

# Scoping report – applying behavioural insights to domestic violence perpetrator programmes

*A report from the Behavioural Insights Team*

*July 2016*

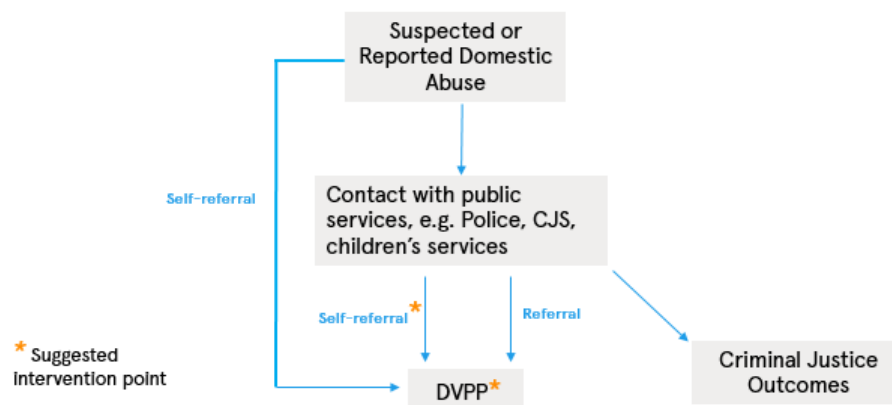
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## Executive Summary

Domestic abuse (DA) blights lives and causes serious harm to victims, their children and wider society. According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales 8.2% of women and 4% of men in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse in 2014-15. The Welsh Government is interested in how domestic violence perpetrator programs (DVPPs) can play a role in reducing the harm caused by DA. As such they commissioned the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) to undertake a scoping report to explore possible applications of behavioural science to improve the outcomes from DVPPs. This report sets out the findings from that scoping work. We have focussed on using behavioural insights to: encourage perpetrators to self-refer to programmes following contact with public services, improve attendance and help embed the messages of the programmes. We have detailed the points in the system that offer the best opportunities for interventions in Figure 1. Figure 2 shows the high level ideas for each area of intervention.

**Figure 1:** Diagram of referral journey and suggested intervention points



**Figure 2:** Outline of ideas for each point of intervention

Self-referrals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timing of contact</li> <li>Fear of regret and loss of aversion</li> <li>Ego and cognitive dissonance</li> <li>Friction costs</li> </ul>
Improve attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grit</li> <li>Growth mindsets</li> <li>Value affirmations</li> </ul>
Enhance learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hot and cold states</li> <li>Commitment devices, mental contrasting and implementation intentions</li> <li>Effort recognition</li> </ul>

## Recommendations

Based on our scoping work we make the following recommendations:

1. The Welsh Government should consider introducing routine communication to be sent to individuals after contact with a statutory body such as the police or children's services. The purpose of this message (likely to be a letter or text message) would be to intervene early with perpetrators and potential perpetrators to increase self-referral rates. This approach is likely to be easier to implement than changing the content of DVPPs and also lends itself well to trialling a number of behaviourally informed approaches to maximise efficacy. During our research we did not find any information suggesting this approach is already being carried out but the first step in any future work would be an exploration period to understand the exact local context and feasibility of the approach outlined in this report. This would include:
  - a. Further research to assess the (technical) feasibility of a project, including identifying: the number of people being referred onto DVPPs, available data (and how this could be used to measure the impact of the work), possible outcome measures, ways that the Welsh Government could work with criminal justice organisations such as the Home Office and the Police to implement such an approach, any ethical concerns about running such a project; and
  - b. Assessment of which DVPPs would be suitable and have capacity for increased referrals.
2. We would also recommend that the Welsh Government commission an assessment of the journey of a domestic violence perpetrator through the system in Wales from first incident all the way to prison, DVPP or behavioural change. This would help identify the gaps in the system as well as the points where perpetrators come into contact with public services. These contact points are likely to present an opportunity for interventions (possibly behaviourally informed) to improve outcomes.
3. During our research we were struck by a lack of evidence about which programmes were working well, or even an agreed definition of what a 'successful' outcome was. As such we would recommend that the Welsh Government establishes a set of criteria, potentially focussing on perpetrator behaviour, which define success for DVPPs or other interventions. We also recommend more routine evaluation of current DVPPs to help inform future policy design. This could include data collection on current programmes and feedback on which ones are performing well and which are not.

## Self-referral onto programmes

Perpetrators are either referred onto a DVPP by a statutory organisation or they self-refer. We think there is scope to increase self-referrals by getting in touch with perpetrators following contact with statutory services. This could be a letter or a text message that would aim to help people identify whether they are committing abuse and if they are how to seek help. The ideas below cover when this should be done, the content of the message and how to help people follow up on the message.

**Table 1: Proposals to increase self-referral to DVPP**

Behavioural Bias	Behavioural insights	High level ideas
Routinely communicate with people after contact with statutory services (timing)	People's decision making and behaviour is strongly affected by experiences that have happened very recently. <sup>1</sup> This means that the timing of an intervention can have a considerable effect on the way in which people will respond to it. <sup>2</sup>	Introduce a routine message to perpetrators soon after contact with a statutory body, when the event in question will be foremost in the individual's mind. A message showing perpetrators that they are on a path which could lead to further negative outcomes (e.g. loss of access to children) could be a powerful motivator for change.
Message content: Fear of regret and loss aversion	Research suggests that individuals are more sensitive to losses than equivalent gains, <sup>3</sup> and our drive to avoid losses is a powerful motivator when making decisions.	Potential losses could be used to encourage self-referral onto DVPPs. This could be the loss of the relationship, the loss of access to their children, the loss of a job, loss of liberty (prison) or even of social status. This message would aim not to be threatening or

<sup>1</sup> Dolan, P., Hallsworth, M., Halpern, D., King, D., & Vlaev, I. (2010). "MINDSPACE: Influencing behaviour through public policy" Institute for Government and Cabinet Office

<sup>2</sup> BIT, 2014, East: Four simple ways to apply behavioural insights.

<sup>3</sup> Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1991). Loss aversion in riskless choice: A reference-dependent model. *The quarterly journal of economics*, 1039-1061.

		judgemental but a statement that continued DA could lead to loss while enrolment onto a DVPP will help avoid that loss.
Message content: Ego and cognitive dissonance	Cognitive dissonance refers to the discomfort an individual feels when they hold two conflicting thoughts or beliefs, or perform an action that is inconsistent with their values. <sup>4</sup> Some domestic violence perpetrators are likely to experience cognitive dissonance, and may look to resolve this internal conflict through avoidance, rationalisation or alteration of their beliefs. <sup>5</sup>	Demonstrating what constitutes abuse could help perpetrators realise their actions constitute abuse. But it would be important to do this without alienating perpetrators. We like to have a positive self-image and messages that clearly show that particular behaviour constitutes abuse could challenge this. Instead of threatening sanctions messages would show how to get help if actions do constitute abuse. Enabling perpetrators to get help would be a way for them to reduce the dissonance associated with their behaviour. This approach is unlikely to work for perpetrators who do not see their actions as wrong.
Reducing friction costs of signing up to a DVPP	Friction costs are small tasks or obstacles that can disproportionately affect decisions and make undertaking certain behaviour more effortful or challenging. Time-consuming or complicated processes, may prevent individuals from	If perpetrators decide to take action about their DA this should be as easy as possible. This means that information on how to seek help should be made very accessible and self-referral should be made straightforward.

<sup>4</sup> Harmon-Jones, E., & Mills, J. (1999). An introduction to cognitive dissonance theory and an overview of current perspectives on the theory.

