
Signposts

for assessing and reporting family
and domestic violence perpetrator
behaviour change

RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice
Stopping Family Violence Inc.

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Written by Rodney Vlasis, Elena Campbell and Damian Green

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The **Centre for Innovative Justice (CIJ)** researches, advocates and applies innovative ways to improve the justice system with a particular focus on therapeutic jurisprudence, restorative justice and non-adversarial dispute resolution.

The CIJ's objective is to develop, drive and expand the capacity of the justice system to meet and adapt to the needs of its diverse users. The CIJ meets this objective by conducting rigorous research that focuses on having impact – taking our research findings, most of which involve direct engagement with service users, and using them to develop innovative and workable solutions.

Across our research we put our values into practice – ensuring that the process of the research is as useful as the ultimate 'product', that participants feel strengthened and empowered by their involvement, and that stakeholder engagement is built throughout. This supports implementation of the practical and achievable recommendations that the CIJ develops to inform its findings.

The CIJ runs a program of research concerning family and domestic violence (FDV). This includes a focus on how the legal system must function as part of an integrated system that responds to and prevents perpetration of FDV – with all parts of the system accountable for how they contribute to safety and reduce perpetrator-driven risk.

Stopping Family Violence (SFV) was formed in the belief that everyone deserves to live without fear of violence. The organisation's purpose is to help drive the social change that we believe is necessary to put an end to family and domestic violence.

SFV works to keep women and children, and others who experience gender-based violence, at the core of everything we do. For us, it is vital that all responses to FDV work to enhance safety and reduce risk for those experiencing FDV. We do this by focusing upon the cause of harm, which all too often is men in our communities. It is only through bringing into view and changing men's behaviour that we can hope to end FDV.

SFV works to drive change: by engaging with men (and with the services that support them) to help foster the changes that are necessary for them to stop choosing violence and to encourage alternative ways of behaving; by working with children and young people to address the trauma they have experienced as a result of FDV; by working with organisations that engage with men to change violent behaviours; and by working with the entire community to change perceptions about FVD and encourage people to stand together and stand up for anyone they believe may be in danger.

We do this work through: pilot programs and action research, including the delivery of training programs within and across sectors; provision of some direct tertiary services work, and supervision for front-line and specialist workers; support for organisations who provide men's behaviour change programs or who may engage men who are violent in other ways; and by working in the community to raise awareness and change perceptions.

SFV also acts as a peak body for men's behaviour change programs in Western Australia and as part of this role convenes the WA Men's Behaviour Change Network.

About this paper

The challenge

The primary purpose of this paper by the Centre for Innovative Justice (CIJ) and Stopping Family Violence (SFV) is to encourage further progress around ways to reflect and report, in safe and responsible ways, the extent to which a user of family and domestic violence (FDV) may be (or not be) starting to take steps towards non-violence.

The need for this discussion stems in part from the reality that courts and statutory authorities regularly make decisions about a perpetrator's level of risk to adult and child victim-survivors without much information about the type and nature of risk that he may continue to pose. In the absence of any more detail, these authorities often look to simplistic measures, such as an individual's attendance at a Men's Behaviour Change Program (MBCP), as an indication of reduced risk.

Participation in – or even completion of – an MBCP or other change-focused program, however, offers little, if any, indication of a meaningful shift in a perpetrator's attitudes or patterns of behaviour. Relying on this type of measure may therefore lead inadvertently to decisions made on the basis of false assumptions that a user of FDV has been 'held accountable' simply by virtue of his referral to an MBCP and that his participation equates to him becoming a safer man.

Given this challenge, it is unsurprising that courts and statutory authorities often ask for additional information about a perpetrator's 'progress' through his participation in an MBCP, because they are looking for guidance to inform their decisions. In the course of the CIJ's and SFV's work with courts in the FDV context, some court staff or members of the judiciary have expressed frustration that they are not provided with any further information.

The request for further information, however, rests on an assumption that an MBCP is the custodian of sufficient – and sufficiently accurate – information about a perpetrator's risk, rather than just the custodian of *some* information that may be relevant at a particular point in time; which may or may not be informed by a perpetrator's family; and which may or may not be relevant to the full range of an individual's behaviours or experience of the particular change-focused intervention.

Because of these caveats about the nature of the information that an MBCP can provide, practitioners have historically been reluctant to offer any comment about an individual perpetrator's participation or 'progress' that could be misconstrued or given inappropriate weight by a decision making authority. In fact, initial iterations of Australian minimum standards for MBCP work that guided the sector in the 1990s, 2000s and for some of the 2010s specifically stated that program completion (exit) reports to a referring body such as a court or child protection authority must be limited to the number of sessions that a user of violence has attended and not go into any further detail.

This position was adopted with the aim that program completion reports not contribute inadvertently to decisions that cause further harm, with these reports often expressing specific cautions that the perpetrator's mere participation in the program not be given any weight. In the absence of any other information in these reports, however, decision-making bodies increasingly default to a perpetrator's attendance at a program to inform their decisions, reinforcing assumptions that participation in an MBCP equates to behaviour change.

For this reason, the CIJ and SFV consider that it is time for a cautious discussion about ways to reflect and report on the extent to which a user of violence has (or has not) started to take incremental steps on a journey towards eventually becoming a safer man. This is not only to ensure that referring authorities do not make decisions on false assumptions, but also to support the role of programs in the context of wider integrated responses to a perpetrator's behaviours – as well as the continued development of a much-needed evidence base about perpetrator interventions on a broader scale.

The aim

The aim of this paper is to support the development of a framework that can conceptualise, delineate, measure and adopt a set(s)¹ of proximal or 'signposts' indicators. In doing so, this paper goes so far as to propose a preliminary set of draft indicators. The CIJ and SFV have done this, however, to concretise the issues explored in this paper, rather than to suggest these as definitive or finalised ideas. The conceptualisation and delineation of proximal indicators requires significant work and sector-wide input, rather than through a single paper alone. Furthermore, the CIJ and SFV hope that this paper will stimulate discussion regarding the complexities, limitations and potential safe use of proximal indicators, in addition to producing the actual indicators themselves.

As outlined below, these complexities are inherent even in the choice of what term to use to describe these indicators. Irrespective of the term used, however, the focus of this paper is on variables that are not in themselves intermediate and ultimate outcomes in men's behaviour change work. Rather, the focus is on preliminary indicators that *point to the possibility* that a user of violence might be on a journey towards making shifts in his violent and controlling behaviour – shifts that may make a positive difference in the lives of those affected by his behaviour.

Whether these indicators point to the *possibility*, or a *likelihood*, that the perpetrator is on a journey towards making positive shifts is one of several points of conjecture that this paper will explore. In the absence of any available research investigating correlations between proximal indicators and behaviour change outcomes, the CIJ and SFV utilise the wider theoretical and applied behaviour change literature, as well as 'practitioner-based evidence', to construct an initial set of draft indicators that a perpetrator would need to demonstrate in order for a program provider (and the wider system) to have any confidence that he is heading 'in a right direction'² on a behaviour change journey.

The terminology

The CIJ and SFV will emphasise in this paper that these signposts are indicative of some of the *necessary* steppingstones that a user of violence needs to make to be heading 'in a right direction'. They are not, however, *sufficient* – a user of violence might demonstrate these indicators, yet still not be making, or will not end up making, shifts in his violent and controlling behaviour. The fact that these indicators are conceptualised as necessary but not sufficient is one of the several complexities explored in this paper.

¹ As outlined in a later section of this paper, the CIJ and SFV propose the need for a common or core set of proximal indicators, that can be supplemented by additional sets for perpetrators from particular cohorts. There might also be the need for the core set to be varied for, or created anew by, particular communities with unique circumstances. As such, this paper will use the term 'framework of proximal indicators' to convey that what is required is more complex and nuanced than developing a 'set'.

² The wording of this phrase is deliberate, as men's behaviour change journeys are complex and can vary significantly between perpetrators.

As such, this paper will interchangeably use the terms ‘proximal indicators’, ‘signpost indicators’ and ‘signposts’, connoting variables that point towards possibilities of current and/or future shifts in behaviour. The term ‘steppingstones’ will be used less frequently, as this metaphor connotes a more deterministic or linear relationship between these variables and behaviour change outcomes, that the perpetrator is definitely on a right path if he demonstrates these steppingstones. Unfortunately, there has been little research conducted to support the use of indicators with this degree of confidence.

The CIJ and SFV recognise the preference of many policy workers and practitioners to adopt terms other than ‘perpetrator’ in policy and written practice guidance: as such, the paper often employs the term ‘user of violence’. The term ‘perpetrator’ is also frequently adopted due to its brevity, and also because women’s gender-based violence activist movements have not determined that use of the term ‘perpetrator’ should be discontinued. The CIJ and SFV – like many policy workers and advocates – do not recommend the use of this term for adolescents who use relationship violence nor for women who use force in the context of being victim-survivors of FDV. These two cohorts, however, are not addressed in this paper.

The structure

This paper is substantial. The development of a framework of proximal indicators requires consideration of a range of issues, which the paper seeks to explore in a comprehensive way and to function as a resource for a broad range of readers. We note that this paper also makes extensive use of footnotes, both for the purposes of citing references, as well as for explanations that expand on points made in the body of the text. This approach is intended to broaden the usefulness of the paper as a resource for furthering discussion and debate. Readers may use the following guide, however, to determine those chapters – and the extent of detail – that is most relevant for their purposes.

This paper will commence with an overview in **Chapter One** of the rationale and need for a framework of proximal or signpost indicators.

Chapter Two will focus on some of the foundational principles and assumptions that underpin the analyses contained within the paper. This will include consideration of what is meant by a ‘change-focused perpetrator intervention’, of how FDV is conceptualised, and the assumptions made by this paper about behaviour change processes in the context of perpetrator interventions and perpetrator intervention systems.

Chapter Three will involve an in-depth exploration of issues related to MBCP provision of exit (program completion) reports. These explorations will initially be situated within the specific contexts of MBCP reporting to particular referrers – namely, child protection authorities, courts, corrections and family courts. The section will follow with a discussion of several common issues related to this reporting, including:

- the influence of state-based MBCP minimum standards and the positions of peak bodies in shaping practice on reporting over the past 25 years,
- reasons why MBCP providers, in addition to the stipulation of relevant minimum standards, have been hesitant to provide anything other than a list of service attendance dates when responding to exit reporting requests by mandated referrers, and
- the important conceptual and practical difference in basing reports on an analysis of perpetrator-driven risk as distinct from what ‘progress’ the perpetrator has made through the intervention; in particular, in what ways the degree and nature of the risk posed by the perpetrator and the impact on adult and child victim-survivors and on family functioning has, or has not, shifted over the course of the intervention.

This chapter will conclude with an exploration of reasons why providing only a list of attendance dates in exit reporting can be problematic in some circumstances. These include that:

- despite the best efforts of program providers to make clear in the wording of feedback letters that the correlation between a man meeting all of the attendance requirements of the MBCP and actual behaviour change is weak, basing feedback letters on the provision of attendance dates alone is likely to reinforce the widely held assumption that ‘successful’ completion of an MBCP (in terms of attendance) equals behaviour change;
- if no other information is provided, mandated referrers will fall back on their current and entrenched default practice of making important decisions (for example, regarding legal matters, perpetrator monitoring, case closure) based solely on whether the perpetrator has met participation requirements;
- in circumstances where it is clear that a perpetrator is not ‘reaching first base’ in the behaviour change process, the CIJ and SFV will argue that it is ethically questionable for program providers to not provide such information to mandated referrers when it is clear that a perpetrator, despite being well advanced into the intervention, is still at a very early stage in a behaviour change journey;
- confining exit reports and feedback letters to service attendance dates only means that, at best, valuable information about his behavioural patterns that impact on adult and child victim-survivor safety and wellbeing becomes locked away in MBCP providers’ individual case file notes – thereby making it highly difficult to keep the perpetrator within view of the wider perpetrator intervention system over time and to scaffold potential journeys of accountability over time;
- and that, in a context where many perpetrators require multiple change-focused interventions over time, an exit report focusing on service attendance dates only gives no guidance for any future interventions to tailor their approach based on what is learnt about the perpetrator’s engagement in the current intervention.

In chapter three the CIJ and SFV will also argue that developing a framework of proximal indicators will provide MBCP practitioners with the language to translate their observations of the perpetrator’s engagement with the program – and more specifically, of his engagement with the content, critical reflections and change processes that he is being invited to consider, make and participate in – into clear, succinct feedback to referrers. Furthermore, to word this feedback in ways that draw a direct line to the implications for continued risk and impacts experienced by adult and child victim-survivors of his behaviour.

Chapter Four explores the need for a framework of proximal indicators to support ongoing assessment and monitoring of each perpetrator’s engagement with, and participation in, genuine behaviour change processes throughout the course of the intervention; in other words, by guiding the development of clinical tools focusing on ongoing assessment. **Chapter Five** outlines the potential role of a proximal indicators framework to assist with the evaluation of MBCPs and other change-focused perpetrator interventions, by guiding the development of performance indicators associated with intended immediate outcomes.

Chapter Six follows with considerations of what might be the main features of a framework of indicators, beyond the mere listing of them. This will include the different layers of generality or specificity of the indicators, and whether they should be designed to support qualitative professional judgments and/or be scored.

The delineation of these features is based in part on an analysis of previous and existing attempts to establish variables that could be considered proximal or signpost indicators in a behaviour change process, focusing on work conducted in Victoria, NSW, NZ and the U.S. As this analysis is quite technical in parts, it is located as **Appendix A** rather than in the main body of the report.

The next and penultimate chapter of this paper (**Chapter Seven**) will take tentative steps towards delineating an actual (and very imperfect) set of proximal indicators, for the purpose of stimulating discussion amongst the sector towards their further development (or indeed, their wholesale replacement).

