NSW Department of Communities and Justice

MEN'S BEHAVIOUR CHANGE PROGRAMS

EVALUATION SUMMARY

PREPARED BY	Research, Performance and Evaluation **Women NSW**
STATUS	Final

NSW GOVERNMENT

Background

In 2015, the New South Wales Government rolled out specialist community-based Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs) in four locations: South Western Sydney, Central Coast, Northern NSW and Mid North Coast. An evaluation was undertaken by the University of New South Wales (UNSW) between May 2017 and October 2019 to review the implementation process and outcomes of the MBCP pilots. This followed a recommendation under the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform 2016-2021* to embed evaluation into all NSW Government funded domestic and family violence services.

The evaluation was guided by the following key research questions:

1. How has the MBCP been implemented?
2. How well did the program work? How successful was the MBCP in assisting men to cease violent and abusive behaviour, and in improving family safety and wellbeing?
3. How can the MBCPs be improved?

What are MBCPs?

MBCPs are a specialist service for men who use violence and abuse in their intimate, domestic and family relationships[i]. Services assist men to develop new understandings of what drives their abusive behaviour and through this process, develop new behaviour, attitudes and beliefs. The underlying premise of MBCPs is that men are accountable and responsible for their actions and that programs are responsive to the needs of women and children and prioritise their safety. The four pilot MBCPs were contracted to meet the following objectives:

- To promote the safety of women and children as the focus of working with men who use violence.
- To become an integral part of a service system where all agencies work together to provide an integrated, systemic response that increases victim safety and accountability of men who use violent and abusive behaviour.
- To support men to take responsibility for their behaviour and support men to stop using violent and abusive behaviour in domestic and family relationships.
- To have a sustained commitment to professional and evidence-based practice that will inform the prevention approach to domestic and family violence responses.
- To provide programs that respond to the diverse needs of participants and their partners which meet the NSW minimum standards and industry benchmarks for quality practice.

Who were the MBCP clients*?

557 males were **referred** to a MBCP between July 2016 and December 2017

227 males **engaged** in a MBCP between July 2016 and December 2017

15% identified as **Indigenous**

14% identified as having a **CALD** background

18% had a history of **participating in a MBCP**

65% had a current mandatory or additional **Apprehended Violence Order (ADVO)**

56% were voluntary **self-referrals**

How were MBCPs delivered?

Program structure and content

- MBCP **duration** ranged from 12 weeks to 32 weeks. All MBCPs provided four modules, however these ranged from two to four hours per session. Findings from participants and providers revealed no preferences in terms of program structure or content, however the durations of MBCPs is consistent with current practice[ii].

- Consistent with many behaviour change programs[iii], all MBCPs adopted a **trauma informed and feminist theory approach** to practice, which aimed to address the issues of gender inequality.

- All programs ran **open groups** whereby new participants could join a MBCP at the beginning of a new leaning module. Providers reported that open groups meant that new males joined a group with males who had already experienced the group dynamics and from whom they could learn that it was safe to be emotionally vulnerable. This enabled greater engagement in the program.

- MBCPs were run by **mixed gender facilitators**.

*Due to missing data, the percentages reported are not always a proportion of 227 clients. For example, history of MBCP participation was only available for 146 clients. Furthermore, not all men who were referred engaged in MBCPs. Primary reasons for non-engagement were: non-eligibility, males could not be contacted, and/or males declined offer to enter the program.

Key Implementation Factors Affecting Outcomes

Enablers

- ✓ **Shared understanding of the MBCP** aims (to achieve behavioural change that keeps women and children safer) meant that the intentions and implementation of the MBCPs were well understood by all providers and participants.
- ✓ All MBCPs assessed **readiness to change** using a narrative therapeutic approach during an intake interview. This was reported to increase engagement with the program and support program effectiveness.
- ✓ **Gender diversity** in facilitators was seen as a key enabler to the successful implementation of MBCPs. Providers reported that female facilitators brought a unique, complementary perspective to the programs.
- ✓ **Vulnerability in male facilitators** was seen as a strength of the program, as it meant that facilitators would reflect and openly discuss with other colleagues their privileges as males in society and how these affected their behaviour in the groups they facilitated.
- ✓ The process of hearing other men's accounts of their abusive behaviours and experiences in a **group format** enabled participants to reflect on their own behaviours and experiences.

Areas for improvement

- The need for **continuing support post MBCP involvement** was identified by participants and providers and reinforced by the fact that many participants had a history of participating in a MBCP.
- The need for **standardised data collection tools** was highlighted in the findings.
- The need for additional resources to support **self-care among facilitators** was reported as an area for improvement.
- Providers reported that **case planning and case management** would help to maintain an ongoing focus on family safety and wellbeing, and build a wider network of contacts with agencies.
- The need for **effective interagency communication and collaboration** was raised by providers. Providers felt that the low number of referrals was due to limited understanding in the sector of the purpose and functioning of MBCPs.
- Providers reported the need for **workforce development**, including the recruitment of suitable qualified, experienced and trained practitioners, as well as ongoing training for staff to improve their skills.