<sup>5</sup> Henning, K., Jones, A. R., & Holdford, R. (2005). "I didn't do it, but if I did I had a good reason": Minimization, denial, and attributions of blame among male and female domestic violence offenders. *Journal of Family Violence*, 20(3), 131-139.

	taking action even when there are very clear benefits to doing so.	Intermediate steps could also be considered such as anonymous advice lines. This should not detract from the need for perpetrators to demonstrate their commitment to the DVPP.
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## Improving attendance at DVPPs

There is little data on DVPP completion rates, although one study suggests it is about 60% in the UK.<sup>6</sup> Three main reasons for non-completion are: non-attendance, disruptive behaviour on the programme or re-arrest following further offending. Behavioural insights could be used to increase completion rates by improving attendance. This section considers how this could be done.

**Table 2: Proposals to improve attendance at DVPP**

Behavioural Bias	Behavioural insights	High level ideas
Grit, growth mindsets and value affirmation	<p>Grit is “perseverance and passion for long-term goals”. It helps individuals persist in achieving objectives, and is a strong predictor of success.<sup>7</sup></p> <p>Growth mindset strategies teach individuals that their capabilities are malleable, and can develop through effort and perseverance. Adopting such a mindset can have a significant impact on adolescents’ academic achievement and motivation.<sup>8</sup></p>	<p>Regular communication to foster grit such as text messages highlighting the importance of the course, that the recipient is part of a group striving for the same thing and that goals are achievable could help programme adherence.</p> <p>Growth mindset training could be built into the DVPP to show that perpetrator that behaviour can be changed with hard work.</p>

<sup>6</sup> Probation: domestic abuse programmes and budgets. A briefing from Napo the Trade Union and Professional Association for Family Court and Probation Staff. March 2012

<sup>7</sup> Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 92(6), 1087.

<sup>8</sup> Blackwell, L. S., Trzesniewski, K. H., & Dweck, C. S. (2007). Implicit theories of intelligence predict achievement across an adolescent transition: A longitudinal study and an intervention. *Child development*, 78(1), 246-263

	Value affirmation exercises encourage an individual to reflect on their core values, and those of their families and communities. 15 minute value affirmation exercises have been shown to improve chronically insecure individuals' social behaviour and relational security for up 8 weeks after an initial intervention. <sup>9</sup>	Value affirmation exercises could be an effective additional layer in reinforcing perseverance and helping perpetrators to identify how their previous behaviour may have deviated from their personal values.
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### Enhancing and embedding the learning from DVPPs

The following section considers how behavioural science could help perpetrators avoid falling back into abusive patterns of behaviour. Some of these approaches could be included during and after completion of the programme.

**Table 3: Proposals to help maintain improved behaviour**

Behavioural Bias	Behavioural insights	High level ideas
Hot and cold states	Hot and cold states refer to contrasting conditions that underpin decision making. In a 'hot state' an individual will make a decision based on an emotional, visceral, impulse-driven reaction. The more impulsive the judgement the more it may conflict with long-term goals and lead to unwanted consequences. A 'cold state' refers to an action that is guided by more restrained reasoning, detached from emotion. <sup>10</sup> Previous studies have shown that reducing 'hot state' behaviour can decrease	Helping perpetrators understand the type of situation where the risk of DA is increased and help them recognise the cues for when they are switching into a 'hot state' could reduce DA. The programme would also teach how to react when in a hot state. One way to do this would be to teach techniques to reduce impulsive responses to situations such as deep breathing. Also trying to help perpetrators take a more objective view of the situation such as imaging

<sup>9</sup> Stinson, D. A., Logel, C., Shepherd, S., & Zanna, M. P. (2011). Rewriting the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Social Rejection Self-Affirmation Improves Relational Security and Social Behavior up to 2 Months Later. *Psychological science*, 22(9), 1145-1149.

<sup>10</sup> Loewenstein, G. (2005). Hot-cold empathy gaps and medical decision making. *Health Psychology*, 24(4S), S49.



	criminal behaviour and increase self-control. <sup>11 12</sup>	the situation from the standpoint of a neutral third party.
Mental contrasting, implementation intentions and commitment devices.	<p>Many of us have aspects of our behaviour that we would like to change but with busy lives don't quite manage it. This difference between people's planned and actual behaviour is called an 'implementation gap'.</p> <p>Mental contrasting can help overcome this. It is a visualisation technique that seeks to improve motivation by comparing a desired future goal with the present, identifying obstacles that may impede attainment of the specified goal.<sup>13</sup></p> <p>Helping people plan how to overcome these obstacles, 'implementation intentions' in the literature, can also encourage them to change their behaviour.</p> <p>Both of these approaches can be re enforced by making a public commitment to behaviour change. Commitment devices have proven to be successful with smoking cessation, alcohol abstinence or weight loss.<sup>14</sup></p>	<p>Mental contrasting, implementation intentions and commitment devices could be incorporated into existing programmes to act as an additional aid in changing perpetrators' behaviour. For example implementation intentions could be used to plan responses to risky situations in order to avoid them. Or perpetrators could commit to being more respectful to their partners. This commitment could be made to the group or another trusted person/ group who can hold them to account.</p> <p>Mental contrasting, implementation intentions and commitments could be done at the beginning of a course and monitored over its duration. They could then be refreshed at the end of the course and monitored for a period of 6-12 months after the course.</p>

<sup>11</sup> Blattman, C., Jamison, J. C., & Sheridan, M. (2015). Reducing crime and violence: Experimental evidence on adult noncognitive investments in Liberia (No. w21204). National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>12</sup> Heller, S. B., Shah, A. K., Guryan, J., Ludwig, J., Mullainathan, S., & Pollack, H. A. (2015). Thinking, fast and slow? Some field experiments to reduce crime and dropout in Chicago (No. w21178). National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>13</sup> Oettingen, G., & Gollwitzer, P.M. (2010), Strategies of setting and implementing goals. In Maddux, J.E., & Tangney, J.P. (Eds.), Social psychological foundations of clinical psychology. New York: The Guilford Press.

<sup>14</sup> Volpp, K. G., John, L. K., Troxel, A. B., Norton, L., Fassbender, J., & Loewenstein, G. (2008). Financial incentive-based approaches for weight loss: a randomized trial. *Jama*, 300(22), 2631-2637

	Previous BIT work has shown that using implementation intentions and commitment devices with unemployed people led to an increase in the number of people coming off benefits. <sup>15</sup>	
Effort recognition	Recognising and rewarding effort, as well as providing meaningful feedback, have all shown to be significant motivators in promoting behaviour change. <sup>16</sup> An intervention aimed at enhancing psychotherapy outcomes found that couples who received continued progress feedback throughout the course of therapy displayed significantly greater post-treatment improvements than those who did not. <sup>17</sup>	Integrating effort recognition and personalised feedback into existing perpetrator programme structures may increase motivation. This could be done by creating a channel for peer-to-peer feedback, such as a peer support group, where a perpetrator could discuss the positive steps they have taken and have their efforts recognised. A system could also be created that clearly measured perpetrators' progress, allowing them to set milestones, record steps taken and goals achieved.

<sup>15</sup> The Behavioural Insights Team Update Report 2013-2015, p.7, [http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT\\_Update-Report-Final-2013-2015.pdf](http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT_Update-Report-Final-2013-2015.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Ashraf, N., Bandiera, O., & Jack, B. K. (2014). No margin, no mission? A field experiment on incentives for public service delivery. *Journal of Public Economics*, 120, 1-17.

<sup>17</sup> Anker, M. G., Duncan, B. L., & Sparks, J. A. (2009). Using client feedback to improve couple therapy outcomes: A randomized clinical trial in a naturalistic setting. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 77(4), 693.