Finally, **Chapter Eight** will highlight particular implementation complexities regarding the safe use of proximal indicators for the purposes outlined previously; these will include what the use of these indicators might mean within particular community and perpetrator cohort contexts.

Perpetrator cohorts covered by this paper

This paper focuses on the development of signpost or proximal indicators in relation to users of FDV aged 18 years or older, who are:

- from any Indigenous nation,
- from any ethnocultural group,
- gay or bisexual,
- transitioning between genders or who choose a non-binary gender identity, provided that they do not solely or predominantly identify as female,
- intersex,
- identify as queer, and/or
- who are perpetrating violence either against family members as part of a current or former nuclear family arrangement, or against elderly parents or family members not part of their immediate family.

It is important to note two cohorts that this paper does not encompass.

First, adolescent relationship violence and adolescent violence in the home are both distinct fields within FDV perpetration, with some overlap but also some highly important differences to the work with adult perpetrators.³ While some of the concepts and discussion in this paper might be relevant to programs conducted for this cohort, particularly where young people are using FDV against intimate partners, there is likely to be some significant areas of mismatch.

Second, a large and growing volume of research – including a number of studies conducted within Australia – demonstrate that a high proportion of women in heterosexual relationships who have been assessed by first responders (for example, police) as a or the perpetrator in a FDV situation are

³ Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020). The PIPA project: Positive interventions for perpetrators of adolescent violence in the home (AVITH) (Research report, 04/2020). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS; Fitz-Gibbon, K., Elliott, K. and Maher, J. (2018). *Investigating adolescent family violence in Victoria: Understanding experiences and practitioner perspectives*. Monash Gender and Family Violence Research Program, Faculty of Arts, Monash University; Kehoe, M., Ott, N., & Hopkins, L. (2020). Responding to adolescent violence in the home: A community mental health approach. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 41(4), 342-354.

not the predominant aggressor in the relationship.⁴ The distinction here is between these women using one or a small number of isolated acts of force as self-defence, as part of their general resistance to their male partner's use of patterned coercive control, or as acts of dignity-making in the context of their and their children's lives being severely reduced through this coercive control – versus the widespread, continuous and patterned use of violence by the male adult in the family. Programs working with women who use force are substantially different from MBCPs⁵ and, as such, require a distinct body of work separate from that explored through this paper.

⁴ Boxall, H., Dowling, C., & Morgan, A. (2020). Female perpetrated domestic violence: Prevalence of self-defensive and retaliatory violence. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*, no. 584. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology; Flood, M. (2012). *He hits, she hits: Assessing debates regarding men's and women's experiences of domestic violence*. Seminar, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, Sydney, November 6; Hester, M. (2012). Portrayal of women as intimate partner domestic violence perpetrators. *Violence Against Women* 18(9), 1067-1082; Larance, L., & Miller, S. (2017). In her own words: women describe their use of force resulting in court-ordered intervention. *Violence Against Women*, 23(12), 1536-1559; Mansour, J. (2014). *Women defendants of AVOs: What is their experience of the justice system?* Women's Legal Service NSW; No to Violence (2019). *Predominant aggressor identification and victim misidentification: Identifying predominant aggressors remains a challenge to family violence responses*. NTV discussion paper, Melbourne; Reeves, E. (2021). 'I'm not at all protected and I think other women should know that, that they're not protected either': Victim-survivor experiences of 'misidentification' in Victoria's family violence service system, *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, 10(2), online first; Warren, A., Martin, R., Chung, D. (2020). *Women who use force: Final Report. Volume 2 – International Literature Review*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne; Women's Legal Service of Victoria (2018a). *Snapshot of police Family Violence Intervention Order applications: January – May 2018*; Women's Legal Service of Victoria (2018b). *"Officer she's psychotic and I need protection": Police misidentification of the 'primary aggressor' in family violence incidents in Victoria*. Policy Paper 1.

⁵ Kertesz, M., Humphreys, C., & Larance, L.Y. (2021). *Interventions for women who use force in a family context: An Australian Practice Framework*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne; Kertesz, M., Humphreys, C., Ovensden, G., & Spiteri-Staines, A. (2020). *Women who use force: Final Report. Volume 1 – Executive summary, Positive Shift program, evaluation of Positive Shift, and practice framework*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne.

1. Background and overview

Defining success in family and domestic violence (FDV) men's behaviour change program (MBCP) work has been a difficult and contested issue since this work began, internationally in the late 1970s and in Australia in the following decade. Several bodies of work, research publications and practice guides over the past ten years have attempted to explore this issue and provide options for MBCP evaluators and program providers. This has included:

- the delineation of outcome indicators based on qualitative research with women victim-survivors concerning what success means for them stemming from their partner's or former partner's participation in a program;⁶
- research exploring child victim-survivor perspectives;⁷
- the use of Quality of Life indicators for measuring changes in victim-survivor wellbeing;⁸
- analyses of the applicability of potentially relevant psychometric scales with validated psychometric properties;⁹ and
- broader outcome frameworks that attempt to scope the complexities, nuances and wide-spanning objectives inherent in MBCP work.¹⁰

Determining success criteria for MBCP work has proven difficult, in part, due to the significant variability in how this work is conceptualised, and in how FDV itself is understood.¹¹ This is highlighted by a recent attempt to identify scales with strong psychometric properties for potential use in the evaluation of MBCPs.¹² Many of the available scales with proven psychometric properties were found to be based on a conceptual and theoretical understanding of FDV at odds with current understandings of coercive controlling violence, and would be seen by many in the field as measuring the wrong things.

Added to this complexity is the established understanding that MBCPs, like other specialist perpetrator interventions, best and most safely operate within the context of multi-agency and multi-sector integrated FDV responses. Defining what success means in MBCP work is influenced by

⁶ Westmarland, N., Kelly, L., & Chalder-Mills, J. (2010). *Domestic violence perpetrator programmes: What counts as success?* London: Respect.

⁷ Alderson, S., Kelly, L., & Westmarland, N. (2013). *Domestic violence perpetrator programmes and children and young people*. London and Durham: London Metropolitan University and Durham University; Lamb, K. (2017). *Seen and heard: embedding the voices of children and young people who have experienced family violence in programs for fathers*. PhD thesis. University of Melbourne; Noble-Carr, D., Moore, T., & McArthur, M. (2020). Children's experiences and needs in relation to domestic and family violence: Findings from a meta-synthesis. *Child & Family Social Work*, 25(1), 182-191.

⁸ McLaren, H., Fischer, J., & Zannettino, L. (2020). *Defining quality of life indicators for measuring perpetrator intervention effectiveness* (Research report, 05/2020). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

⁹ Nicholas, A., Ovenden, G., & Vlasis, R. (2020). *The Evaluation guide: A guide for evaluating behaviour change programs for men who use domestic and family violence* (ANROWS Insights, 02/2020). Sydney: ANROWS.

¹⁰ Respect (2017b). *Respect Outcomes Framework*. London: Respect UK; Vlasis, R., & Green, D. (2018). *Developing an outcomes framework for men's behaviour change programs: A discussion paper*. Stopping Family Violence.

¹¹ These complexities are scoped in the Stopping Family Violence discussion paper: Vlasis, R., & Green, D. (2018), *ibid*.

¹² Nicholas, A., Ovenden, G., & Vlasis, R. (2020), *ibid*.

the overall objectives of any given integrated response, and how those involved in the response define and work towards victim-survivor safety and perpetrator accountability.¹³

Furthermore, perpetrator interventions do not exist as an island wholly responsible for a perpetrator's accountability and change; many aspects of a change process are associated with factors far beyond that of the intervention itself. Change-focused programs contribute to a perpetrator's journey towards accountability and change but cannot be held solely responsible for it. To this effect, recent work on conceptualising the foundational principles of potentially strong perpetrator intervention systems – that is, how agencies, sectors and workforces take collective responsibility for responding to perpetrator-driven risk, and for scaffolding processes and journeys of perpetrator accountability both in the short and longer-term – serves as an essential backdrop to how the success of any constituent perpetrator interventions is defined.¹⁴

At the very core of determining what success means for how perpetrator interventions can contribute towards strong perpetrator intervention systems is how the oft-used term 'perpetrator accountability' is defined. Recent thinking and practice guidance in this area has challenged the default understanding of perpetrator accountability as mechanisms that are 'done to' users of violence, inviting new conceptualisations that are based on an understanding of perpetrator patterns of behaviour and their impacts on adult and child victim-survivors, as well as the accountability of constituent parts of a system to victim-survivor needs.¹⁵

Challenges in identifying proximal indicators

The above-mentioned areas of ongoing work provide important avenues to progress evaluation of MBCPs and other perpetrator interventions. They do so by providing guidance on how these evaluations and evaluation methodologies can become fit-for-purpose based on a more contextualised understanding of these interventions and of what they attempt to achieve. These areas of work focus largely on 'big picture' evaluation activity concerning a program or intervention as a whole, and how it operates as part of a perpetrator intervention system.

Parallel to these areas of work, a need has been identified to focus on one particular aspect of MBCP evaluation activity – conceptualising and defining 'proximal' or 'signpost' indicators to help determine whether a user of violence participating in an intervention is demonstrating the necessary steps required as part of a journey towards (and of) behaviour change.¹⁶ This need has been identified because, while the above areas of work are critical in helping to guide program evaluation activity towards generating meaningful data and analyses, funding is often not available to conduct formal, independent evaluations of MBCPs and other change-focused perpetrator interventions.

¹³ Gover, A., Boots, D., & Harper, S. (2021). Courting justice: Tracing the evolution and future of Domestic Violence Courts. *Feminist Criminology*, 16(3), 366-381.

¹⁴ Chung, D., Davis, K., Cordier, R., Campbell, E., Wong, T., Salter, S., Austen, S., O'Leary, P., Brackenridge, J., Vlasis, R., Green, D., Pracilio, A., Young, A., Gore, A., Speyer, S., Mahoney, N., Anderson, S., & Bisset, T. (2020). *Improved accountability: The role of perpetrator intervention systems* (Research report, 20/2020). Sydney: ANROWS; Vlasis, R., Campbell, E., & Green, D. (2019). *Foundations for family and domestic violence perpetrator intervention systems*. RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice and Stopping Family Violence.

¹⁵ New Zealand Family Violence Death Review Committee (2020). *Sixth report / Te Pūrongo tuaono: Men who use violence / Ngā tāne ka whakamahi i te whakarekerekere*. Wellington: Health Quality & Safety Commission; Pritchard, A., Wasaga, L., & Vlasis, R. (2022). *Caboolture Perpetrator Accountability Taskforce: MAARC tool*. Mercy Community, Queensland; Vlasis, Campbell & Green (2019), *ibid*.

¹⁶ Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2019). *Evaluation readiness, program quality and outcomes in men's behaviour change programs* (Research report, 01/2019). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

Using the terminology suggested in a recently published practice guide to assist evaluators of MBCPs,¹⁷ evaluation of intermediate outcomes (for example, reductions in the extent and severity of perpetrator patterns of coercive control, increased space for action in adult and child victim-survivor lives) and ultimate outcomes (for example, sustained felt and actual victim-survivor safety and autonomy) can be beyond the reach of many evaluations. Determining intermediate – let alone ultimate – outcomes generally cannot be possible without systematic attempts to follow-up victim-survivors and perpetrators several months (or even years) after program completion. Indeed, given the amount of time needed for some change processes to take root, a behaviour change journey often requires a series of connected interventions; in this context, it can be argued that some evaluations should ideally focus on the journey (the ‘whole’) rather on singular interventions (the individual ‘parts’).

Establishing realistic expectations for what any single MBCP or other specialist perpetrator intervention can achieve is crucial.¹⁸ Facilitating meaningful shifts in a perpetrator’s patterns of behaviour, including patterns of coercive control that impact significantly on adult and child victim-survivor safety and wellbeing and on family functioning as a whole, can take considerable time. For some users of violence, in some situations, facilitating meaningful shifts in these patterns is too much to expect from participation in any single MBCP alone.¹⁹ Indeed, it can often not be clear by the end of a perpetrator’s participation in a program exactly what shifts in behaviour have been achieved and in what direction,²⁰ as well as what shifts are likely to be sustained or only temporary.

Practical complications in assessing intermediate outcomes

Two practical issues complicate the ability to evaluate intermediate level outcomes related to shifts in the perpetrator’s behaviour. The first concerns variability in the availability of information about the man’s behaviour from victim-survivors. While partner contact is widely recognised as a crucial component of MBCPs, the ability of partner contact practitioners to reach out to victim-survivors is influenced by a wide variety of factors.

These factors include:

- perpetrator gatekeeping of their partner’s access to services;
- her previous experience of support services and what this means for the degree of trust she has in the partner contact service;
- limitations in the capacity of the partner contact service, and high caseloads;

¹⁷ Nicholas, A., Ovenden, G., & Vlasis, R. (2020), *ibid*.

¹⁸ Day, Vlasis, Chung & Green (2019); Vlasis, R., Ridley, S., Green, D., & Chung, D. (2017). *Family and domestic violence perpetrator programs: Issues paper of current and emerging trends, developments and expectations*. Perth, Australia: Stopping Family Violence.

¹⁹ Mandel, D. (2020). *Perpetrator intervention program completion certificates are dangerous*. White paper: Safe and Together Institute.

²⁰ Several recent Australian and overseas studies have documented victim-survivor experiences of their partner’s or former partner’s participation in an MBCP being associated with a worsening of his patterns of coercive control: Chung, D., Anderson, S., Green, D., & Vlasis, R. (2020). *Prioritising women’s safety in Australian perpetrator interventions: The purpose and practices of partner contact* (Research report, 08/2020). Sydney: ANROWS; Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2019), *ibid*; McGinn, T., Taylor, B, McColgan, M. (2019). A qualitative study of the perspectives of domestic violence survivors on behavior change programs with perpetrators, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, online ahead of print; Opitz, C. (2014). Considerations for Partner contact during men’s behaviour change programs: Systemic responses and engagement. *Ending Men’s Violence Against Women and Children: The No to Violence Journal*, Autumn, 114–142.

