in either the delivery of MBCPs or the evaluation of complex behaviour change programs.

See anrows.org.au for the full report and the Evaluation guide.

Key findings

Australian MBCP standards emphasise women’s and children’s safety as the primary goal of programs, however, evaluation of safety has generally not been prioritised

The first listed outcome of the *National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions* (NOSPI) (Council of Australian Governments, 2015, p. 6) is that “Women and their children’s safety is the core priority of all perpetrator interventions.” State-based practice guidelines (which exist in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia) similarly highlight that the safety of people experiencing violence is paramount. The NOSPI and state-based guidelines also point to the need for evidence-based and evidence-building practices, including program evaluation. However, to date, measuring women’s and children’s safety has generally not been prioritised in program evaluation.

Measures commonly used to assess men’s behaviour change are often problematic

For example, each of the following indicators can be problematic if used as the sole measure of success.

- Program completion: this is a process measure which does not assess whether the goals of participation have been achieved. Merely completing a program does not demonstrate that a man’s violent and controlling behaviour has changed, or that his partner’s wellbeing and safety have improved.
- Perpetrator self-report: this is not a reliable measure. There are often vast differences between self-report ratings of behaviours given by perpetrators and ratings given by victims/survivors.
- Recidivism data: this measure fails to capture perpetrators’ use of a range of non-criminal tactics to control women and children, such as emotional and financial control, and sabotaging women’s relationships with their support networks.

A number of validated tools exist that could be used to evaluate men's behaviour change as well as women's and children's safety

The measures listed below are all self-administered scales available free of charge. Most take 10–15 minutes to complete, with some being 20–30 minutes. Note that permission is required for use of some scales. See Appendix B of the full report for more detail about these tools.

Measures of long-term changes in perpetrator and controlling behaviour

[Safe at Home Inventory](#)

[Proximal Antecedents to Violent Episode](#)

[Modified Abusive Behavior Inventory](#)

[Partner Abuse Scales: Non-physical abuse of partner scale and Physical abuse of partner scale](#)

[Composite Abuse Scale](#)

[Severity of Violence Against Women Scale](#)

[Psychological Maltreatment of Women Scale](#)

[Profile of Psychological Abuse](#)

Measures of adult victim/survivor safety, wellbeing and freedom

[Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale](#)

[Kessler 6](#)

[General Self-Efficacy Scale](#)

[Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support](#)

[Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale](#)

Measures of children's safety, wellbeing and family functioning

[Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire](#)

[Personal Wellbeing Index–School Children](#)

What is a validated tool?

A validated tool is one with demonstrated *reliability* and *validity*.

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure. The reliability of a tool can be assessed statistically, with a tool being deemed “reliable” if it scores above a threshold value. Different aspects of reliability are:

- internal consistency
- consistency when used over time (known as “test–retest reliability”)
- consistency when used by different researchers (known as “inter-rater reliability”).

Validity refers to the extent to which a tool assesses what it is intended to assess. Validity is often determined by:

- having experts examine whether the items in the measure are appropriate (known as “content validity”)
- assessing how well the measure relates to other measures of a similar construct (known as “construct validity”)
- assessing how well scores on the measure predict future behaviour—for example, do risk measures predict future violent behaviour? (known as “criterion validity”)
- examining the underlying structure of the measure—for example, do all items measure the same construct? (known as “factorial validity”).

Ethical issues to be considered when evaluating MBCPs

Making contact with clients for the purpose of evaluation

Evaluators need to consider how they initially make contact with men who use violence and women who experience violence. It is important to ensure that both men and women voluntarily give informed consent to participate, and that engagement in the evaluation process does not increase risk for women who experience violence.

For example, if a woman remains in the household or in contact with her abusive partner, it may not be safe to send information about the evaluation to her home address. In the first instance, the approach to a woman should be made by a support worker. This should be done only if a woman consents to her contact information being shared with the evaluators. Importantly, women should be given an opportunity to make decisions about when and how they would like to be contacted and receive information about the evaluation.

Interviewing men who use violence

Men who use violence might use the evaluation interview to minimise, justify or deny their use of violence. If men disclose information about their use of violence in the evaluation interview, they may

then avoid disclosing this in the more transparent, accountability-based group setting. Evaluators need to be able to resist invitations to collude, and avoid reinforcing a man's victim stance. Evaluators also need to be equipped to respond appropriately should a man disclose new information suggesting an increased level of risk to his partner.

Interviewing women who have experienced violence

Evaluators need to be able to conduct interviews in ways that limit re-traumatisation for women who have experienced violence. The design of data collection instruments—such as the interview schedule—needs to be carefully considered to ensure that victims/survivors are provided with opportunities to reflect and to experience positive impacts. Evaluators conducting interviews with women experiencing violence may find that this is the first lengthy, face-to-face discussion that some women have ever had with a “professional”. A woman might have a lot to tell, and in these cases it is important that there is some space for her to tell her story, even if at times this moves outside the focus of the evaluation interview. An evaluator must know how to manage disclosures of traumatic experiences, striking a balance between ensuring that a woman does not feel her voice has been silenced and ensuring that the boundaries of the role of evaluator are maintained. Skills in appropriate containment of disclosure are necessary here. Ideally a woman will only be involved in an evaluation if she is currently receiving assistance from a support worker.

Recommendations for policymakers and practitioners

Outcomes measured should include women's and children's safety and wellbeing, and men's long-term behaviour change

It is important to move beyond process indicators and include measures of outcome. These include outcomes for men in terms of changed attitudes and behaviours, and outcomes for women and children in terms of their safety, wellbeing, freedom and/or quality of life. Note that the safety of women and children can be enhanced by an MBCP, even in situations where the man does not change his behaviour. For example, the program might in the short term be able to help contain the risk he poses to her and her family, and over the longer term support her attempts to untangle herself and her children from his coercive control.

It is therefore important that ultimate outcome measures focusing on victim/survivor safety do so in ways that are not solely linked to changes in the perpetrator's behaviour.

Evaluators should be aware of a range of practical and ethical considerations relating to domestic and family violence before undertaking evaluation activities

External evaluators should undertake training about domestic and family violence. This includes training on the dynamics of working with men who use violence (for example, covering topics such as collusion; risk escalation; perpetrator accountability; responsibility; victim/survivor safety) and basic micro-skills in perpetrator engagement. As well, evaluators should work in partnership with providers of services to both men who use violence and women who experience violence.

Program providers should be supported to conduct periodic process evaluations; when programs are evaluation-ready, sufficient resourcing to conduct high-quality outcome evaluations is required

Funding agreements for MBCPs should make provision for process evaluations, which can help to identify whether an MBCP is outcome evaluation-ready. Funding peak bodies to build the capacity of program providers to conduct process evaluations should also be considered. When an MBCP is evaluation-ready, sufficient resourcing is required to allow a high-quality outcome evaluation to be undertaken.

References

Council of Australian Governments. (2015). *National outcome standards for perpetrator interventions*. Retrieved from https://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/communique/National_Outcome_Standards_Perpetrator_Interventions.pdf

Further reading and resources

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2019). *Men's behaviour change programs: Measuring outcomes and improving program quality: Key findings and future directions* (Research to policy and practice, 01/2019). Sydney: ANROWS.

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Please check the online version at www.anrows.org.au for any amendment.

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