## Introduction

Domestic abuse blights lives and causes serious harm to victims, their children and wider society. According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales 8.2% of women and 4% of men in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse in 2014-15. There is limited information about the prevalence of domestic abuse in Wales, however, data suggests that 11% of women, and 5% of men, in Wales are affected by domestic abuse.<sup>18</sup> This report, commissioned by the Welsh Government, considers ways that behavioural insights might be used alongside domestic violence perpetrator programmes (DVPPs) to reduce the harm caused by domestic abuse.

There is a considerable existing literature on domestic abuse<sup>19</sup> and this report does not aim to exhaustively review that. Instead this report provides behavioural approaches that could be added to existing interventions in order to improve outcomes from services. Our methodological approach is detailed in Annex A. The rest of the report is set out as follows: in the next section we detail our three areas of intervention; increasing uptake of DVPPs, sustaining attendance on DVPPs and enhancing DVPPs to embed learning. We finish by setting out recommendations and next steps.

## Challenges

Before proceeding it is worth noting four caveats to this report.

### **1. The evidence on existing perpetrator programmes is mixed and there is disagreement on how success should be measured**

There is a lot of debate and little evidence based on randomised controlled trials about the efficacy of DVPPs. The impact of DVPPs is central to whether the suggestions in this report would generate positive social outcomes. A meta-analysis of 22 perpetrator programmes found only a small effect on reducing

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<sup>18</sup> Based on disaggregated data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (2011/12) Robinson et al. (2012), The Welsh Government's proposed 'Ending Violence Against Women and Domestic Abuse (Wales) Bill': Recommendations from the Task and Finish Group.

<sup>19</sup> A note on terminology: In this report we use the term domestic abuse (DA) to encompass domestic violence as well as coercive and controlling behaviour. When we use the term DA we therefore follow the government definition of domestic violence and abuse: "Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional". From 'Information for Local Areas on the change to the Definition of Domestic Violence and Abuse, March 2013'

recidivism with no difference in impact between the different interventions.<sup>20</sup> Other meta-studies have found no impact on recidivism rates from DVPPs based on the widely used Duluth model.<sup>21 22</sup>

As such there is limited evidence to suggest that DVPPs in the UK are reducing overall recidivism.<sup>23 24</sup> There are also questions about whether reduced recidivism is the best measure of success for perpetrator programmes. Other measures such as reduced overall harm, improved victim/offender relationship or increased safety of children are all beneficial outcomes that are put forward as possibilities. Ideally, the Welsh Government should consult stakeholders to create a Minimum Dataset that outlines which outcomes it will use as a yardstick of effectiveness.

## **2. Data about the extent of the issue are poor**

Approximately 1 in 4 women over the age of 16 have been victims of domestic abuse.<sup>25</sup> Despite this only 353,100 reports were made in the UK from March 2014 to March 2015.<sup>26</sup> This demonstrates one of the challenges with domestic abuse; it is severely underreported.

Abusive behaviour is often part of a cyclical pattern that builds up over time as opposed to an isolated incident. It can begin with low level controlling behaviour and slowly turn into more severe abuse including violence. This gradual change can mean that people are slow to recognise and therefore report an abusive relationship.

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<sup>20</sup> Babcock, J. C., Green, C. E., & Robie, C. (2004). Does batterers' treatment work? A meta-analytic review of domestic violence treatment. *Clinical psychology review*, 23(8), 1023-1053.

<sup>21</sup> The Duluth model is a clinical intervention which employs a feminist psychoeducational approach. It proposes that the principal cause of domestic violence is a social and cultural patriarchal ideology that historically has allowed men to control women through power and violence. It posits that violence perpetrated on women and children originates from their relative positions of weakness and vulnerability socially, politically, economically, and culturally.

<sup>22</sup> What works to reduce recidivism by domestic violence perpetrators, Washington State Institute for Public Policy, January 2013

<sup>23</sup> Bowen, E., Gilchrist, E. A., & Beech, A. R. (2005). An examination of the impact of community-based rehabilitation on the offending behaviour of male domestic violence offenders and the characteristics associated with recidivism. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 10(2), 189-209.

<sup>24</sup> Sartin, R. M., Hansen, D. J., & Huss, M. T. (2006). Domestic violence treatment response and recidivism: A review and implications for the study of family violence. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 11(5), 425-440.

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/268885/h12\\_key\\_facts\\_about\\_domestic\\_abuse.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/268885/h12_key_facts_about_domestic_abuse.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-35093837>

The lack of data on DA also extends to DVPPs. There is very limited data on DVPPs and their use. We have found only indicative data in key areas such as the number of people going through DVPPs and dropout rates. This has restricted the strength of the conclusions we have been able to draw and means that some further exploration of the issue would be required before a trial could be implemented.

### **3. The DVPPs in England and Wales are varied and so are the populations that they serve**

The first large-scale perpetrator programme implemented in England and Wales was the Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP). First delivered by the National Probation Service in 2004, the IDAP is a community-based groupwork programme. Since then a broad range of perpetrator programmes have been used across England and Wales, using different techniques to address perpetrators' behaviour. Currently DVPPs in England and Wales are provided by probation services, prisons, and by the voluntary sector.

A review of sexual violence services in Wales highlighted a lack of domestic violence perpetrator programmes and emphasised the need to ensure programmes are accredited, and involve greater monitoring and evaluation.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it is important that data are used effectively to ensure that these programs deliver the outcomes, once they have been agreed.

Similarly, perpetrators of DA are a very varied group. This means that not all interventions will be suitable for all perpetrators and that must be borne in mind when reading the report. This is partly because DA covers a range of behaviour from coercive and controlling behaviour to severe violence. A report by the Home Office<sup>28</sup> identified key risk factors linked to domestic violence perpetrators, including witnessing or being a victim of childhood domestic violence, interpersonal dependency, jealousy, and low empathy. The report also made a clear distinction between two types of perpetrators, those that are antisocial/narcissistic (displaying a lack of empathy and 'macho' attitudes) and those that are borderline/emotionally dependent (low self-esteem, anger issues, and high levels of jealousy). These categorisations suggest different motivations for committing DA.

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<sup>27</sup><http://clon.uclan.ac.uk/10728/1/140430-violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-sexual-violence-services-FULL%20report%20EN.pdf>

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<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218135832/http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/r217.pdf>

Several studies also highlight alcohol and drug use as contributing factors in domestic violence offences<sup>29</sup>, with over 60% of reported cases involving perpetrators' alcohol abuse.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, mental health problems have been identified as a feature of domestic violence.<sup>31</sup> <sup>32</sup> Any intervention therefore needs to consider how and when to deal with addiction or mental health problems.

#### **4. Behavioural insights may help but is unlikely to be a silver bullet**

A lot of behavioural approaches are about 'nudging' the marginal person towards a particular behaviour. This recognises that there are some people for whom a nudge will not be enough to adopt a particular behaviour. It is possible that DA perpetrators are more likely to be in this latter group because by definition they exhibit abnormal behavioural patterns. Therefore, there is a question about how effective a nudge could be for such an ingrained and anti-social behaviour. Having said that, the cohort is varied and we have worked with specific populations (e.g. job seekers) before and believe that the ideas discussed within the report are applicable, and have the potential to be effective, within the current context.

### **Findings and ideas**

The Behavioural Insights Team uses findings from behavioural science to suggest changes to existing systems to achieve policy objectives. For the purposes of this report we did not aim to design a new DVPP; instead we considered how behavioural science could be used to make changes to existing systems to improve outcomes from DVPPs. We have focussed on three ways to do this. Firstly, using behavioural science to increase the number of self-referrals to DVPPs. Secondly, using behavioural science to sustain attendance once people are on them. Thirdly, using behavioural science to enhance the content of programmes enhance and embed the learning. We cover each of these in turn below.