- parallel processes through which partner contact work can become marginalised and de-prioritised at an organisational level relative to the work with the men; and
- organisational policies that restrict the ability of partner contact to be offered as a service in its own right independent of the man's participation or lack thereof in the program.²¹

These and other factors result in information about the man's behaviour, from the perspective of the victim-survivor, not being available for a significant proportion of men participating in MBCPs.

A second and related practical limitation concerns the significant proportion of users of violence referred into MBCPs who do not currently reside with their partner and family, and who have limited contact due to conditions of a protection order or other court order. In many of these situations, particularly when a child protection authority is involved, feedback from the MBCP provider to the referring organisation after the man has completed the program is used to make a judgement about whether it is safe for the man to reunite with his family. If at this point the man does become reunited with his family, for example because his participation in the program has ended, there is often no service system 'eyes' on him to assess and monitor how his behaviour actually pans out. In other words, due to his lack of or limited contact with his family during his participation in the MBCP, it is not possible during this time to attempt to assess intermediate level outcomes concerning shifts in his actual behaviour towards both adult and child victim survivors.

This is also an issue for MBCP participants who are not in a current relationship and who have little or no contact with any past partners towards whom they have been violent. Many of these participants are likely to form new families in the future, presenting a risk to future partners and children (particularly non-biological children). Unfortunately, in most of these situations, no links are drawn to the man's past behaviour until he comes back into contact with the system due to his renewed use of violent and controlling behaviour.

These difficulties in assessing intermediate (let alone ultimate) outcomes of MBCP work necessitates, in some circumstances, an increased focus on evaluating *immediate* outcomes; in other words, proximal indicators that might be 'signposts' that a user of violence is (or is not) 'on a journey' *towards* achieving shifts in his behaviour that would make a positive and important difference in the lives of those affected by his use of violence.

As this paper will highlight, drawing conclusions on the basis of proximal or signpost indicators can be fraught in some situations. For example, it can be tricky to interpret positive indications gauged solely from the quality and nature of the man's participation in the program and his associated discourse and contributions, when there is no partner support associated with the case, or where the perpetrator's contact with his family is limited.

Despite these difficulties, however, there is a substantial need for a body of work that attempts to conceptualise and define a set, or sets, of proximal indicators associated with MBCP work. This is required to support MBCP evaluation activity in the context of the limitations and complexities highlighted above.²² Even more so, this work is required to assist MBCP providers to fulfil their crucial function of contributing to integrated responses and to perpetrator intervention systems, through the provision of highly specialised information and analysis.

²¹ Chung, D., Anderson, S., Green, D., & Vlasis, R. (2020), *ibid*.

²² Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2019), *ibid*.

Complexities in providing exit reports²³ to referrers

The first iterations of minimum standards for running MBCPs, developed in Victoria in the 1990s and 2000s, significantly limited the feedback that program providers could give to mandated referrers²⁴ seeking exit reports after a user of violence has completed his participation in the program.²⁵ As these Victorian standards, first developed by No to Violence in 1995 and revised in 2006,²⁶ had significant influence Australia-wide, these standards set the shape for practice in reporting to referrers during the first few decades of MBCP work in Australia.

Most, if not all, MBCP minimum standards in Australia and overseas, including those developed by No to Violence, emphasise(d) the critical importance of MBCPs providing information to referrers and other relevant agencies about issues of risk, as these issues arise during a man's participation in an MBCP. The role of MBCPs in proactively engaging in information sharing activities in a timely manner to support coordinated and collaborative risk management responses to elevated risk has never been contentious.²⁷ This paper is *not* about regular information sharing practices between program providers and mandated referrers that occur throughout the course of the intervention.

Providing an exit report to mandated referrers regarding a man's participation in a program, outside the context of information sharing as part of an integrated response to manage escalations in risk, has until recently however been strongly discouraged in the field. Historically, program providers have been encouraged to report the man's attendance dates only.

Minimum standard 29 of the (now outdated) No to Violence standards manual stated:

When providing any information to a court or other statutory body, providers include information about the complexities and uncertainties of men's behaviour change work.

²³ This paper uses the term *exit report* to refer to documentation produced by a program provider for the referring agency at the point in which a perpetrator has completed participation in the program. This term is preferred to 'completion report' as in some instances a report is written after a man has discontinued his participation in the program on his own accord, or been exited from it by the program provider, before completing the program.

²⁴ This paper uses the term *mandated referrer* for situations where either: (i) a court (Magistrates', Local or Children's) or community correctional/probation or parole services has legally mandated a perpetrator to attend an MBCP; (ii) a court, court-associated or community correctional agency or program has referred a perpetrator to attend an MBCP as part of a voluntary pre-sentencing or post-sentencing agreement made by the perpetrator; (iii) a child protection authority has 'strongly encouraged' a perpetrator to participate in an MBCP in the absence of a Children's Court order, with the understanding that the outcomes of the perpetrator's participation in the program will influence subsequent child protection authority decision-making in relation to the man's access to his children; or (iv) a family court makes a referral for a father to participate in an MBCP. These various contexts in which a mandated referrer might expect an exit report from an MBCP provider will be outlined in detail in a later section of this report.

²⁵ No To Violence. (2006). *Men's behaviour change group work: Minimum standards and quality practice*. Melbourne: No To Violence Male Family Violence Prevention Association.

²⁶ The third iteration of Victorian state standards for MBCPs were published in 2018, with ownership transitioned from No to Violence to the government authority Family Safety Victoria.

²⁷ Program providers vary in the extent to which they emphasise and put time and resources into proactive information sharing and coordinated and collaborative risk management; they also vary in the quality of their risk management practice. In part, this variance reflects the degree to which any given program provider is embedded within a local integrated response, and the nature and strengths of its relationships with partner agencies. However, the need to share risk-related information with integrated response partners in a timely manner has been consistently emphasised across MBCP minimum standards both in Australia and internationally.

They do not:

- *Provide any feedback about men that helps them to avoid penalties, or that lessens the strength of a justice or child protection response to their use of violent and controlling behaviour.*
- *Provide a court or other statutory body with any comments about men's behaviour outside the group, or with timelines for behaviour change or family reunification.*²⁸

As such, at that time No to Violence advised that feedback letters to a court or other statutory authority should be guided by the following example:

The above named man has attended xxx sessions in the Men (Can) Stop Family Violence Program.

Our program is based on two principles: that women and children have the right to live their lives freely and safely; and that men who deny them this right need to take responsibility for their actions and choose to change.

In our program, men who have been violent or controlling towards a family member attend a Men's Behaviour Change Group weekly for at least 20 weeks. The sessions are held every Tuesday night, from 7pm until 9pm. Our two counsellors, Jill and Jack, invite men to reflect on their behaviour and learn ways to relate non-violently.

The process of behaviour change is a long one, and participation in our program is in no way predictive of positive change. Whilst there is evidence that men can and do modify their behaviour, research over the longer term demonstrates that it is exceedingly difficult to predict which men will sustain positive change or for how long.

Furthermore, any views that we might hold about xxx's behaviour outside the group are conjecture, based on our own observations, and what xxx and his family members say. Confidentiality precludes us making public any information from xxx's family members.

As such, we can make no comments on xxx's behaviour now or in the future.

*We strongly believe that men should not use their participation in men's behaviour change programs as a means to avoid the penalties that they are due, or in any other way to lessen the strength of a justice or child protection response to men's violent and controlling behaviour. We urge the Court not to take xxx's participation in our program into account when making its decisions.*²⁹

Essentially, MBCP providers were required under the minimum standards to report a list of the perpetrator's attendance dates only. The rationale for this minimum standard and suggested approach to exit report writing was stated as follows:

²⁸ *ibid*, p. 100

²⁹ No To Violence. (2006). *Men's behaviour change group work: Resources for quality practice*. Melbourne: No To Violence Male Family Violence Prevention Association. p. 8

As noted earlier, a significant number of men seek to participate because of a legal mandate; that is, a court or other statutory body has told them they must. Other times, men choose to participate in a men's behaviour change program on the advice of their lawyer, in the hope that this might help them to avoid a criminal conviction or achieve a lesser penalty.

Usually men who are directed to participate by a statutory body are required to prove their attendance by having a facilitator sign an attendance sheet. However, courts or child protection workers do occasionally request information additional to an attendance record. Facilitators sometimes find themselves asked to give feedback on a man's participation in the group, his attitudes, and behaviour in or outside the group, or timelines for 'improvement in his behaviour'. In child protection matters, sometimes staff are asked to suggest reunification timelines.

Clearly, facilitators' views about a man's behaviour outside a group are conjecture, based on their own observations of the man, and what he and his family members say. Confidentiality precludes making public any information from family members, which can mean that facilitators are unable to back up their assertions and/or that only the man's voice is heard.

For these reasons, NTV recommends that program staff do not provide a court or other statutory body with any comments about a man's behaviour outside the group, or timelines for behaviour change or family reunification. Furthermore, NTV strongly discourages providing information about a man's participation or behaviour in a group, as likelihood of this information being taken out of context, misunderstood, or misused is too great.³⁰

While subsequently adopting a somewhat different stance to the equivalent 2006 Victorian minimum standards (as will be explained later in this section), the NSW Government concurred with the caution required when providing exit reports to mandated referrers:

The feedback that MBCPs can give to referrers is limited in several ways:

- program staff cannot give feedback about matters that are not related to a man's use of violence or women's and children's safety*
- a man's presentation in interviews, one-on-one sessions and groups might be significantly different to his behaviour towards his family members, and therefore is an unreliable indicator of risk*
- in some circumstances, when a man or his legal representatives are able to obtain or copy or see the feedback provided to an active referrer, it might not be safe to include any information from a man's partner or other family members due to the risk of retaliation—this means that the program might be unable to report what they know of men's behaviour outside the group unless it has already been disclosed or admitted by the man.*

These limits mean that program staff often cannot convey a true picture of a man's behaviour in any report they make. Providing information in a report about the man's presentation in the program can be misleading, as often a man's self-reports,

³⁰ *Men's behaviour change group work: Minimum standards and quality practice*, p. 99

attitudes and behaviours expressed in the group do not portray a true indication of his use of violence and the degree of risk that he poses.

Furthermore, referrers need to be made aware that program completion does not necessarily indicate that a man's risk of using violence has been reduced.³¹

The reasons for this initial stance and practice of reporting attendance dates only when providing exit reports to referrers – outside and separate from situations of regular information sharing in relation to escalations of, or other matters pertaining to, risk – will be unpacked in detail in later parts of this paper. The above rationale outlines some of the main concerns, namely:

- the extreme caution required in making judgements about the nature and degree of any behaviour change associated with a man's participation in a program based solely on observations of the man's discourse and observed behaviour during group-work and individual program sessions; and
- the difficulty in using more reliable information obtained from victim-survivors in exit reporting, due to complexities regarding confidentiality, and in some cases, the potential for the perpetrator to obtain a copy of the report and to learn what his partner or former partner has disclosed about his behaviour.

This previous Victorian minimum standard of limiting exit reporting to service participation dates departed from the practice in Corrective Services contexts of constructing exit reports after an offender has completed an offending behaviour program. Exit reports in these contexts are often based, in part, on the administration of psychometric scales pre- and post-intervention. These are scales that (in some cases) many community-based MBCP providers would not consider relevant in relation to the theory of change underpinning their program. Historically, these exit reports have focused on changes in dynamic risk variables based on generalist offending Risk Need Responsivity framework understandings of criminogenic needs, rather than on a gender-based understanding of FDV as a very specific offence type.^{32,33}

A change in course: Is reporting participation dates enough?

As mentioned previously, the stance taken in the mid-late 1990s and 2000s by No to Violence shaped MBCP practice across Australia in providing exit reports to mandated referrers. While there has been no research conducted with program providers across Australian jurisdictions on contemporary practice in providing exit reports, the approach of basing exit reports on a list of attendance dates only appears to remain reasonably widespread.

Calls to reconsider this practice have accelerated, however, in light of reasons briefly summarised below and detailed in a later section of this paper. As early as 2007, the Queensland professional practice standards for MBCPs stated that:

³¹ NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice. (2012). *Towards safe families: A men's domestic violence behaviour change practice guide*. Sydney, Australia: State of New South Wales. Written by No to Violence and Red Tree Consulting. p.134

³² Vlasis, R. (2018). *Application of the Risk Need Responsivity framework by community-based MBCP providers*. Sydney, Australia: NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence.

³³ There is emerging work in some Correctional jurisdictions, however – such as in South Australia – to broaden exit reporting to include some focus on proximal change indications. It is also important to note that the administration of psychometric scales pre- and post-intervention is often as much, if not more, for the purposes of overall program evaluation in Correctional contexts than it is to support clinical judgements of behaviour change.