What was the impact of MBCPs on clients, partners and children?

Understanding of program content and awareness of violent behaviours

- 58% of participants (n=250) were reported to have a low understanding of the program content by providers. However, participants (n=21) interviewed felt that the content helped them to recognise their behaviours as violent and enabled them to take responsibility. This was also supported by partners who were interviewed. Taking responsibility for violent and abusive behaviours is necessarily the first step in understanding issues of gender inequality[iv].

"There was a point there in the beginning of when he was doing the group where I was still feeling the blame; but it slowly seems to be wearing away, now and he's taking responsibility for what he did." – Partner

Changes in violent and abusive behaviour

- **69% of participants** (n=36) from MBCP Provider 1 strongly agreed that they behave less threateningly and/or violently towards their ex/current partner.
- **78% of participants** (n=76) from MBCP Provider 2 rated their progress as 7 or 8 out of 10 (where 0 is "no progress and 10 is "complete progress") on their reduction or cessation of violence and abuse.
- **89% of facilitators** (n=58) from MBCP Providers 3 and 4 reported a perceived reduction in physical and sexual violence among participants.
- **86% of current or ex partners** (n=38) from Providers 3 and 4 reported a perceived reduction in physical and sexual violence among participants.

Impact on partners and children

- Perceived changes by men in their relationships with their partners were attributed to improved communication as a result of their participation in the MBCP. Partners mentioned that the MBCPs taught men techniques to navigate difficult situations and conversations in their relational dynamics. Some participants and partners reported that these techniques resulted in feelings of safety.

"You can actually see him stop for a second and actually think about what he's going to say next instead of just blurting out the first thing. […] It's been a big change within the house as well because we're not all walking on eggshells anymore."- Partner

- Partners reported that the tools learnt during MBCPs- such as the "traffic lights" tool- were often shared with them by the participants and helped to foster

productive and respectful interactions. The "traffic lights" technique was described by facilitators as a tangible means by which men could identify and express their subjective emotional experiences in a potentially challenging situation.

"So sometimes you see him get flustered and aggressive and his controlling ways sort of come out and then he uses his techniques through the [MBCP], I think it's traffic light signals of green, yellow and red, where he needs to start pumping on the brakes when he notices that he's aggressive or controlling or the verbal violence comes out. He actually notices that now since the program."- Partner

- Some participants reported that they had more positive relationships with their children as a result of participating in the MBCP. They also acknowledged that to maintain these positive relationships, they needed to be more conscious of their behaviours through self-monitoring efforts.

I'm a lot more conscious of what I do around my kids, which I think is part of the reason why it's a bit stressful, because I've got to be really on my toes a bit. I was always edgy around my children, and I didn't feel like a very good father since they were born and always second guessed myself with everything to do with them and other things. So, I'm even more conscious, these days, when I see my kids, that I've got to really make the effort to stay calm and do the right thing by them. – Participant

- Motivation to have better relationships with partners and children was highlighted as a key driver of participation and continued engagement in the program, as supported by the literature[v]. Motivational factors included child custody requirements, maintaining access to their children, and understanding the effects of their violent behaviours on their children's wellbeing.

"I don't feel like I want to be that person, I don't want to be that person. I don't want my kids to be afraid of me or my wife not to love me, or eventually destroy my family because of my actions or the way that I speak or the way that I act. It's explosive."- Participant

Support for women and children

- Providers reported increased safety of partners/ex-partners and children for two main reasons: providers were able to directly contact them and offer support, and providers attended Safety Action Meetings (SAM) which meant that they had/could provide additional intel about men's behaviours - hence resulting in additional referrals for women and children. This finding is consistent with research showing the importance of involving partners and ex-partners in perpetrator program delivery[vi].

- 61% of women (n=328) accepted support offered to them as part of their current/ex partners involvement in the MBCP. The main reasons for not accepting support were: fear that their children could be removed by child protection, cultural barriers, and not experiencing violence in their relationships at the time of participation in the program.

What next?

The evaluation of the MBCPs made 15 recommendations for improvements in data collection, program design and delivery, and expansion. The Department of Communities and Justice is currently reviewing these recommendations, noting that some recommendations may be impacted by funding constraints.

References

[i] 2016 Funding Agreements between the NSW Government and MBCP providers.

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[iii] Velonis, A. J., Mahabir, D. F., Maddox, R., & O'Campo, P. (2018). Still Looking for Mechanisms: A Realist Review of Batterer Intervention Programs. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. doi:10.1177/1524838018791285

[iv] Zosky, D. L. (2016). "I Feel Your Pain": Do Batterer Intervention Programs Impact Perpetrators' Empathy for Victims? *Partner Abuse, 7*(1), 70-86. doi:10.1891/1946-6560.7.1.70

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[vi] ANROWS. (2019). *Men's Behaviour Change Programs: Measuring Outcomes and Improving Program Quality: Key findings and future directions*. Retrieved from Sydney, NSW.

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