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<sup>29</sup> What works to reduce recidivism by domestic violence perpetrators, Washington State Institute for Public Policy, January 2013

<sup>30</sup> Hester, M. (2009). Who does what to whom? Gender and domestic violence perpetrators. Violence Against Women Research Group/University of Bristol with Northern Rock Foundation.

<sup>31</sup> <http://policybristol.blogs.bris.ac.uk/2015/06/11/men-experiencing-or-perpetrating-domestic-violence-linked-with-two-to-three-fold-increase-in-mental-health-problems/>

<sup>32</sup>

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218135832/http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/r217.pdf>

## Self-referral onto programmes

There are several routes onto a DVPP. The main ones are:

1. Referral by children's services (e.g. Children's Social Care or Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service);
2. Referrals by police, probation or the local Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC);
3. Self-referrals by people who recognise that they need help.

There are limited data on the proportions going through each route although a DVPP in the North East receives around 50% of attendees through children's services, 20% from police/probation and MARAC and 30% from self-referrals.<sup>33</sup> Discussions with stakeholders in Wales indicated broadly similar proportions in Wales, particularly that children's services often now make the majority of referrals.

In this section we consider how behavioural science could be used to increase voluntary self-referrals. We think the point at which a part of the public sector first becomes aware of potential DA is a good time to intervene. This could include a range of organisations but the police and children's services departments seem the most likely routes. This may require the Welsh Government to work in non-devolved policy areas and therefore require partnership working with the Home Office and the Police.<sup>34</sup>

Specifically we suggest creating a mechanism whereby perpetrators are sent a letter or a text message following contact with these bodies where there is reason to think that DA might be occurring. We would need to consider whether the communication was sent following the first incident or a subsequent incident. If there are large amounts of one-off incidents then sending a letter after the second offence might be a more targeted approach.

This approach creates opportunities to test a range of behaviourally informed messaging to maximise impact. The Transtheoretical Model (TTM), a model of behaviour change, separates intentional change into five stages: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance.<sup>35</sup> Tailoring

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<sup>33</sup> Barnardo's: domestic violence protection project, Case study of a Clinks member in the North East, October 2014

<sup>34</sup> The Welsh Government has responsibility for policies in relation to education, housing, substance misuse, health and social services and all of these policy areas play a role in supporting people who are in the criminal justice system and in preventing or reducing offending behaviour. However, Welsh Government does not have responsibility for the criminal justice systems, policing or the courts and so would need to work with national bodies to change policies or processes in these areas.

<sup>35</sup> Prochaska, J.O. & DiClemente, C.C. (1992). Stages of Change in the Modification of Problem Behaviours. Newbury Park: Sage



and targeting communication with perpetrators, depending on the stage they may be in, could increase self-referral onto DVPPs. Despite limited evidence of its application in domestic violence settings, TTM has helped to predict dropout rates in other areas of research.<sup>36</sup>

Before introducing any routine communication it is extremely important to consider whether this proposed approach might create any additional problems for DA victims and families. There is a danger that the recipients of these letters might react angrily and punish those around them. Despite this we still think this idea merits further consideration and as such we now suggest some possible approaches for the message content.

We discuss four ways that behavioural approaches could be built into this type of communication to increase self-referrals. The first looks at when messaging should be delivered. We then consider two ways that the content of the message could be framed. Finally, we look at how to make it easy for people to sign up to a DVPP once they have decided they want to.

### Timing of a new routine communication

**Issue:** Domestic violence is rarely an isolated incident. Abusive behaviours tend to build up slowly over time and can appear as the norm in a relationship or in multiple relationships for an individual.<sup>37</sup> This means that for both victims and perpetrators it can be difficult to recognise the relationship is abusive.

**Behavioural insight:** Timing can have a considerable effect on the way in which people respond to a prompt.<sup>38</sup> A study assessing help-seeking pathways for domestic violence perpetrators identified certain 'triggers to change', often related to critical incidents such as contact with police or children's services.<sup>39</sup> In addition, individuals are more motivated by costs and benefits that have an immediate effect, rather than a delayed one. Present bias, the emphasis on the short-term, at the expense of the long-term, affects individuals' decision making as present costs and benefits are given more value than those in the future.<sup>40</sup> People are also more likely to adopt positive behaviour at significant life events or

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<sup>36</sup> Brodeur, N., Rondeau, G., Brochu, S., Lindsay, J., & Phelps, J. (2008). Does the transtheoretical model predict attrition in domestic violence treatment programs?. *Violence and Victims*, 23(4), 493-507

<sup>37</sup> Taylor, A. (2012). *The handbook of family dispute resolution: Mediation theory and practice*. John Wiley & Sons.

<sup>38</sup> BIT, 2014, East: Four simple ways to apply behavioural insights.

<sup>39</sup> Hester, M., & Westmarland, N. (2006). Domestic violence perpetrators. *Criminal Justice Matters*, 66(1), 34-35.

<sup>40</sup> Amato, P., Booth, A., McHale, S. M., & Hook, J. V. (2015). Families in an Era of Increasing Inequality. In *National Symposium on Family Issues (Vol. 5)*, pg. 75.



points of transition. For example research has demonstrated that people are more likely to commit to a broad range of goals, including those related to career, education or personal relationships, at the beginning of a week or month.<sup>41</sup>

**Ideas:** Contacting perpetrators at times when the costs of continuing to commit DA are very obvious, such as after contact with the police, provides an opportunity to encourage them to seek help. This could be especially powerful if consequences are considerable or imminent. For example a message following a police visit highlighting the risk of arrest and prosecution in the future could encourage self-referral to a DVPP.

Alternatively contact with children's services may also be an effective time to intervene as many referrals to DVPPs in the UK come through children's services.<sup>42</sup> Perpetrators might be particularly receptive to messaging at this point because of the effects their abusive behaviour might have on their relationships with their children and access to them. Finally, following up with a perpetrator immediately after a victim has been to hospital, may be a good time to encourage a perpetrator to seek help.

Timing of interaction is already used in some areas to combat DA. It is an integral aspect of Second Responder Programmes, such as those used by Leicestershire Police<sup>43</sup> and police forces in America.<sup>44</sup> The programmes involve a police officer and victim advocate following up with a victim and/or perpetrator of domestic violence shortly after an incident has occurred, at a point when both are likely to be receptive to support and legal consequences.

The introduction of a routine communication also presents the opportunity to test different methods of communication (for example, letter or text message) and behaviourally informed messaging. It may also be possible to vary who sends the message, this could include the police as well as other public bodies. Using the wider public sector would fit well with the DA strategy in Wales which now requires local areas to have their own strategies to tackling DA as well as a policy of 'ask then act' for professionals.

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<sup>41</sup> Dai, H., Milkman, K. L., & Riis, J. (2014). The fresh start effect: Temporal landmarks motivate aspirational behavior. *Management Science*, 60(10), 2563-2582.

<sup>42</sup> Stanley, N., Graham-Kevan, N., & Borthwick, R. (2012). Fathers and domestic violence: Building motivation for change through perpetrator programmes. *Child Abuse Review*, 21(4), 264-274.

<sup>43</sup> <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0515/POST-PN-0515.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/lib/download/233/>.