*Feedback to referral services including statutory bodies will include specific behaviour change identified by preferably both the participant and those impacted by his abuse.*³⁴

The NSW minimum standards for MBCPs, published initially in 2011 and revised in 2017, adopted the vaguely worded standard:

*Standard 5.8: MBCP providers must comply with the requirements of a referring agency to report on participants' completion of a program.*³⁵

This standard can be criticised as being too open to interpretation: if understood literally, it can erroneously suggest that referring agencies should have the power to 'dictate' what information should be included in exit reports. The NSW Government clarified the interpretation of this standard in the *Towards Safe Families*³⁶ practice guide published the year following the introduction of the NSW minimum standards. This practice guide reiterated that, when providing reports to a Local Court, NSW MBCP providers must maintain the practice suggested by No to Violence outlined in their 2006 minimum standards manual.³⁷ When providing completion reports to child protection authorities or Corrective Services referrers, however, the practice guide recommended an expanded approach:

*Because reporting to Community Services [child protection services] or Corrective Services NSW needs to include information directly pertaining to risk and safety, to assist with risk management, it can include information provided by the man's partner, as well as any other relevant information.*³⁸

This difference in recommended approach to exit reporting was based on the assumption that it would be more difficult in child protection and Correctional contexts than in court situations for a user of violence to obtain a copy of the report (or at least to obtain a copy without redaction) and therefore become privy to the victim-survivor's disclosures about his behaviour. In a court situation, however, any report provided to a Magistrate technically needs to be tabled as a court document that the user of violence and his legal representation are entitled to obtain, unless there are specific provisions for the Magistrate to withhold sensitive information.

An expanded view of exit reporting to referrers has also been adopted by Family Safety Victoria in the current minimum standards for MBCP work in Victoria.³⁹ Unlike the No to Violence 2006 version, the equivalent minimum standard now states:

³⁴ Queensland Department of Communities (2007). *Professional practice standards: Working with men who perpetrate domestic and family violence*. Brisbane, Australia: State of Queensland. p. 29

³⁵ NSW Department of Justice (2017). *Practice standards for men's domestic violence behaviour change programs*. Sydney, Australia: State of New South Wales. p. 17

³⁶ NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice (2012), *ibid*.

³⁷ In reality, however, up to the publication date of this paper, NSW Local Courts – the equivalent of Magistrates Courts in other Australian jurisdictions – provide very few referrals of perpetrators to MBCPs.

³⁸ *ibid*, p. 27

³⁹ Minimum standards for conducting MBCP work in Victoria are now owned by Family Safety Victoria (FSV), a government department created to oversee the implementation of reforms in response to the recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence. Subsequent to the FSV minimum standards being released, No to Violence published an implementation guide to assist program providers in interpreting the standards [No to Violence (2018). *Implementation guide: Men's behaviour change minimum standards*] – however, this guide provided no additional guidance to standard 4.4.

Standard 4.4: A report should be made following the perpetrator's completion, termination or withdrawal from the program. The report must include:

- *reason for termination or withdrawal*
- *assessment of risk (pre and post program)*
- *attendance at the program*
- *any relevant referrals.*⁴⁰

To be discussed in more detail in later sections in this report, this cautious 'opening up' of suggested MBCP practice in providing exit reports to referrers has been taking place for at least two reasons.

First, as can be seen in the suggested approaches towards exit reporting in *Towards Safe Families* and by Family Safety Victoria, the reporting of service attendance dates alone is not seen as sufficient to assist mandated referrers to understand how the risk posed to adult and child victim-survivors might have (or not have) shifted – in either direction – at the point of the perpetrator's exit from the program compared with the initial point of referral. This consideration corresponds with calls in the practice-based literature to focus exit reporting on changes in risk, rather than on the man's behaviour change 'progress',⁴¹ a difference that will be unpacked later in this paper.

A second consideration concerns an increasing recognition of the roles and responsibilities of mandated referrers to become an effective part of perpetrator intervention systems, as well as to take collective responsibility for scaffolding journeys of perpetrator accountability and to keep perpetrators within view.⁴² While the male family violence intervention field has been reluctant to provide information which could be misunderstood and misapplied in problematic and potentially dangerous ways, it is now becoming recognised that these referrers need to be equipped with the knowledge and understanding required to use such information appropriately.

Accordingly, the CIJ and SFV argue in this paper that child protection, court-based and Correctional referrers are often placed in the position of making important – sometimes crucial – decisions that can have major bearings on adult and child victim-survivor safety and wellbeing. Not to trust them with any information at the point of a man's exit from a program other than attendance dates could deny the crucial information that they need to make appropriate and safe decisions to the best of their ability.

Third, in the absence of such information, decision makers have often defaulted to the information they have been provided and, as such, make decisions around safety based on program attendance data alone. It is often the case that decisions around access to children are influenced by attendance and completion data, despite the warnings that this information should not be used in this way. In fact, without information to contextualise or challenge a perpetrator's narrative, it is often left to the perpetrator themselves to report their 'change' back to these systems.

⁴⁰ Family Safety Victoria (2018). *Men's behaviour change minimum standards*. Melbourne, Australia: State of Victoria. p. 11

⁴¹ Shephard-Bayly, D. (2010). Working with men who use violence: the problem of reporting 'progress'. *Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse Newsletter*, 39, 6-8.

⁴² State of Victoria (2016). *Royal Commission into Family Violence: Report and recommendations*, Vol III, Parl Paper No 132 (2014–16); Vlasis, R., & Campbell, E. (2019). *Bringing pathways towards accountability together: Perpetrator journeys and system roles and responsibilities*. Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University; Vlasis, R., Campbell, E., & Green, D. (2019). *Foundations for family and domestic violence perpetrator intervention systems*. RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice and Stopping Family Violence.

Barriers to exit reporting: The need for proximal indicators

Despite some recognition of the importance of cautiously expanding exit reporting beyond providing information solely about service participation, it is not common practice to do so. This paper will outline several of the barriers and complexities that prevent this becoming more commonplace. Taken as a whole, these barriers operate across service system, organisational and practitioner levels.

The CIJ and SFV argue that one of the major barriers in this respect – in those situations where evidence of the man’s actual behaviour is either not available, or, if available, cannot be safely used in an exit report – is the lack of proximal indicators that can be used as benchmarks to gauge whether the man is taking the steps necessary to become a safer man for current and/or future family members to be around. A man’s mere participation in an intervention – for example, whether he attends each session, the extent to which he contributes productively, rather than stays silent – is widely recognised as a poor correlate of actual risk reduction and behaviour change. This paper therefore explores ways to identify proximal or signpost indicators that MBCP practitioners can directly observe or glean from the man’s participation and discourse.

Contributing to the system’s understanding of the perpetrator

Much has been written in recent years about the importance of keeping the user of violence ‘in view’ of local and broader integrated FDV response systems.⁴³ The emerging literature on perpetrator intervention systems has arisen in part from the growing recognition that scaffolding journeys for perpetrator accountability cannot be left to MBCPs and other specialist perpetrator intervention programs alone. In many (or even most) instances, this scaffolding requires (much) more than a single intervention program and might take place over a period of years, rather than a few months. This of course is particularly likely to be the case for higher-risk higher-harm perpetrators; those with complex needs; and/or those enacting significant patterns of coercive control and social entrapment that have major impacts on family functioning.

Keeping a user of violence within view requires more than a short-term, multi-agency coordinated and collaborative risk response, as important as this is. It requires a perpetrator intervention system to document how risk has or hasn’t changed over time; what is known about the patterns of the perpetrator’s violent and controlling behaviours; the impacts of these patterns on adult and child victim-survivors and on family functioning; and what this means for scaffolding processes for the user of violence to become accountable to these specific impacts and the resulting needs of those affected by his violence.⁴⁴ In this context, an exit report from an MBCP provider can help to equip a local integrated response and perpetrator intervention system with the information and analysis that they need to keep the perpetrator within view.

⁴³ Centre for Innovative Justice (2015). *Opportunities for early intervention: Bringing perpetrators of family violence into view*. Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University; Centre for Innovative Justice (2016). *Pathways towards accountability: Mapping the journeys of perpetrators of family violence*. Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University; Centre for Innovative Justice (2018). *Beyond ‘getting him to a program’: Towards best practice for perpetrator accountability in the Specialist Family Violence Court context*. Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University; Expert Advisory Committee on Perpetrator Interventions (2019). *Final Report*. Government of Victoria; Smith, J. (2013). *Experiences of consequences, accountability and responsibility by men for their violence against women and children*. PhD dissertation. University of Melbourne.

⁴⁴ Mandel, D. (2020). *Perpetrator intervention program completion certificates are dangerous*. White paper: Safe and Together Institute; Vlasis, R., Campbell, E., & Green, D. (2019), *ibid*.

Monitoring perpetrators' participation and journeying through a change process

The need for a more tailored approach to FDV perpetrator interventions has become a central theme of recent reviews focusing on how to increase the quality and effectiveness of these intervention programs.⁴⁵ Concerns have been raised about the approach of providing the exact same intervention to each participant and “hoping that something gets through” to him.⁴⁶

However, this need not take the form of providing different streams of interventions for low, moderate and high-risk perpetrators. Enhancing program effectiveness through tailoring program delivery has recently been described, in the Australian context, as making moderate adjustments to a ‘spine’ intervention to different perpetrators informed by initial and ongoing assessment and monitoring.⁴⁷ Most Australian (and indeed, overseas) community-based MBCP providers do not have the funding or capacity to offer alternative streams of interventions for different categories of perpetrators.⁴⁸ Furthermore, relatively few ‘low risk’ perpetrators self-refer or are referred to MBCPs. Differentiating low from moderate risk perpetrators can also be difficult in situations when there is no partner contact, and/or when it is not possible to conduct a comprehensive risk assessment with the victim-survivor(s).⁴⁹

Rather than differentiated streams, MBCP delivery can become tailored to each participant based on variables such as the:

- degree and nature of risk and impact on adult and child victim-survivors and on family functioning as a whole;
- wishes of the adult and child/ren victim-survivors;
- participant’s capacity to participate in the intervention;
- role, if any, of dynamic risk factors such as substance abuse and mental health;
- nature of his motivation to participate and degree of readiness to change his behaviour; and
- other responsivity factors.

⁴⁵ Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2019), *ibid*; Expert Advisory Committee on Perpetrator Interventions (2019). *Final Report*. Government of Victoria; Polaschek, D. (2016). *Responding to perpetrators of family violence*. Issues Paper 11. New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse; Travers, A., McDonagh, T., Cunningham, T., Armour, C., & Hansen, M. (2021). The effectiveness of interventions to prevent recidivism in perpetrators of intimate partner violence: A systemic review and meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 84, online first.

⁴⁶ Butters, R., Droubay, B., Seawright, Tollefson, D., Lundahl, B., & Whitaker, L. (2020). Intimate partner violence perpetrator treatment: Tailoring interventions to individual needs. *Clinical Social Work*, online first; McMaster, K. (2013). The changing nature of family violence interventions. *Te Awatea Review: The Journal of Te Awatea Violence Research Centre*, 10(1&2), 8-11, p. 11

⁴⁷ Vlasis, R., Ridley, S., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2017), *ibid*.

⁴⁸ That is, ‘MBCP-minimal’ for low-risk, ‘MBCP-standard’ for moderate risk, and ‘MBCP-enhanced’ for high-risk perpetrators.

⁴⁹ Correctional differentiation of FDV offenders into low and moderate risk categories is not necessarily strongly correlated with the actual degree of FDV risk; this differentiation is often based on assessments of generalised offending rather than of specific FDV risk generated from victim-survivor sources of information.

As described recently:

FF *One potential approach towards tailoring is to divide perpetrators into separate categories depending on variables such as these, and to offer each category a different intervention or different arrangement of interventions. Crucially, as per the Colorado model, this approach would enable perpetrators to be reclassified into a higher risk category and provided with a more intense intervention if new information arising during the course of program participation suggests that the initial risk classification is (with hindsight) not accurate.*

... [However,] given that the foundations for a Colorado type approach are still to be built in Australia, responding to concerns about a 'one size fits all approach' does not mean that program providers should jettison providing the one main group-based intervention to perpetrators. Rather, there is the potential to vary, supplement and individualise this intervention component 'spine' in a tailored way.

This could be as 'simple' as expanding the program provider's capacity and program design features to enable more of a focus on each perpetrator as an individual. While all perpetrators in a given program could share the same or similar group-work components, some might repeat group work modules to enable the intervention to be lengthened; some might be given supplementary individual sessions or more of these sessions than the average; some might require additional and preliminary intervention components focusing on issues constraining their ability to participate in the program; and all would experience case planning, goal setting and accountability plan formulation processes that are individually attuned to their situation. This tailoring around a group-work component 'spine' would be far from churning each perpetrator through the same 'one size fits all' intervention.⁵⁰

The CIJ and SFV concur with this argument that, in general, the pre-conditions and funding environment are not set to enable MBCP providers in Australia to offer categorically different interventions to different 'types' of perpetrators (for example, differentiated by risk). Varying a spine intervention in the above-mentioned ways to those perpetrators who need it is therefore much more feasible at the current time.

Tailoring a spine MBCP involves a number of considerations that are beyond the scope of this paper.⁵¹ The foundations of a tailoring approach, however, rest in sound practices both in initial assessment and in *ongoing monitoring* of users of violence throughout their participation in the program.

A significant, but often under-valued, role of MBCP providers is to observe and monitor perpetrator beliefs, values and attitudes towards adult and child victim-survivors, as well as in a range of other ways such as views on the justice system. As such, the ongoing monitoring of users of violence is of particular relevance to this paper. While the ways in which intervention components might need to be modified for a given user of violence may sometimes become readily apparent at initial assessment, on other occasions this need – and *how* the program would ideally be tailored – does not become obvious until the user of violence is some way through the program. This might occur

⁵⁰ Vlasis, Ridley, Chung & Green (2017), pp. 81-82.

⁵¹ For relevant reading on tailoring MBCP and other change-focused program work to each perpetrator, see *The Practice Context* chapter of Vlasis, R., Ridley, S., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2017), *ibid*, or Vlasis, R. (2018). *Application of the Risk Need Responsivity framework by community-based MBCP providers*. Sydney, Australia: NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence.

when information from other sources (such as from his partner) does not become available until after the initial assessment process; or when the user of violence is not reaching ‘first base’ in terms of the change process by say the middle stage of the program.