### Message content: Fear of regret and loss aversion

**Issue:** While a perpetrator may wish to seek help and enrol on a treatment programme, they may be concerned about the negative consequences of speaking to external parties. Individuals may worry about any legal repercussions or sanctions for their behaviour, and any impact this may have on their personal and professional lives. Loss of access and contact with children is a particularly important factor that might hold perpetrators back from self-referring.<sup>45</sup>

**Behavioural insight:** Research suggests that individuals are more sensitive to losses than equivalent gains,<sup>46</sup> and our drive to avoid losses is a powerful motivator when making decisions. Additionally, when making decisions individuals might anticipate regret, and avoid a course of action that could lead to a feeling of regret. The abnormality and justifiability of a particular behaviour has been shown to amplify anticipated regret.<sup>47</sup> As such, any decisions DA perpetrators make about seeking help are likely to be influenced by a heightened sense of anticipated regret. Research exploring the effects of mandatory arrests on domestic violence perpetrators found that those who were employed, had been married or cohabited for a number of years, were less likely to commit repeat offences.<sup>48</sup> The fear of anticipated loss of employment or relationship breakdown could be playing a role in this effect.

**Ideas:** Potential losses could be used to encourage self-referral onto DVPPs. This could be the loss of the relationship, the loss of access to their children, the loss of a job or even of social status. Messaging will need to be clear that continued DA will lead to loss while enrolment onto a DVPP will help offenders avoid that loss. Providing messaging that reassures perpetrators that their participation in a programme will not result in sanctions could encourage them to self-enrol, and minimise any anticipated regret. Sending the message from someone who the individual relates to, for example, someone who has already been through a programme, could make it more effective. Qualitative research would be of use in understanding what perpetrators are most likely to care about losing, and thus what is most likely to motivate them to make change.

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<sup>45</sup> Gibbons, L., & Paterson, D. (2000, July). Freedom from Fear campaign against domestic violence: an innovative approach to reducing crime. In Conference Reducing Criminality, July (Vol. 31).

<sup>46</sup> Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1991). Loss aversion in riskless choice: A reference-dependent model. *The quarterly journal of economics*, 1039-1061.

<sup>47</sup> Reb, J., & Connolly, T. (2010). The effects of action, normality, and decision carefulness on anticipated regret: Evidence for a broad mediating role of decision justifiability. *Cognition and Emotion*, 24(8), 1405-1420.

<sup>48</sup> Sherman, L. W., Schmidt, J. D., Rogan, D. P., Smith, D. A., Gartin, P. R., Cohn, E. G., ... & Bacich, A. R. (1992). The variable effects of arrest on criminal careers: The Milwaukee domestic violence experiment. *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* (1973-), 83(1), 137-169.

### Message content: Ego and cognitive dissonance

**Issue:** Identifying and admitting to abusive behaviour could be a difficult process, and the ease with which this is done may depend on the type of perpetrator. It is likely that some perpetrators will feel a conflict between their actions and their values, and are likely to experience a sense of shame and guilt. However, in general, individuals are good at minimising self-blame and attempt to maintain a sense of being a 'good person', rationalising or justifying their behaviour.<sup>49</sup> Perpetrators may resolve the conflict they feel by blaming outside factors. Many perpetrators develop a 'siege mentality', a heightened sense of antagonism directed at them, and a feeling of being unfairly persecuted for their actions.<sup>50</sup> By reducing the conflict between being a DA perpetrator and a 'good person' in their own minds they are reducing the drive to seek help.

**Behavioural insight:** Cognitive dissonance refers to the discomfort an individual feels when they hold two conflicting thoughts or beliefs, or perform an action that is inconsistent with their values.<sup>51</sup> Cognitive dissonance can not only have a destabilising effect on an individual's self-image, but may also affect the way in which an individual thinks others perceive them. Some domestic violence perpetrators are likely to experience cognitive dissonance, and may look to resolve this internal conflict through avoidance, rationalisation or alteration of their beliefs.<sup>52</sup>

Researchers in Australia developed a campaign aimed at domestic violence perpetrators and found messages that emphasised that help was available positively resonated with perpetrators and participants from the general male population. They also found that messaging that focused on the impact abuse has on children was particularly powerful. Drawing on perpetrators' identity as fathers served as an important emotional motivator and encouraged perpetrators to focus on the dichotomy between their abusive behaviour and their duty of care as a parent. Interestingly focussing on children also worked for childless

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<sup>49</sup> Henning, K., Jones, A. R., & Holdford, R. (2005). "I didn't do it, but if I did I had a good reason": Minimization, denial, and attributions of blame among male and female domestic violence offenders. *Journal of Family Violence*, 20(3), 131-139.

<sup>50</sup> Gibbons, L., & Paterson, D. (2000, July). Freedom from Fear campaign against domestic violence: an innovative approach to reducing crime. In *Conference Reducing Criminality*, July (Vol. 31).

<sup>51</sup> Harmon-Jones, E., & Mills, J. (1999). An introduction to cognitive dissonance theory and an overview of current perspectives on the theory.

<sup>52</sup> Henning, K., Jones, A. R., & Holdford, R. (2005). "I didn't do it, but if I did I had a good reason": Minimization, denial, and attributions of blame among male and female domestic violence offenders. *Journal of Family Violence*, 20(3), 131-139.

perpetrators and the researchers attributed this to the high chance that perpetrators would have witnessed or experienced abuse as a child.<sup>53</sup>

**Ideas:** A letter from a statutory agency such as the police or children's services could use cognitive dissonance to increase referrals. Increasing cognitive dissonance could spur perpetrators into seeking help to change their behaviour. However, if the messaging is too severe it could alienate perpetrators and embed the rationalisations of their behaviour. We think that the right approach is to help perpetrators understand what constitutes abuse and then show them how to find help. Clarity of messaging is essential. The government of New South Wales re-wrote their Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders in plain English, to ensure that intended actions are not lost in legal jargon.<sup>54</sup>

The first part of a communication should help people understand that which behaviours constitute abuse. Developing a set of simple heuristics, essentially guidelines or 'rules of thumb' so people can quickly see if their behaviour is abusive could help them understand if they have a problem. This could be a short checklist of behaviours or signs that suggest abusive behaviours and work in a similar way to The Line campaign in Australia<sup>55</sup> or the NHS depression self-assessment.<sup>56</sup> This could be built in to the Welsh Government's existing Live Fear Free campaign.<sup>57</sup>

Once abusive behaviours have been identified the message should show that help is available rather than threatening sanctions which could alienate people. Appealing to perpetrator's internal values, and clearly showing how to access support is likely to be a more effective way of engaging them. It might be possible to include a reference to key motivators such as the impact on children to help reinforce messages.

It should be noted that if perpetrators believe DA is acceptable or they push blame onto their partner then this approach is unlikely to work. For example perpetrators that are on the antisocial/narcissistic side of the spectrum may well not recognise their patterns of behaviour constitute abuse. Further work would be needed to understand who this type of messaging would be effective for.

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<sup>53</sup>Gibbons, L., & Paterson, D. (2000, July). Freedom from Fear campaign against domestic violence: an innovative approach to reducing crime. In *Conference Reducing Criminality*, July (Vol. 31).

<sup>54</sup><http://www.justice.nsw.gov.au/Pages/media-news/media-releases/2015/new-advos-help-reduce-dv.aspx>

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.theline.org.au/>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/depression.aspx>

<sup>57</sup> <http://livefearfree.gov.wales>

### Reduce friction costs to signing up to a DVPP

**Issue:** Even if a perpetrator does acknowledge their wrongdoings or has doubts about their actions, there can be barriers to getting help such as not understanding where to seek help or complex enrolment procedures.

**Behavioural insight:** Friction costs are small tasks or obstacles that can disproportionately affect decisions and make undertaking certain behaviour more effortful or challenging. Time-consuming or complicated processes may prevent individuals from taking an action. For instance, university attendance amongst under-represented groups rose by eight percentage points when forms were filled in and submitted on behalf of the applicant.<sup>58</sup> Therefore ensuring necessary information is provided in a simple, transparent format can disproportionately encourage a particular behaviour.

**Ideas:** The first step in attempting to minimise friction should be make it easy to find information about DVPPs. Therefore the content of the message should be simple and action oriented, clearly setting out practical steps to get help. The second step is to make it as easy as possible to seek help should a perpetrator decide to do so. Part of this is about making the language used as straightforward as possible. For example our work in Australia showed that the reading age required to comprehend messages sent to perpetrators was above the level of some of the cohort. Part of it is also about making the process of registering easy. For example one Children's Centre DVPP self-referral form comprises five pages of short and long-form questions.<sup>59</sup> Although this information might be necessary the effort and time required to complete this could put some people off doing it.

It should be noted that during our field research some of the stakeholders we interviewed cautioned against making self-referral too easy. Before starting a DVPP perpetrators should show that they are committed to changing because admitting them before this will be ineffective at best or, at worst, create risks for their partner or the instructor. For this reason we would suggest a two stage process with a very easy first step. This could be a simple text service requesting a call back from a programme provider or an anonymous helpline or web chat platform, such as those provided by the Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM).<sup>60</sup> These services could be anonymous making them a safe and easy place

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<sup>58</sup> Bettinger, E. P., Long, B. T., Oreopoulos, P. & Sanbonmatsu, L. (2012). The role of application assistance and information in college decisions: Results from the H&R block FAFSA experiment, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 127(3), 1205-1242.

<sup>59</sup> <http://yorkshirechildrenscentre.org.uk/what-we-do/support-for-parents/domestic-violence-perpetrator-programme/>

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.thecalmzone.net/help/get-help/>

for perpetrators to discuss their experiences, as well as gain further information about seeking help. If perpetrators then move to the second step this will require a demonstration of commitment as well as a risk assessment. However, these could still be done in a way that reduces friction. For example if a form needs to be filled out that this is done as a conversation with a member of staff who writes down the answers. Before designing this process we would need to carefully research the risks posed by people who may not yet be fully committed to the programme with the benefits of reducing friction and therefore increasing attendance at DVPPs.

### **Sustaining attendance on DVPPs**

DVPPs are an integral part of treatment for individuals who have displayed abusive behaviour. They aim to help perpetrators stop their abuse and violence, cope with underlying triggers, and learn to interact with their partners in a respectful way. Existing programmes differ in duration (from 20 to 48 weeks), delivery (group or individual sessions), and their treatment of abuse as well as additional factors that may be exacerbating behaviour.<sup>61</sup>

There is limited evidence on the dropout rates from DVPPs although studies from the UK and US suggest that dropout rates can be up to 40%.<sup>62</sup> This is important because research also suggests that dropping out of a programme is the greatest predictor of re-assault.<sup>63</sup> Thus, reducing dropout rates could also reduce the harm caused by DA. This section considers how behavioural science could be used to reduce dropout rates and improve attendance.

### **Grit, growth mindsets and value affirmation**

**Issue:** Increasing the number of perpetrators starting DVPPs is a positive outcome but will be of limited benefit if they drop out of the programme before it is finished. Perpetrators may start a DVPP with the intention to change but the difficulty involved in changing patterns of behaviour could feel daunting or too difficult.

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<sup>61</sup> <http://www.respectphoneline.org.uk/pages/domestic-violence-prevention-programmes.html>

<sup>62</sup> Rosenfeld (1992)

Probation: domestic abuse programmes and budgets. A briefing from Napo the Trade Union and Professional Association for Family Court and Probation Staff, March 2012

<sup>63</sup> Gondolf (2012)



**Behavioural Insight:** Grit has been defined as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals”.<sup>64</sup> It is integral to a person’s ability to persist in achieving objectives in the face of challenges and is a strong predictor of success. Research on grit has found that it is associated with retention of sales employees, completion of high school and remaining married.<sup>65</sup>

The US Department of Education assessed how learning environments could be adapted to promote grit and perseverance among students. Their research identified key recommendations including the implementation of clearly defined ‘optimally challenging’ goals that kept students stimulated, but not overwhelmed, involved careful monitoring and support, and created an awareness of sociocultural context, tailoring goals to individuals.<sup>66</sup> They also recommended incorporating ‘growth mindset’ strategies. Growth mindset strategies involve teaching individuals that their capabilities are malleable, and can improve through the application of effort and perseverance. Research has shown that adopting such a mindset can have a significant impact on adolescents’ academic achievement and motivation.<sup>67</sup>

**Ideas:** Promoting grit and perseverance within DVPPs could be an effective way to reduce the dropout rate from programmes. BIT has used text messages to foster grit to increase attendance and reduce dropout rates from courses for adult learners.<sup>68</sup> This approach could be built on for DVPP attendees by sending regular text messages which highlight the importance of the course that the recipient is part of a group striving for the same thing and that goals are achievable. A test, such as the GRIT scale,<sup>69</sup> could be used to predict success and measure perpetrators’ motivation and likelihood to persevere. Support and messaging could be tailored according to an individual's grit score.

Value affirmation exercises could also be incorporated into programmes to foster grit. Value affirmation exercises encourage an individual to consider their core values and those of their families and communities. They can be as simple as asking someone to write about their values or the values of their community. A study found that 15 minute value affirmation exercises improved chronically

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<sup>64</sup> Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 92(6), 1087.

<sup>65</sup> Eskreis-Winkler, Lauren et al. “The Grit Effect: Predicting Retention in the Military, the Workplace, School and Marriage.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 5 (2014): 36. PMC. Web. 13 June 2016.

<sup>66</sup> <http://pgbovine.net/OET-Draft-Grit-Report-2-17-13.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> Blackwell, L. S., Trzesniewski, K. H., & Dweck, C. S. (2007). Implicit theories of intelligence predict achievement across an adolescent transition: A longitudinal study and an intervention. *Child development*, 78(1), 246-263

<sup>68</sup> The Behavioural Insights Team Update Report 2013-2015, P22. [http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT\\_Update-Report-Final-2013-2015.pdf](http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT_Update-Report-Final-2013-2015.pdf)

<sup>69</sup> <http://angeladuckworth.com/grit-scale/>

insecure individuals' social behaviour and relational security for up to 8 weeks after an initial intervention.<sup>70</sup> Value affirmation exercises could be an effective additional part of a DVPP to reinforce perseverance and help perpetrators identify how their previous behaviour may have deviated from their personal values.

Finally, we think there would be merit in incorporating growth mindset training into DVPPs to maintain attendance. People's mindsets can roughly be divided into 'growth mindsets' and 'fixed mindsets'. People with a fixed mindset see their abilities as unchangeable, whilst people with a growth mindset view capabilities as something that can be developed. This means that people with growth mindsets are more likely to try new approaches to problems and persist for longer without worrying about appearing to have failed. This approach helps them to succeed and to learn from mistakes. Growth mindsets have shown to increase academic attainment, decrease aggression and strengthen willpower.<sup>71</sup>

Importantly, growth mindsets can be taught. The educational organisation, the Khan Academy, for example, has developed a multimedia growth mindset training. Researchers at a large American adult education institution wanted to see whether it was possible to improve the performance of a group of underprivileged students who had struggled with maths at school. They put half of the students through growth mindset training which involved reading and feeding back on an article about the brain's ability to change as a result of putting effort into a task and trying again if failing the first time. The other half undertook an online lesson that taught facts about memory and the brain, but did not mention that intellectual ability is malleable. By the end of the course the drop-out rate in the growth mindset group was half of the drop-out rate in the control group.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Stinson, D. A., Logel, C., Shepherd, S., & Zanna, M. P. (2011). Rewriting the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Social Rejection Self-Affirmation Improves Relational Security and Social Behavior up to 2 Months Later. *Psychological science*, 22(9), 1145-1149.