This raises a number of questions that form the focus of this paper:

- what these change steppingstones or signpost indicators might be to inform ongoing assessment and monitoring, and therefore to enable decisions about how to tailor the program;
- how these signpost indicators are conceptualised;
- how they are measured; and
- what conclusions to draw (including the limits to what can be concluded) when any given signpost indicator is or is not present.

Why this is of concern to the CIJ and SFV

This paper has come about due to a clearly defined need to conceptualise and define a set – or multiple sets – of proximal indicators, change steppingstones or signposts to assist with:

- the evaluation of MBCPs and similar change-focused perpetrator interventions;
- MBCP exit reporting to mandated referrers;
- keeping perpetrators within view of local integrated responses and perpetrator intervention systems; and
- the ongoing monitoring and assessment of perpetrators while participating in an MBCP, to assist with efforts to tailor interventions.

While the need to conceptualise and define proximal indicators or change signposts has been identified for some time, the CIJ and SFV felt that it was timely to commission this work now for several reasons. First, the CIJ had recently completed work for the Magistrates’ Courts of Victoria in designing a best-practice Court Mandated Counselling Order Program as part of a review of existing approaches whereby five Victorian Magistrates’ Courts have gazetted powers to mandate perpetrator participation in an MBCP through civil justice system (FDV protection order) pathways. This work raised a number of issues regarding the provision of feedback by MBCP providers to the court in ways that can assist judicial monitoring and accountability processes. Indeed, more broadly, the need for improved communication and information flows between courts and MBCP providers has been highlighted by recent Australian research of the interface between these two service sectors.⁵²

Second, as convener of the Western Australian Men’s Behaviour Change Network,⁵³ SFV has been seeking to raise the issue of exit reporting to mandated referrers to gauge current practice, as well as to stimulate thinking and discussion concerning what best practice might look like in this respect.

⁵² Fitz-Gibbon, K., Maher, J., Thomas, K., McGowan, J., McCulloch, J., Burley, J., & Pfitzner, N. (2020). *The views of Australian judicial officers on domestic and family violence perpetrator interventions* (Research report, 13/2020). Sydney: ANROWS.

⁵³ A forum where MBCP providers in Western Australia convene to discuss issues of common concern, identify areas of common need, and to determine priorities for joint advocacy.

SFV's informal conversations with industry leaders from elsewhere in the country suggests that fostering this thinking and discussion would be timely at a national level.

Third, both SFV and CIJ have been acutely aware of the impact of COVID-19 and associated social restrictions on MBCPs and other perpetrator interventions in Australia and worldwide – and indeed, on FDV sectors as a whole. There is now significant, Australia-wide evidence that the pandemic has intensified the already huge problem of FDV in Australia.⁵⁴ MBCPs and other perpetrator interventions have had to make substantial adjustments during this time, both in allocating a higher proportion of resources towards managing heightened and complex risk situations, and in hurriedly developing alternatives to in-person change-focused interventions.

The experience of both the ongoing pandemic emergency and pandemic recovery phases has highlighted the need for program providers to be flexible in adapting to unforeseen changes in circumstances. While program providers have varied significantly in their willingness to trial videoconferencing group-work and other alternatives to in-person change-focused work with users of violence, there is no doubt that a range of new interventions and significant modifications to existing interventions have been trialled over the past 18 months; in some cases, these continue to operate.

Trialling alternative and adapted interventions in the safest ways possible has been at the forefront of both government and program provider thinking during this time.⁵⁵ The CIJ itself was commissioned by the Magistrates' Courts of Victoria to provide advice on what could be considered acceptable alternatives to in-person delivery so that perpetrators could work towards meeting the requirements of mandated participation despite the disruption to standard service delivery.

In a context where program providers have had to adapt rapidly, however, there is insufficient time to conduct evaluation studies to determine the impact and effectiveness of adapted interventions. While it is not the intention of SFV or CIJ to stifle innovation in this space, any such work needs to give careful consideration to potential unintended consequences, especially in terms of risk and safety. Furthermore, any adaptation of in-person group-based MBCP work needs to be done cautiously given the already highlighted challenges that exist in evaluating the effectiveness of these foundational approaches.⁵⁶ As such, the rapid development of alternatives to in-person men's behaviour change interventions raises questions pertaining to whether these new interventions are safe and potentially effective.

As highlighted previously, referring to a user of violence as having completed a program without a sense of where he is at on a change journey is problematic on multiple levels.⁵⁷ This is even more the case, however, when an adapted intervention is based on compromises to what is generally considered best practice. It can be difficult to address questions such as 'how many videoconference group-work sessions are required to provide equivalent intervention power to a program provided

⁵⁴ Boxall, H., & Morgan, A. (2021). *Intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 pandemic: A survey of women in Australia* (Research report, 03/2021). ANROWS.

See also <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/dec/01/the-worst-year-domestic-violence-soars-in-australia-during-covid-19>

⁵⁵ Peak bodies such as SFV and No to Violence, and at least one state government (Victoria), have written guidelines for program providers to keep safety considerations in the forefront when creating alternatives to in-person delivery of men's behaviour change work.

⁵⁶ See, for example: <https://sfv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Practice-Update-2-COVID-19-In-Person-Service-Delivery-and-Mens-Behaviour-Change-Programs.pdf>

⁵⁷ Hansen, J. (2016). *Standards for treatment with court ordered domestic violence offenders: A process evaluation*. Colorado Domestic Violence Offender Management Board; Mandel, D. (2020). *Perpetrator intervention program completion certificates are dangerous*. White paper: Safe and Together Institute.

in-person?’ or ‘for which perpetrators has this adapted intervention fallen short, and who therefore requires additional one-to-one phone-based or videoconference sessions?’ if there is no clear set of proximal indicators available to gauge where any given perpetrator is at in relation to a journey towards behaviour change.

There is no doubt that the conceptualisation and use of proximal indicators for the purposes outlined in this paper has potential limitations, of which this paper will be cognisant throughout. While the CIJ and SFV believe that, when done poorly, the definition and use of proximal indicators can be fraught with risks and inadvertent negative consequences, it is nevertheless possible to develop quality practice in this respect in ways that can contribute significantly to victim-survivor safety and wellbeing, and to perpetrator accountability. This paper is an attempt to stimulate discussion and define some of the contours of what quality practice might entail.

2. Introductory concepts

This chapter will make transparent important conceptualisations and assumptions that underpin our exploration of the development and use of proximal indicators of behaviour change. It will:

- scope what is meant by FDV perpetrator interventions, and define the concept of *change-focused perpetrator interventions* as the focus of this paper;
- contextualise perpetrator behaviour change objectives as only some of the (albeit important) ways in which these interventions work towards the fundamental aim of enhancing victim-survivor safety, wellbeing and dignity;
- briefly outline the theoretical and operational understanding of FDV that is used throughout this paper; and
- make transparent assumptions about behaviour change processes in FDV perpetrator intervention program contexts.

What is meant by a ‘perpetrator intervention’?

Historically, the term ‘perpetrator intervention’ – meaning ‘specialist perpetrator intervention’ in essence⁵⁸ – has been considered synonymous with MBCPs run by community sector organisations, and with violent offending behaviour programs run in Correctional contexts. Over the past fifteen years, however, a wider set of specialist interventions and programs have arisen beyond those that aspire towards having sufficient intervention power to deliver significant and sustainable behaviour change outcomes.

It could be argued that all perpetrator interventions work towards the safety, human rights and dignity for individuals, families and communities affected by the violent and controlling behaviour of program participants. To varying extents, perpetrator interventions work towards this fundamental aim by pursuing a number of strategic objectives:

- immediate and short-term safety gains for those affected by the perpetrator’s violence, through effective risk responses that engage with him in ways to contain risk;
- enhanced comprehensive and ongoing risk assessment through augmenting information obtained from victim-survivors and from other sources with risk-relevant information and insights gained from direct or indirect engagement with the user of violence;

⁵⁸ Recent analysis and focus on perpetrator intervention systems have helped to highlight that any direct or indirect engagement with a perpetrator can be considered an ‘intervention’. Analogous to how it ‘takes a village to raise a child’, it can take a number of services and influential people in a perpetrator’s life over some period of time to assist him to take incremental shifts towards taking responsibility for his behaviour. Any intentional and considered engagement with the perpetrator that focuses on appropriate opportunities to assist in this process – without going beyond the parameters of one’s expertise and role – can be considered a perpetrator intervention in this sense. However, the term is often used to mean perpetrator interventions or perpetrator intervention *programs* conducted by services and practitioners with full or partial specialisation in engaging FDV perpetrators. This is the sense in which this term is being used in this paper.

- enhanced understanding and mapping of the perpetrator's patterns of coercive control, and the impact of these patterns on adult and child victim-survivors and on family functioning;
- strengthened ongoing and longer-term risk management through contributing to a multi-agency integrated response that keeps the user of violence within view and that scaffolds pathways towards accountability beyond his involvement in any single intervention;
- information provision – including of that gained from the user of violence through the course of his participation in the intervention – to relevant services and sub-systems⁵⁹ to assist them to be part of a collaborative approach that scaffolds pathways towards his accountability for the harm caused to family members;
- strengthened advocacy and support provided to adult and child victim-survivors, both individually and as parent-child units, through the partner contact and family support services associated with some perpetrator interventions;
- enhanced perpetrator motivation to participate genuinely in perpetrator intervention programs, and enhanced readiness to change, through supporting the development of internal motivation(s) to replace external motivations;
- shifts, even if only incremental and partial to begin with, in the perpetrator's violent and controlling behaviour; and
- longer-term and more substantial and sustainable shifts in the perpetrator's patterns of coercive control.

Program providers differ, sometimes significantly, in terms of which of these strategic objectives they might prioritise over others. Across the field as a whole, however, the pathways through which these programs attempt to make a difference in the lives of victim-survivors are many and varied.

While the above categorisation is only one way to differentiate the myriad ways in which MBCPs and other perpetrator interventions work towards their fundamental aim, it is clear that perpetrator behaviour change is featured in only some of these pathways (most strongly, the last three). Engaging users of violence in specialist intervention programs can, in many instances, produce benefits for adult and child victim-survivor safety and wellbeing even in the absence of any incremental or longer-term behaviour change outcomes.

This reflects the potential positioning of perpetrator interventions as part of a systems response, with the potential to assist partner agencies within the local or regional system to fulfil their responsibilities to manage risk and to keep the user of violence within view. This is exemplified by a growing trend to consider the overall purpose of MBCPs across two levels: one that focuses on the pathways through which the program contributes positively towards an integrated response, and the other on how the program works towards behaviour change outcomes at the perpetrator 'clinical' level.

⁵⁹ For example, law enforcement, child protection and family services, criminal justice system and health-based services and sub-systems.

Spectrum of interventions

As outlined and featured from an earlier paper by the CIJ and SFV,⁶⁰ engagement with and responses to people who cause FDV violence harm can occur at a number of different points over time along a spectrum of interventions. This spectrum can be divided into *front end*, *middle point* and *back-end* (or ‘intensive’) interventions. The division of this spectrum into these points is somewhat arbitrary, but has some validity in terms of the different types of interventions offered, as well as the objectives of these interventions.

Front-end interventions typically take place in the days or one-two weeks after a precipitating FDV incident or after the perpetrator becomes known to the system through other means. These include proactive attempts to telephone male FDV respondents⁶¹ based on active referrals from police, and court-based respondent workers who engage with men appearing for protection order proceedings in Magistrates’ or Local Courts. While sowing seeds for possible ‘back end’ interventions at a later point (through variants of motivational interviewing, to the extent possible at that time), the objectives of these front-end interventions are often based on reducing risk in the immediate term, and on increasing compliance with civil or criminal justice system conditions related to a perpetrator’s use of FDV.

Front-end interventions often involve one-off contact with a user of violence or, at most, a small number of contacts over a short period of time. Because of their very brief nature, they have potential to reach relatively large volumes of people who cause FDV harm.

Next along the continuum, extending in time beyond the front-end, are those interventions that work with perpetrators in the short-term after initial referral, over a period of some weeks to a few months. These ‘middle point’ interventions include specialist FDV men’s coordinated case management work to:

- address risk factors accentuating the frequency and intensity of a perpetrator’s use of violence;
- increase his capacity and willingness to engage in change-focused behaviour change interventions; and
- to introduce some very preliminary behaviour change work, such as basic CBT violence interruption strategies.

While these mid-point interventions have potential to help reduce risk in the short-term posed by a user of violence and to set out a pathway for him to transition into back-end interventions and programs, they generally cannot pursue behaviour change goals or work towards significant and long-term reductions in his tactics of coercive control. Rather, they focus on potentially ‘winnable’ risk reduction goals in the short-term that might be steppingstones for some users of violence to start the longer-term journey towards taking responsibility for their behaviour. They can also motivate perpetrator attendance at MBCPs.⁶²

⁶⁰ See pp. 56-60 of Vlais, R., Campbell, E., & Green, D. (2019). *Foundations for family and domestic violence perpetrator intervention systems*. RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice and Stopping Family Violence.

⁶¹ Respondents to a police or victim-survivor application for a protection order, and/or respondents to immediate police-imposed conditions.

⁶² There is a growing body of overseas research findings that motivational enhancement strategies in the context of MBCPs can successfully increase perpetrator attendance and reduce drop-out, though have less power in contributing to actual behaviour change. For a recent meta-review, see Santirso, F., Gilchrist, G., Lila, M., & Gracia, E.

In some situations, mid-point interventions might have a significant focus on strengthening the capacity of a user of violence to participate in MBCP work. This might be required if substantial mental health, AOD or other issues would preclude his effective participation in a deep intervention. Mid-point interventions can also be a means of providing a flexible response to users of violence who are on a wait list to commence an MBCP or other ‘back end’ perpetrator program. Ideally, when used in this way, they would address the immediate risk landscape in addition to building his motivation and capacity to participate in a program.⁶³

At the back-end of this spectrum are MBCPs and other relatively more intensive interventions that attempt to work with men over a longer period, towards risk reduction and behaviour change goals. While MBCPs feature prominently in this part of the spectrum, other examples include Corrections-based supervision when this includes an active case management component; and intensive FDV-informed fathering programs such as Caring Dads.⁶⁴ This part of the spectrum includes post-MBCP interventions designed to support and extend the changes made through an MBCP. It also includes coordinated case management approaches designed to work with high-risk high-harm perpetrators over several months, often in close collaboration and coordination with law enforcement, justice system and child protection authorities, to reduce and contain risk amongst perpetrators who are not changing (or likely to change) through participation in an MBCP.⁶⁵

Change-focused programs

Across all points of this spectrum, there are some commonalities between perpetrator interventions even when they are of different types and are positioned very differently on the spectrum. All types of perpetrator interventions work, or should work, towards the fundamental aim of enhancing the safety, well-being and dignity of adult and child victim-survivors affected by perpetrator violence. Furthermore, all perpetrator interventions have (or at least should have) a component of contributing towards current and ongoing risk assessment and risk management as part of working towards this fundamental aim. All interventions can also have a component of monitoring the perpetrator and keeping him within view.⁶⁶

The specific mix of other strategic objectives that work towards the above-mentioned fundamental aim, however, varies between interventions. Only some perpetrator interventions have a change-focused element that attempt to facilitate significant shifts in the perpetrator’s violent and controlling behaviour and patterns of coercive control. At the back-end, MBCPs and Corrections-run

(2020). Motivational strategies in interventions for intimate partner violence offenders: A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Psychosocial Intervention*, 29(3), 175 - 190.

⁶³Specialist FDV men’s coordinated case management performed a heightened role in some jurisdictions in Australia during parts of 2020 and 2021 related to the Covid-19 pandemic. During periods of significant disruption to in-person MBCP work, and given that the Covid-19 situation intensified and made more complex the risk situations facing many victim-survivors, phone- and videoconference-based individual case management work performed a crucial role in keeping perpetrators within view and connected to a specialist service.

⁶⁴ <https://caringdads.org/>

⁶⁵ Robinson, A., & Clancy, A. (2020). Systematically identifying and prioritising domestic abuse perpetrators for targeted intervention. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, online first, April 8, 2020; See also <http://driveproject.org.uk/about/research-evaluation/>

⁶⁶ Historically, offender based program units within Correctional Services Jurisdictions have not positioned themselves as part of FDV service systems, and do not necessarily see themselves as contributing to the wider system’s ability to monitor, assess and manage risk on an ongoing basis. In many of these settings (either prison or community based), programs that work with men who have committed FDV offences are highly clinically-based, focusing on pursuing outcomes based on interventions targeting generalist criminogenic needs and some FDV-specific dynamic risk factors. With a few exceptions in some jurisdictions, the types of information sharing and parallel partner contact arrangements inherent in NGO-provided MBCPs do not occur in programs run directly by Correctional program units.

FDV-focused violent offending behaviour programs are obvious examples; some short-term mid-point interventions can also work towards behaviour change outcomes.⁶⁷

In focusing discussion on proximal or signpost indicators pointing towards the possibility of behaviour change, this paper will centre on perpetrator interventions with a change-focused element. As such, it will use the term *change-focused program* to refer to perpetrator interventions, generally those operating at the back-end of a spectrum of perpetrator interventions, that have a significant focus in facilitating behaviour change outcomes.

It is important when using this terminology to reiterate, however, that facilitating behaviour change might be only one, and not even the most important, component of a change-focused program. For some change-focused programs, and in relation to some users of violence whose behaviour proves difficult to shift, the benefits of engaging him in the program might fall mostly outside behaviour change outcomes. In this sense, the term change-focused program is used in this paper for those interventions that involve a significant change-focused component, and that work towards significant shifts in a perpetrator's behaviour, even if facilitating behaviour change is not the most important pathway through which the intervention might work towards its fundamental aim for some families. In this context, it would be more accurate, albeit too ungainly, to use the term 'program with a change-focused component' rather than change-focused program.

It is also important to note that a change-focused program might involve multiple intervention components. Certainly, MBCPs and similar back-end interventions are often based predominantly on group-work interventions. However, the increased focus in recent years on tailoring perpetrator interventions according to perpetrator risk and responsivity issues has accelerated interest, in situations where resources allow, in combining group-work with the targeted use of individual change-focused sessions; and where higher-risk higher-harm perpetrators have complex needs limiting their ability to participate in the program, with FDV-focused case management. For most program providers, of course, the ability to offer multiple intervention components as part of a tailored intervention remains out of reach in terms of available funding and resources.

Assumptions about the behaviour change process

How the behaviour change process is conceptualised can exert a significant influence on the delineation of proximal indicators or signposts of that change. What the change process entails – the very mechanisms hypothesised to drive change – determine what to look for in terms of signposts. What might seem to be critical steps along the way in a process of change based on one particular theory of change, might be seen as less important or not even relevant when a different theory of change is employed. Notably, the theory of change and the way in which the behaviour change process is conceptualised by any given program provider is influenced by their philosophical understanding of FDV, and by their conceptual understanding of what drives FDV behaviour.

⁶⁷ See, for example: Scott, K., Heslop, L., Kelly, T., & Wiggins, K. (2015). Intervening to prevent repeat offending among moderate- to high- risk domestic violence offenders: A second-responder program for men. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 59(3), 273-294.

Conscious of the current debates in the field concerning the different approaches in MBCP work, SFV and the CIJ attempt in this paper to find common ground on which to base the draft indicators. As such, the intention is for the indicators to be relevant across many theories of change, rather than being aligned to any one particular approach. At the same time, it is impossible for any set of indicators to be applicable to every theory of change.⁶⁸

While attempting to be inclusive of the diversity of men's behaviour change theories of change, the CIJ's and SFV's work to draft a framework of proximal indicators is based on some assumptions concerning the nature of FDV and of behaviour change programs that attempt to address it. Some of these assumptions are briefly outlined below, including the implications for developing a framework of proximal indicators.

FDV as a social problem, not a mental health issue

This paper draws upon a structural analysis to understand FDV as a social problem. This analysis views the use of FDV – predominantly by men⁶⁹ – as a means to maintain gender-based and/or other forms of control, based on privilege and entitlement that comes from being in a societally-prescribed superior position in a hierarchy of perceived value and power. Men's use of gender-based power intersects in complex ways with other forms of privilege and of marginalisation, related to race, class and other factors.

This analysis assumes that most men, not only those who use FDV, benefit from the unearned privilege given to them through a patriarchal society, such as:

- an unequal share (domination) of decision-making, economic and political power and opportunities;
- an unequal share (domination) of physical and other forms of space;
- women doing a greatly disproportionate share of domestic and community tasks, leaving them less time to pursue activities that (in a patriarchal society) gain more status and financial reward;
- the entitlement to leave the majority of emotional labour work at the family and community level for women to identify, manage and do;
- the effects of benevolent and hostile sexism on shaping societal and cultural expectations of women's roles and abilities, and in reinforcing narrow and dominant masculinities; and
- the sexual objectification of women and other processes that reinforce a 'rape culture'.

⁶⁸ For example, some (but not all) strengths-based approaches would not conceive indicators relating to the perpetrator disclosing a meaningful proportion of his use of violent and controlling behaviours as a critical steppingstone. The CIJ and SFV propose this, however, as an important indicator as it is consistent with most theories of change in the field.

⁶⁹ The vast weight of international research demonstrates that intimate partner and sexual violence is predominantly perpetrated by men, either against women or against other men – for example, see https://d2c0iky46o3b1.cloudfront.net/anrows.org.au/ANROWS_VAW-Accurate-Use-of-Key-Statistics.1.pdf, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women> and <http://xyonline.net/content/he-hits-she-hits-assessing-debates-regarding-mens-and-womens-experiences-domestic-violence>

The ‘toxic’ notion of masculinity associated with a patriarchal society comes with considerable costs for men too. The need to compete in the context of an implicit hierarchy of men, to adhere to dominant/toxic notions of masculinity, and to deny aspects of themselves that do not measure up to these standards, can be quite detrimental in terms of mental and physical health for some, perhaps many, men. However, the benefits that come from male entitlement and privilege are substantial, highly reinforced and maintained, and are often not visible to men.

In this analysis, tactics of FDV are chosen by some perpetrators to enforce and maintain gender-based (or other forms of relational) power. Those men who do not use FDV make choices to feed and maintain their male privilege and entitlement in other, less severe or less tightly-patterned ways. It is these choices and actions made by the majority of men to go with and maintain, rather than identify and challenge, their male privilege and entitlement, which add fuel to a patriarchal society from which some men justify their use of FDV. Men who perpetrate FDV do not themselves invent the idea to control women.

While gender-based privilege is pervasive, it does not determine men’s thinking. All men are responsible for whether, when and how they conform to, invest in, or resist and challenge patriarchal ideas. This includes responsibility for the choice to use FDV tactics to assert control and one’s will, as well as responsibility to challenge or at least not be complicit in – rather than adopt – patriarchal ideas.

Based on this analysis, a set(s) of signposts or proximal indicators of the behaviour change process needs to relate or point to perpetrator choices regarding their behaviours, beliefs, thinking and awareness – whether they choose to reinforce and build upon their use of power and control at the expense of the victim-survivors’ voices and space for action in their lives, or to desist from these practices and ideas. Of course, these choices are not simple: changing highly reinforced and ingrained behaviour is never a simple matter. The challenge of making changes to behaviours, beliefs and perspectives in FDV behaviour change work, however, is not categorically different to the challenge that all men face. These include the choices they have about whether to reinforce or dissent from the many behaviours and ideas that maintain gender inequality, sexism, and the control of women and other marginalised communities.

In this analysis, changes in mental health outcomes are not centrally relevant to the behaviour change process. Certainly, for some perpetrators in some situations, improvements in a highly impacting mental health condition can result in some reductions in the acute risk the perpetrator poses to victim-survivors.

For example, for a clinically depressed user of violence with high levels of associated hopelessness⁷⁰ about the future – with high levels of emotional and life domain dependency on the victim-survivor, who has been highly possessive and controlling of her, who post-separation begins to realise that he is no longer able to control her choices, and who blames her for ‘ruining his life’ based on highly entitled and self-centred expectations – reducing the intensity of his depression might assist to a moderate degree in bringing down the acuteness of risk. It might also make him more receptive to participating in an MBCP or other form of change-focused intervention. Consistent with this paper’s understanding of FDV as a social problem, however, reducing his level of depression will not in itself make him a safer man for current and/or future family members to be around over the longer-term, and is not *central* to the behaviour change process.

⁷⁰ ‘Hopelessness’ is a clinical phenomenon that is present to varying degrees with clinical depression; when high, it can be highly correlated with suicidal ideation.

At the same time, the CIJ and SFV understand that focusing on individual-level factors has a very important role to play in the behaviour change process, even without conceptualising FDV as a mental health problem. It is widely accepted that change-focused programs can be both educative⁷¹ in helping men to understand, identify and transform their use of socially sanctioned male power, privilege and entitlement in the form of violence, *and* therapeutic in addressing individual-level factors associated with violent behaviour.⁷² Furthermore, some (but not most) users of violence require a case management approach so that complex individual support needs impinging on their capacity to participate in a change-focused program can be targeted by the overall intervention. This paper takes this integrative approach while maintaining the conceptualisation of FDV as a social problem.

FDV as intentional, patterned behaviour – not a series of incidents

FDV service systems are still primarily designed to identify and respond to FDV as *incidents* (of physical violence). An incident-based narrative about FDV is reinforced through frequently used terms such as ‘recidivist offenders’, ‘recidivism’, and ‘re-offending’; by systems built around police call-outs to FDV incidents; and by the ways in which crisis services for victim-survivors are funded and understood. This is distinct from a more *pattern*-based understanding of FDV that acknowledges the continuous use by the perpetrator of a range of tactics of coercive control and social entrapment of women and children throughout their everyday lives.⁷³

The focus on coercive control amongst FDV sectors in Australia has been steadily increasing over the past ten or so years, and has been accelerated most recently by debate over calls to follow the lead of the Scottish and English/Welsh systems to criminalise coercive control. Indeed, the need to start from an understanding of coercive control and entrapment patterns rather than an incident-based focus is not new for specialist women’s and men’s FDV service providers. The problem arises when other elements of an integrated response system focus primarily on incidents, thereby shaping expectations concerning referral criteria, program design and what counts as successful outcomes of specialist program participation. Designing and evaluating a program to address whole patterns in the way that a user of violence controls and entraps his (ex)partner is somewhat different from one that focuses on reducing re-offending behaviour.

Kelly and Westmarland (2016), in their qualitative study interviewing UK FDV perpetrators, argue that:

⁷¹ The term ‘education’ has unfortunate connotations in MBCP work, often associated with loose notions of ‘psychoeducation’ and the top-down imparting of concepts. This is in contrast to Duluth-focused, narrative and invitational approaches which are based on dialogical conversational processes that scaffold exploration and discovery through MBCP group-work and individual sessions.

⁷² Cagney, M., & McMaster, K. (2013). The next step: A resolution approach to dealing with intimate partner violence. *Ending Men’s Violence Against Women and Children: The No to Violence Journal*, Spring 2013, 29–50; Gondolf, E. (2012). *The Future of Batterer Programs: Reassessing Evidence-Based Practice*. Boston: Northeastern University Press; Vlasis, R. (2014). *Domestic violence perpetrator programs: Education, therapy, support, accountability 'or' struggle?* Melbourne, Australia: No To Violence.