<sup>71</sup> Dweck, C. S., (2016). The Remarkable Reach of Growth Mindsets, *Scientific American Mind*.  
<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-remarkable-reach-of-growth-mind-sets/>

<sup>72</sup> Yeager, D. S., Paunesku, D., Walton, G. M., and Dweck, C. S. (2013) 'How can we instill productive mindsets at scale? A review of the evidence and an initial R&D agenda.' A White House White Paper prepared for the meeting on 'Excellence in Education: The Importance of Academic Mindsets.' Paunesku, D., Yeager, D., Romero, C., and Walton, G. (2012) 'A brief growth mindset intervention improves academic outcomes of community college students enrolled in developmental mathematics courses.' Unpublished manuscript. Stanford CA: Stanford University



## Enhancing and embedding the learning from DVPPs

DVPPs commonly form part of a coordinated response to DA. Many programmes in Wales are based on the Duluth model, a psycho-educational approach that places accountability on the perpetrators.<sup>73</sup> However, other intervention techniques such as cognitive behavioural therapy are also widely used. Programmes differ in their use of individual or group sessions, and their treatment of violence and its effects.

The following section considers how behavioural science could be applied to improve engagement of perpetrators in DVPPs. We recognise that existing programmes may consist of a variety of exercises and techniques, and not every idea outlined would be directly applicable. As such, careful consideration would need to be given to the type of programme that the ideas could be attached to. Some of these approaches could be used as part of the programme and then again as a follow-up.

### Hot and cold states

**Issue:** For some perpetrators DA will form part of a calculated approach to control their partners; for others, violence may be the result of losing control. The latter type of perpetrator is likely to feel heightened levels of anger and anxiety, be highly emotionally reactive,<sup>74</sup> losing control of rational thought processes and paying little attention to the consequences of their behaviour when committing an act of violence. Research suggests that perpetrators have diminished awareness of their emotions and avoid confronting negative internal states.<sup>75</sup>

**Behavioural Insight:** Hot and cold states refer to contrasting conditions that underpin decision making. In a 'hot state' an individual will make a decision based on an emotional, visceral, impulse-driven reaction. The impulsiveness of the judgement may conflict with long-term goals and lead to unwanted consequences. A 'cold state', on the other hand, refers to an action that is guided by more restrained reasoning, detached from emotion.<sup>76</sup> Previous studies have investigated how these two different states affect decision making in a

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<sup>73</sup><http://clok.uclan.ac.uk/10728/1/140430-violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-sexual-violence-services-FULL%20report%20EN.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> Dutton, D. G. (2011). Rethinking domestic violence. UBC Press, p. 169.

<sup>75</sup><http://www.stevenchayes.com/perpetrators-are-people-too/>

<sup>76</sup> Loewenstein, G. (2005). Hot-cold empathy gaps and medical decision making. *Health Psychology*, 24(4S), S49.

broad range of contexts including physical and social pain.<sup>77 78 79</sup> Previous work sought to reduce harmful automatic 'hot state' behaviour of criminally-engaged men and low-income youths, using cognitive behavioural therapy techniques to recognise when they were entering a hot state and then create space for consideration before acting. Both studies saw decreases in criminal behaviour and cited increased self-control amongst participants.<sup>80 81</sup> Findings from a preliminary study using acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), that aims to target emotional deficits, involving values, mindfulness and emotional intelligence training, found significant, sustained behavioural change in physical and psychological abuse of DV perpetrators.<sup>82</sup>

**Idea:** Teaching perpetrators about hot and cold states, and key 'hot state' characteristics may help them to identify triggers of abusive behaviour. Some cognitive behavioural therapy-based programmes do focus on trigger identification, and incorporate mindfulness techniques, to help perpetrators build a greater awareness of the relationship between internal states and external factors.<sup>83 84</sup> Practically this would involve helping perpetrators understand the type of situation where the risk of DA is increased and they recognise the cues for when they are switching into a hot state. The programme would also teach how to react when in a hot state. One way to do this would be to teach techniques to reduce impulsiveness of response such as deep breathing. Also trying to help perpetrators take a more objective view of the situation such as imaging the situation from the standpoint of a neutral third party.

If an intervention could help perpetrators recognise when they are in a hot state there may also be ways of helping them plan their response to minimise risk to

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<sup>77</sup> *ibid*

<sup>78</sup> Sayette, M. A., Loewenstein, G., Griffin, K. M., & Black, J. J. (2008). Exploring the cold-to-hot empathy gap in smokers. *Psychological science*, 19(9), 926-932.

<sup>79</sup> Nordgren, L. F., Banas, K., & MacDonald, G. (2011). Empathy gaps for social pain: why people underestimate the pain of social suffering. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 100(1), 120.

<sup>80</sup> Blattman, C., Jamison, J. C., & Sheridan, M. (2015). Reducing crime and violence: Experimental evidence on adult noncognitive investments in Liberia (No. w21204). National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>81</sup> Heller, S. B., Shah, A. K., Guryan, J., Ludwig, J., Mullainathan, S., & Pollack, H. A. (2015). Thinking, fast and slow? Some field experiments to reduce crime and dropout in Chicago (No. w21178). National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>82</sup> Zarling, A., Lawrence, E., & Marchman, J. (2015). A randomized controlled trial of acceptance and commitment therapy for aggressive behavior. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 83(1), 199

<sup>83</sup> Tollefson, D. R., Webb, K., Shumway, D., Block, S. H., & Nakamura, Y. (2009). A mind-body approach to domestic violence perpetrator treatment: Program overview and preliminary outcomes. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 18(1), 17-45.

<sup>84</sup> Berry, V. L., Stanley, N., Radford, L., McCarry, M., & Larkins, C. (2014). Building Effective Responses: An Independent Review of Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Services in Wales.

their partners. This could be done using implementation intentions as detailed in the next section.

### Mental contrasting, implementation intentions and commitment devices

**Issue:** Perpetrators might begin a course with the aim of changing their behaviour, but lose motivation or face difficulties once they are on it or after they have finished. Changing their behaviour may be a challenge, and improvement may seem unachievable for some perpetrators.

**Behavioural Insight:** It is a common human experience to intend to do something, but not get around to it. This 'implementation gap' means a lot of people do not change their behaviour even when they want to.

One way of overcoming this is by using mental contrasting. This is a visualisation technique that seeks to improve motivation by comparing a desired future goal with present reality and identifying obstacles that may impede attainment of the specified goal.<sup>85</sup> This has been shown to improve academic performance<sup>86</sup> as well as healthy behaviours.<sup>87</sup>

Implementation intentions are another strategy that aim to improve the likelihood of an objective being achieved. Rather than incentivising or penalising, implementation intentions lay out the specific actions (the when, where and how) required to accomplish a goal. They involve creating a detailed advanced plan, linking scenarios with actions. Implementation intentions have been proven to be effective in improving vaccination attendance<sup>88</sup> and healthy eating.<sup>89</sup>

Linking these, WOOP is a strategy in which an individual identifies their Wish, Outcome, Obstacle (mental contrasting), and then outlines a Plan (implementation intention) which helps to consolidate their future steps.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Oettingen, G., & Gollwitzer, P.M. (2010), Strategies of setting and implementing goals. In Maddux, J.E., & Tangney, J.P. (Eds.), *Social psychological foundations of clinical psychology*. New York: The Guilford Press.

<sup>86</sup> Gollwitzer, A., Oettingen, G., Kirby, T. & Duckworth, A. L. (2011). Mental contrasting facilitates academic performance in school children. *Motivation and Emotion*, 35, 403-412.

<sup>87</sup> Adriaanse, M. A., Oettingen, G., Gollwitzer, P. M., Hennes, E. P., de Ridder, D. T., & De Wit, J. B. (2010). When planning is not enough: Fighting unhealthy snacking habits by mental contrasting with implementation intentions (MCII). *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 40(7), 1277-1293.