⁷³ Barlow, C., & Walklate, S. (2021). Gender, risk assessment and coercive control: Contradictions in terms? *The British Journal of Criminology*, online 22 January 2021; Douglas, H., McGlade, H., Tarrant, S., & Tolmie, J. (2020). Facts seen and unseen: Improving justice responses by using a social entrapment lens for cases involving abused women (as offenders or victims). *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, online; Mandel, D. (2020). Perpetrator intervention program completion certificates are dangerous. White paper. Safe and Together Institute; Mandel, D., & Wright, C. (2019). Building on the Greenbook: A perpetrator pattern-based approach to improve child welfare’s response to domestic violence, *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 70(4), 119-135; Stark, E., & Hester, M. (2019). Coercive control: Update and review. *Violence Against Women*, 25(1), 81-204.

FF ... framing domestic violence in terms of incidents—whether in research, policy definitions or practice responses—reflects how violent men describe their behaviour rather than what we know from survivors. What women describe is an ongoing, ‘everyday’ reality in which much of their behaviour is ‘micro-managed’ by their abuser: this includes what they wear, where they go and who they see, household management and childcare. None of these are ‘incidents’, nor would they be considered crimes.⁷⁴

... Drawing on data from men who have used violence we have shown that framing domestic violence in terms of incidents—whether in research, policy definitions or practice responses—is to adopt the talk of abusive men, which serves not only to minimise domestic violence, but also to explain it in ways that disconnect it from gender, power and control.⁷⁵

Taking a pattern-based understanding to a perpetrator’s behaviour is also essential when considering what he does to harm the family as a unit. This includes:

- how his actions affect the safety, stability and development of children, including the numerous ways that he might directly or indirectly sabotage their mother’s parenting and her relationship with them, and the family’s access to and connections with service, educational, community and cultural supports;⁷⁶
- how some or much of the adult victim-survivor’s apparent ‘messiness’ and challenging behaviours that service providers might feel frustrated about – for example, alcohol-and-other-drug (AOD) abuse, making and then withdrawing disclosures, inconsistent attendance at appointments, leaving and then returning to the perpetrator, lack of proactivity in making connections with services to address her children’s needs, poor connections with their children’s school – can result from the perpetrator’s coercive controlling patterns to destroy her worth as a person and as a mother, and to limit her freedom and confidence to act in the social world.⁷⁷

There is also growing evidence that many users of violence engage in coercive controlling tactics that directly target children in addition to their mother, and that children, like their mothers, attempt to resist violence and coercive control.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Kelly, L., & Westmarland, N. (2016) Naming and defining ‘domestic violence’: Lessons from research with violent men. *Feminist Review*, 112(1), 113-127. p. 114

⁷⁵ *ibid*, p. 124

⁷⁶ Heward-Belle, S. (2015). The diverse fathering practices of men who perpetrate domestic violence. *Australian Social Work*, 69(3); Lapierre, S., Cote, I., Lambert, A., Buetti, D., Lavergne, C., Damandt, D., & Couturier, V. (2017). Difficult but close relationships: Perspectives on their relationships with their mothers in the context of domestic violence, *Violence Against Women*, 24(9), 1023-1038.

⁷⁷ Mandel, D., & Wright, C. (2019). Building on the Greenbook: A perpetrator pattern-based approach to improve child welfare’s response to domestic violence, *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 70(4), 119-135.

⁷⁸ Callaghan, J., Alexander, J., Sixsmith, J., & Fellin L. (2018). Beyond “witnessing”: Children’s experiences of coercive control in domestic violence and abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 33(1), 1551-1581; Haselschwerdt, M. L., Hlavaty, K., Carlson, C., Schneider, M., Maddox, L., & Skipper, M. (2019). Heterogeneity within domestic violence exposure: Young adults’ retrospective experiences. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 34, 1512-1538; Katz, E., Nikupeteri, A., Laitinen, M. (2020). When coercive control continues to harm children: Separation fathering, stalking and domestic violence. *Child abuse review*, 29(4), 310-324; Katz, E. (2016). Beyond the physical incident model: How children living with domestic violence are harmed by and resist regimes of coercive control. *Child Abuse Review*, 25, 46-59; Øverlien, C. (2013). The children of patriarchal terrorism. *Journal of Family Violence*, 28, 277-287.

In addition to an increasing focus in FDV policy and risk assessment frameworks on moderate to severe FDV as involving varying degrees of coercive control, the concept of *social entrapment* has gained increased attention of late.⁷⁹ An understanding of (some forms of) FDV as social entrapment involves consideration of:

- The perpetrator's patterns and tactics of coercive control.
- Any tactics that the perpetrator uses to target particular aspects of the victim-survivor's identity, or particular aspects of social marginalisation they face (by virtue, for example, of experiencing racism, discrimination, ableism, ageism, heterosexism, transphobia) to further isolate and entrap them.
- Any tactics the perpetrator may use to gain further power and control as a result of their own experience of identity and social marginalisation (such as, for example, appealing to their own mental and/or physical disability to 'mine sympathy' or manipulate victim-survivors towards discounting the violence and abuse they are experiencing).
- Any tactics by the perpetrator to use or manipulate services and service systems – FDV services or otherwise – to his benefit and to further isolate and/or pathologise the victim-survivor. This can include efforts to persuade services to collude with the perpetrator's avoidance of taking responsibility for his violent behaviour, and to cast victim-survivors in a negative light. Related to this are the tactics that some perpetrators use to isolate victim-survivors within cultural or other defined communities, and to make it more difficult for their experiences of FDV to be recognised and their needs to be supported.

Considerations of FDV as patterned behaviour consisting of varying degrees of coercive control and social entrapment have major implications for the development of a framework of signposts or proximal indicators of men's behaviour change. It is not sufficient for proximal indicators to point towards the perpetrator's cessation of physical violence only. They must also point towards perpetrators changing patterns and tactics of behaviour that limit adult and child victim-survivor ability to have space for action in their lives based on fundamental human rights, including patterns that harm family and child functioning. This is reflective of the priorities of many victim-survivors not just for physical violence to stop, but also the perpetrator's control over their lives and their families.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Tolmie, J., Smith, R., Short, J., Wilson, D., & Sach, J. (2018). Social entrapment: A Realistic understanding of the criminal offending of primary victims of intimate partner violence. *NZ Law Review* 2018, 181-218. See also the Appendix to this article that outlines a highly useful **social entrapment assessment guide** <https://www.hqsc.govt.nz/our-programmes/mrc/fvdrp/publications-and-resources/publication/3444/>

⁸⁰ Noble-Carr, D., Moore, T., & McArthur, M. (2020). Children's experiences and needs in relation to domestic and family violence: Findings from a meta-synthesis. *Child & Family Social Work*, 25(1), 182-191; Westmarland, N., Kelly, L., & Chalder-Mills, J. (2010). *Domestic violence perpetrator programmes: What counts as success?* London: Respect; McLaren, H., Fischer, J., & Zannettino, L. (2020). *Defining quality of life indicators for measuring perpetrator intervention effectiveness* (Research report, 05/2020). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

Behaviour change as an incremental process

When conceptualising FDV in these ways, and considering what adult and child victim-survivors might require a user of violence to do differently to regain space for action and control over their lives, it is not surprising that the behaviour change process can in some circumstances require multiple specialist interventions over time. Indeed, the evidence concerning the effectiveness of single intervention programs is not strong.⁸¹

Outcomes vary substantially, of course, both across users of violence and across circumstances. Many practitioners in the field can attest to having reliable knowledge about at least some anecdotal examples of positive behaviour change through reports by a man's partner at program completion, or even at follow-up. Particularly with respect to patterned, coercive controlling violence, however, the behaviour change process can often be very long. A single change-focused program might result in the cessation of some tactics and patterns of controlling behaviour – either on a temporary or longer-term basis – but not in others. Indeed, while a single change-focused program might in some circumstances also change a perpetrator's patterns of coercive controlling behaviours more broadly, it cannot be expected that this will occur.

Further, in some circumstances, a perpetrator's involvement in a single program can result in inadvertent negative consequences that makes things worse for adult and child affected family members. Several recent Australian and overseas studies have documented victim-survivor experiences of their partner's or former partner's participation in an MBCP being associated with a worsening of his patterns of coercive control.⁸²

The length of the scaffolding required for a behaviour change process for any given user of violence will depend on several factors. These include the degree of risk that the user of violence poses to adult and child victim-survivors; the complexity of the risk landscape and of the perpetrator's patterns and tactics of coercive control; and the complexity of needs that interfere with his capacity to engage meaningfully in the work.

The fact that in many circumstances a single change-focused program is likely to result in incremental, rather than wholesale, shifts in a perpetrator's behaviour adds considerable weight to the importance of developing a framework of proximal indicators. Monitoring how a user of violence is progressing through a program can assist in determining how the program will land in terms of what degree of shifts might or might not be likely; and to plan what might be required to further scaffold the behaviour change process at the program's end.

⁸¹ Arce, R., Arias, E., Novo, M., & Fariña, F. (2020). Are interventions with batterers effective? A meta-analytical review. *Psychosocial Intervention*, 29(3), 153–164; Cheng, S-Y, Davis, M., Jonson-Reid, M., & Yager, L. (2021). Compared to what? A meta-analysis of batterer intervention studies using non-treated controls or comparisons. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 22(3), 496-511; Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2019), *ibid*; Travers, A., McDonagh, T., Cunningham, T., Armour, C., & Hansen, M. (2021). The effectiveness of interventions to prevent recidivism in perpetrators of intimate partner violence: A systemic review and meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 84, online first; Wilson, D., Feder, L., & Olaghere, A. (2021). Court-mandated interventions for individuals convicted of domestic violence: An updated Campbell systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 17(1), open access.

⁸² Chung, D., Anderson, S., Green, D., & Vlasis, R. (2020). *Prioritising women's safety in Australian perpetrator interventions: The purpose and practices of partner contact* (Research report, 08/2020). Sydney: ANROWS; Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2019), *ibid*; McGinn, T., Taylor, B, McColgan, M. (2019). A qualitative study of the perspectives of domestic violence survivors on behavior change programs with perpetrators, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, online first; Opitz, C. (2014). Considerations for Partner contact during men's behaviour change programs: Systemic responses and engagement. *Ending Men's Violence Against Women and Children: The No to Violence Journal*, Autumn, 114–142.

Developing a framework of indicators is also important as part of taking both a long- and short-term approach to working with users of violence at the same time. While a long-term view is required, the use of proximal indicators enables a focus on incremental, tangible goals to work towards over the course of the journey.

Behaviour change in the context of perpetrator intervention systems

Given this consideration of the (limited) power of any single change-focused program to produce incremental shifts in perpetrator behaviour, the broader context of perpetrator intervention systems is vital. MBCPs and other change-focused programs are only one part of a broader service system, and cannot be solely responsible for what behaviour change outcomes do or do not occur with respect to any given user of violence. While change-focused programs might be the only interventions that work intensely on facilitating behaviour change outcomes, their ability to do this depends to varying extents upon the actions of other parts of the service system – actions before, during and after the perpetrator’s participation in the change-focused program.

The concept of a *web of accountability* with respect to FDV perpetrators was initially coined by Smith and her colleagues as part of research into victim-survivor and perpetrator narratives about service system responses in rural southern Victoria.⁸³ The concept has become widely adopted over the past five years to express the need for a range of services and other responders to take collective responsibility for scaffolding processes of perpetrator accountability. The web involved three general categories of strands, as described later by No to Violence:

FF *...attempts to hold him accountable through the formal criminal justice, civil justice and child protection systems (involving informed, consistent and coordinated actions by police, courts, corrections and child protection, where appropriate)*

the actions of non-mandated service systems that attempt to engage him through proactive, assertive outreach (for example, at court through a Respondent Worker, or telephone-based via men’s enhanced intake or the MRS After Hours Service)

women’s (and in some cases, a community’s) own informal attempts to ‘draw a line in the sand’ about his behaviour, and to hold him accountable to the promises he might have made to change his behaviour, and to her and her children’s needs for safety and dignity.⁸⁴

In supporting this conceptual approach, No to Violence commented:

FF *Men who use family & domestic violence are very adept at making use of whatever gaps or inconsistencies are present in service system responses – gaps in the accountability web – to extend their control over family members. They can threaten to involve the child protection system to ‘out’ her as a bad mother, draw systems agencies workers into colluding with their violence-supporting narratives, and use evidence of inconsistent responses by systems agencies to convince her that it is all her fault. A strong web of accountability... is crucial to reduce the*

⁸³ Smith, J. (2013). *Experiences of consequences accountability and responsibility by men for their violence against women and children*. PhD dissertation. University of Melbourne. Smith, J., Humphreys, C., & Laming, C. (2013). The central place of women’s support and partner contact in men’s behaviour change programs. *Ending Men’s Violence Against Women and Children: The No To Violence Journal*, Spring, 7–28.

⁸⁴ Vlasis, R. (2013). *What can be done to strengthen accountability for men who perpetrate family and domestic violence?* Melbourne: No To Violence Male Family & domestic violence Prevention Association, p. 5

*wriggle room available to men to wriggle out of accountability for their behaviour.*⁸⁵

Building upon this concept, and in response to a specific recommendation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV) in Victoria,⁸⁶ the CIJ and SFV previously expanded upon the web of accountability concept to consider the common and differentiated responsibilities for perpetrator engagement by a range of services that make up a perpetrator intervention system – including those agencies with little or no specialisation in FDV. Situated as the second of twelve foundational principles of potentially robust perpetrator intervention systems, this was defined as:

FF *Government and non-government agencies have a collective responsibility to bring perpetrators into view in a way that acknowledges adult and child victim-survivors' dignity and contributes to their safety and wellbeing. Each agency can map its roles and responsibilities for doing so as part of an ongoing, collaborative mapping exercise, so that these are transparent and serve to synergise positive outcomes across agencies.*⁸⁷

As outlined in detail through work conducted by the CIJ for the Victorian Government in response to the above-mentioned RCFV recommendation, this mapping process covers a wide terrain, focusing on roles and responsibilities that both precede and run parallel to a perpetrator's participation in a change-focused intervention.⁸⁸ Readers are directed to the CIJ's report for further details. It is crucial to keep in mind throughout the current paper, however, that change-focused perpetrator interventions cannot solely 'bear the brunt' of the hard work required to attempt to facilitate shifts in perpetrator behaviour.