<sup>88</sup> Milkman, K. L., Beshears, J., Choi, J. J., Laibson, D., & Madrian, B. C. (2011). Using implementation intentions prompts to enhance influenza vaccination rates. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 108(26), 10415-10420.

<sup>89</sup> Adriaanse, M. A., Vinkers, C. D., De Ridder, D. T., Hox, J. J., & De Wit, J. B. (2011). Do implementation intentions help to eat a healthy diet? A systematic review and meta-analysis of the empirical evidence. *Appetite*, 56(1), 183-193.

<sup>90</sup> <http://www.woopmylife.org/>

Finally this approach could be reinforced by making a public commitment to the action or behaviour change which creates a social pressure to follow through on the intentions. Commitment devices have proven to be successful at helping people break patterns of behaviour and help with smoking cessation, alcohol abstinence or weight loss,<sup>91</sup> both at an individual and group level.<sup>92</sup>

Previous BIT work has demonstrated the efficacy of using implementation intentions and commitment devices with jobseekers; encouraging them to develop advanced plans and commit to specific actions to search for work led to a reduction in the number of people claiming benefits.<sup>93</sup>

**Idea:** Mental contrasting, implementation intentions and commitment devices could be incorporated into existing programmes to act as an additional aid in changing perpetrators behaviour. Beginning the course with a mental contrasting approach would aim to emphasize the positives of achieving behaviour change as well as the main obstacles that stand in the way of achieving it.

Then the course could help people plan their approach to overcoming these obstacles. These implementation intentions could, for example, be about how to avoid risky situations from happening in the first place. This could involve simple “if x, then y” rules which are tailored to the individual. For example if alcohol consumption is an obstacle for achieving a goal, then the person could plan to stay at a friend’s house following a night out.

This approach could be reinforced with a commitment. Individual participants could commit to being more respectful towards their partners or not having any more violent incidents. These would need to be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound to ensure people can be held to account. The commitment could be made to the group at the beginning of the perpetrator programme with everyone writing down and presenting their commitment to the group. The group could be reminded of the commitment at each session and success could be measured. The person that the commitment is made to should be independent and respected. They must also be someone who will hold the perpetrator to account if they fail so the course leader might be a good candidate.

As well as being used while on the DVPP, mental contrasting, implementation intentions and commitment devices could play a beneficial role after the

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<sup>91</sup> Volpp, K. G., John, L. K., Troxel, A. B., Norton, L., Fassbender, J., & Loewenstein, G. (2008). Financial incentive-based approaches for weight loss: a randomized trial. *Jama*, 300(22), 2631-2637

<sup>92</sup> Bryan, G., Karlan, D., & Nelson, S. (2010). Commitment devices. *Annu. Rev. Econ.*, 2(1), 671-698.

<sup>93</sup> The Behavioural Insights Team Update Report 2013-2015, p.7 [http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT\\_Update-Report-Final-2013-2015.pdf](http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT_Update-Report-Final-2013-2015.pdf)

programme has finished to help maintain better behaviour. There could be regular contact points following the DVPP to assess progress.

### Effort recognition

**Issue:** As previously mentioned, motivation is a key factor affecting perpetrators' willingness to attend programmes;<sup>94</sup> yet self-doubt and uncertainty are likely to play a part in the recovery process. Without sufficient support, tangible goals or clear outcomes their sense of progress may be diluted.

**Behavioural Insight:** Recognising and rewarding effort, as well as providing meaningful feedback, have all shown to be significant motivators in promoting behaviour change. An intervention aimed at enhancing psychotherapy outcomes found that couples who received continued progress feedback throughout the course of therapy displayed significantly greater posttreatment improvements than those who did not. This included achieving four times the rate of clinically significant change (measured on the Outcome Rating Scale), and a significantly lower rate of separation or divorce.<sup>95</sup> Research also suggests that personalisation and tailoring to the individual increases the impact of feedback and effort recognition. Praising effort over intelligence is more likely to inspire an individual to continue to pursue a goal, despite obstacles, and to be honest about their performance.<sup>96</sup>

**Idea:** Integrating effort recognition and personalised feedback into existing perpetrator programme structures may increase motivation. Some DVPPs already include tailored feedback and this could be extended to include effort recognition. This could be done by creating a channel for peer-to-peer feedback, such as a peer support group, where a perpetrator could discuss the positive steps they have taken and have their efforts recognised. In addition, a system could be created which clearly measures perpetrators' progress, allowing them to set milestones, record steps they have taken, and any goals achieved.

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<sup>94</sup> Babcock, J. C., Green, C. E., & Robie, C. (2004). Does batterers' treatment work? A meta-analytic review of domestic violence treatment. *Clinical psychology review*, 23(8), 1023-1053.

<sup>95</sup> Anker, M. G., Duncan, B. L., & Sparks, J. A. (2009). Using client feedback to improve couple therapy outcomes: A randomized clinical trial in a naturalistic setting. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 77(4), 693.

<sup>96</sup> *Mindset: How You Can Fulfil Your Potential*, Dweck, C., 2012

## Recommendations

Based on our scoping work we make the following recommendations:

1. The Welsh Government should consider introducing routine communication to be sent to individuals after contact with a statutory body such as the police or children's services. The purpose of this message (likely to be a letter or text message) would be to intervene early with perpetrators and potential perpetrators to increase self-referral rates. This approach is likely to be easier to implement than changing the content of DVPPs and also lends itself well to trialling a number of behaviourally informed approaches to maximise efficacy. During our research we did not find any information suggesting this approach is already being carried out but the first step in any future work would be an exploration period to understand the exact local context and feasibility of the approach outlined in this report. This would include:
  - a. Further research to assess the (technical) feasibility of a project, including identifying: the number of people being referred onto DVPPs, available data (and how this could be used to measure the impact of the work), possible outcome measures, ways that the Welsh Government could work with criminal justice organisations such as the Home Office and the Police to implement such an approach, any ethical concerns about running such a project; and
  - b. Assessment of which DVPPs would be suitable and have capacity for increased referrals.
2. We would also recommend that the Welsh Government commission an assessment of the journey of a domestic violence perpetrator through the system in Wales from first incident all the way to prison, DVPP or behavioural change. This would help identify the gaps in the system as well as the points where perpetrators come into contact with public services. These contact points are likely to present an opportunity for interventions (possibly behaviourally informed) to improve outcomes.
3. During our research we were struck by a lack of evidence about which programmes were working well, or even an agreed definition of what a 'successful' outcome was. As such we would recommend that the Welsh Government establishes a set of criteria, potentially focussing on perpetrator behaviour, which define success for DVPPs or other interventions. We also recommend more routine evaluation of current DVPPs to help inform future policy design. This could include data

collection on current programmes and feedback on which ones are performing well and which are not.



## Annex A: Methodology

For this report we conducted a series of interviews with stakeholders as well as a review of the literature on DA. The interviews were with the following organisations:

Organisation	Title	Name
Youth Justice Board	Head of Effective Practice and Innovation	Lynzi Jarman
Gwent Police	Detective Superintendent	Ian Roberts
RESPECT	Development Director	Neil Blacklock
Atal-y-fro	Director	Kay Quinn
Probation service	Assistant Chief Officer for North Wales (lead on domestic violence)	Judith Magaw
Home Office	Lead on domestic violence and abuse	Christian Papaleontiou
Independent adviser to the Welsh Government	National Adviser for Violence against Women, other forms of Gender-Based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence	Rhian Bowen-Davies

These interviews gave us a good view of specific points in the system such as those of strategic national policy makers as well as those of voluntary sector organisations working with victims in particular parts of Wales. We then conducted a review of the academic and policy literature on DA to understand the evidence and trends in the area.