As will be explored later in this paper, there is a crucial difference here between a mandated referrer taking an approach of "I am referring X to you in the hope that you can send him back to me as a changed man" versus "I am referring X to you so that you can help me to make a decision in # months' time about where he is at in terms of becoming a safe man; to help me know if the risk that he poses to family members has changed; and to let me know what I can do over these # months, within the constraints of my time and skillset, to assist in keeping him on track".

There are, of course, numerous (and sizable) systems, resource, practice capability and cultural/organisational constraints that prevent most referring agencies from taking the latter approach, or at least from taking this approach most of the time. The CIJ and SFV have no illusions in terms of the task ahead for agencies and systems to work towards understanding and adopting appropriate roles and responsibilities to engage safely with users of violence and to adopt a perpetrator pattern-based lens in all of their FDV-related work. Addressing these constraints at the systems, organisational and individual practitioner levels will likely take decades while continuing to recognise that, even unconstrained, change-focused interventions cannot be held solely responsible for the effort required in starting men on a path towards change.

⁸⁵ *ibid*, p. 6

⁸⁶ Recommendation 85 calls upon government and non-government agencies and service providers to map the roles and responsibilities they each have concerning direct and indirect engagement with FDV perpetrators: State of Victoria (2016). *Royal Commission into Family Violence. Report and Recommendations*. Vol III. Parl Paper No 132 (2014–16).

⁸⁷ Vlasis, R., Campbell, E., & Green, D. (2019). *Foundations for family and domestic violence perpetrator intervention systems*. RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice and Stopping Family Violence.

⁸⁸ See Vlasis, R. & Campbell, E. (2019) *Bringing pathways towards accountability together: Perpetrator journeys and system roles and responsibilities*, RMIT University, Melbourne. <https://cij.org.au/research-projects/bringing-pathways-towards-accountability-together/>

However, and although this paper focuses on proximal or signpost indicators in the context of change-focused perpetrator interventions, these interventions cannot be held solely responsible for the work required to scaffold processes for men to journey across these steppingstones.

Working towards sustainable behaviour change⁸⁹

A framework of signpost indicators needs to point towards the possibility that a user of violence is on a path towards stopping their violent and controlling behaviour. However, some indicators within the framework need to point towards whether foundations are being laid for these changes to become *sustainable*.

As such, this paper is influenced by desistance theory drawn from the broader criminology field.⁹⁰ Scottish criminologist Fergus McNeill defines three levels of desistance from violent offending behaviour:

FF *Primary desistance, or the short/medium term cessation of violent behaviour. Secondary desistance, where a person makes fundamental changes over time to his self-identity, general ways of being in the world, his social environments and sometimes other factors in his life (for example, his fields of employment or male peer cultures that he hangs out in) to strive to become a 'new person' who is fundamentally incompatible with violent offending. Tertiary desistance, where a person's new personal identity of non-violence is valued and reflected in (new and/or existing) social groups and networks that he belongs, where his newly evolving identity has a sense of 'social home'. ...it is important to note here that working towards secondary goals presents a significant quandary for community-based FDV perpetrator program providers. Both UK and US research demonstrates that the pathways towards secondary desistance are long, and are difficult to stimulate within the limitations of 20-session programs (or less) (Acker, 2013; Morran, 2011, 2013). For some medium to high risk perpetrators, however, long-term, sustainable change is unlikely without making some progress towards secondary desistance goals. For particularly high-risk, generally violent men with significant social dislocation and weak pro-social bonds, tertiary desistance goals can also be particularly important to sustain fledgling new identities.*⁹¹

In other words, secondary desistance infers that behaviour change is a life project involving the user of violence becoming a 'new man', whereas tertiary desistance necessitates this 'new man' being valued in his peer networks and his micro-communities of belonging. Some MBCP practitioners refer to the difference between primary and secondary desistance as 'first and second-order change' respectively. Secondary and even tertiary desistance goals are particularly important for higher-risk higher-harm perpetrators, including those with long histories of using violence, to achieve sustainable, long-term behaviour change.

A consistent finding of Australian and New Zealand studies employing qualitative research methodologies with perpetrators to understand their experiences and views of the service system, is that many perpetrators who understand the behaviour change process as *a life project* feel that post-

⁸⁹ Parts of this section are adapted from earlier CIJ writing found at Vlasis, R., & Campbell, E. (2019). *Bringing pathways towards accountability together: Perpetrator journeys and system roles and responsibilities*. Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University. Specifically, the section 'Research regarding perpetrator pathways', pp. 15-27

⁹⁰ See, for example, King, S. (2013). Early desistance narratives: A qualitative analysis of probationers' transitions towards desistance. *Punishment & Society*, 15(2), 147-165.

⁹¹ Vlasis, R. Ridley, S., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2017), *ibid*, p. 34.

program opportunities for support and guidance is vital.⁹² In these studies, perpetrators viewed the transition from the intensity of the program to ‘nothing’ at its completion as quite problematic.

One NZ study, for example, found that “the bulk of participants reported feeling isolated and extremely fearful of re-engaging in behaviours and attitudes that could once again lead to family violence.”⁹³ Developing a violence-free network to support change in the long-term was crucial for some of these men. For some, this involved moving away to new locations and becoming part of new social settings that supported non-violent lifestyles. For others, it meant their communities making gradual shifts towards non-violence in a way that supported their new sense of self, through a more incremental process. Access to role models was important here, through men’s linkages to various programs and support groups.

In Victorian qualitative research, Clavijo Lopez⁹⁴ found that a central theme amongst men committed to desisting from FDV was the adoption of this as an ongoing life project, rather than achievement of a set of concrete and discrete behaviour change goals. Some of the men reported needing to attend more than one MBCP over time, so that they could adopt a new framework for living their life different from the old ‘patriarchal story’, and to develop confidence in applying new attitudes and behaviours.

Lopez also found that the willingness and desire to seek external assistance and support for the behaviour-change process was highly important for these men:

FF *A significant characteristic of the desistance process from IPV [intimate partner violence] that emerged from the analysis is that desisting men have transformed their identity in such a way that they now consider external assistance as a key factor in continuing their improvement of their behaviour after program completion. Before the MBCP they were independent men who never spoke about their issues; while after the MBCP they have become responsible men who look for assistance when they feel they are at risk of going back into their old ways. As we will see below, this change involved a significant distancing from patriarchal masculine ways of being.*⁹⁵

Through similar research in the UK, Morran⁹⁶ found that long-term desisters of FDV identified the following as crucial to their ongoing journeys of accountability and change:

- external support, even well after completion of a FDV perpetrator program, such as through the opportunity to come back to the program every now and then for one-on-one counselling;
- significant changes to personal identity consistent with non-violence as a way of being;

⁹² Clavijo Lopez, C. (2016). *Desistence from intimate partner violence: A narrative study of men with histories of violence against their female partner*. PhD thesis. Monash University; McLaren, H & Goodwin-Smith, I (2015). *Hearing their voices: Perceptions of women and men on reducing men’s perpetration of domestic violence*. Adelaide: Australian Centre for Community Services Research, Flinders University, Bedford Park SA; Roguski, M, & Gregory, N. (2014). *Former family violence perpetrators’ narratives of change*. The Glenn Inquiry. Wellington, New Zealand.

⁹³ Roguski & Gregory (2014), p. 42.

⁹⁴ Clavijo Lopez (2016).

⁹⁵ *ibid*, p. 235.

⁹⁶ Morran, D. (2011). Re-education or recovery? Re-thinking some aspects of domestic violence perpetrator programmes. *Probation Journal*, 58(1), 23–36; Morran, D. (2013). Desisting from domestic abuse: Influences, patterns and processes in the lives of formerly abusive men. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 53(3), 306–320.

- general maturation and responsibility-taking for one's life trajectories and choices, not only in terms of violent behaviour, but more generally in a range of life domains;
- developing new social connections, and letting go of old ones that reinforced the sense of masculinity from which they were trying to move away; and
- the desire to make use of their journeys of change to give back to other men at a much earlier point in their journey.

While not wanting to segue into desistance theory at length, the CIJ and SFV believe that it raises highly important issues and questions for consideration in this paper. To what extent, for example, is it sufficient for a set of proximal indicators to point towards behaviour change at the primary desistance level, as distinct from secondary and tertiary desistance goals? Are secondary and tertiary desistance goals important for facilitating sustainable change for some perpetrators and not others – and, if so, what flexibility will a framework of indicators require to enable this differentiation on a case-by-case basis? Further, what might this mean in terms of perpetrator motivation to change their behaviour, which, as both practitioner experience and the available research literature⁹⁷ demonstrates, varies substantially between 'not wanting to get into trouble again' through to 'changing who I am'?

Core threads of a behaviour change process

As mentioned previously, it is not possible to develop a framework of indicators that is completely independent of behaviour change theory. Each MBCP-related theory of change emphasises some things more than others in terms of what needs to be targeted, or developed, for behaviour change to come about. One of the most difficult challenges for the MBCP field in taking the work forward that the CIJ and SFV have commenced in this paper is to land on a set(s) of proximal indicators with which most practitioners in the field, despite different theoretical inclinations, feel comfortable.

In this paper, the CIJ and SFV attempt to walk a line between various theoretical orientations in a way that is as inclusive as possible. The assumptions made about the behaviour change process in this paper, however, will inevitably not lean equally towards each of the many and varied orientations.

To be transparent, this paper assumes that, to lead towards sustainable change, most behaviour change work requires a significant degree of focus on the following:

- The user of violence developing an internal motivation for change, through encouraging exploration of values, including the complexity and nuance of living out values in ethical ways, rather than using a simplistic appeal to values to support choices to use violent and controlling behaviour; of strivings around being a less hurtful, safer or 'good enough'/good partner and family man; and of what he wants for his life and who he wants to be.
- Encouraging the user of violence to identify and unpack his own beliefs, values and attitudes, including how they serve as concrete and tangible influences on him and his behaviour, and how they can be changed.

⁹⁷ For a recent review of qualitative studies focusing on perpetrator perspectives of the change process and of participating in a change program, see McGinn, T., McColgan, M., & Taylor, B. (2020). Male IPV perpetrator's perspectives on intervention and change: A systematic synthesis of qualitative studies. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 21(1), 97-112.

- Increasing awareness of the impacts of his behaviour on affected family members⁹⁸ and on his family as a whole (and his community, if applicable), and scaffolding space both for cognitive (taking the perspective of others) and affective/felt empathy.
- Bringing the perpetrator's 'past' behaviour into the present to inform the future; scaffolding processes for the perpetrator to explore, in detail, some of his use of FDV with the facilitators and other men in the group (or with the practitioner in a one-to-one setting), in ways that are consistent with taking responsibility for this behaviour.
- Inviting the user of violence to explore and articulate the intents⁹⁹ behind his violent and controlling behaviour, and to consider these intents in relation to his exploration of values and strivings, and in relation to impacts.
- Skills, techniques and strategies that the user of violence can use to interrupt and cease build-up towards using violence in situations where he might otherwise choose to use violence (skills that he might already have, and/or that need to be developed).
- Explorations of underlying gendered, entitlement-based beliefs¹⁰⁰ that give rise to intents to use violent and controlling behaviours, to dangerous/unhelpful thoughts associated with build-up towards using violence, and to smokescreens¹⁰¹ and victim stance thinking.¹⁰²
- Scaffolding processes where users of violence personally explore all of the above across a range of situations in which they are starting to or would often use violent and controlling behaviour; reflecting, practicing and rehearsing in ways that operationalise and apply the concepts and content explored through the program to their own specific situations.
- Explorations of aspects of the perpetrator's identity or sense of being a man that supports his use of violent and controlling behaviour; explorations of what he has learnt through various spheres of life and from various influences about how to conduct himself as a man, partner and parent; and about what his rights, entitlements and responsibilities should (and shouldn't be) in relationships and in family life. Further, to assist the user of violence to consider these explorations in relation to his values and strivings, and growing understanding of impacts.

⁹⁸ Noting that most perpetrators have some existing degree of awareness of the impacts of at least some of their behaviour, in the sense of choosing this behaviour as deliberate tactics with clear intentions associated with control.

⁹⁹ Noting that the nature and pattern of intents can be associated with the degree of risk; while much FDV behaviour is associated with an intent to control, the motives underlying an intent to control can vary significantly. For example, for many perpetrators, underlying beliefs that 'women are not trustworthy', 'I am entitled to know who my partner is hanging out with' and 'I need to keep tabs on her otherwise I'll lose her' create an intent to control her movements through social violence, including through the deliberate use of fear. For these perpetrators, there is a 'mixed' pattern of intents that while are mostly about control and entitlement, include some (and sometimes a very strong) degree of wanting to 'protect' the relationship or his partner, of genuinely yearning for a truly intimate relationship. Whereas for a different perpetrator, social violence tactics might be underpinned by stronger misogynist beliefs based on using women for their own material and sexual benefits and then seeking to 'destroy' them at the first 'sign' that they are being 'unfaithful'.

¹⁰⁰ Beliefs, for example, about women, his partner specifically, himself as a man, his and his partner's rights and responsibilities, and about families and relationships.

¹⁰¹ 'Smokescreens' is a term used to capture perpetrator denial, minimisation, justification, and blaming their partner and other things regarding their use of violence.

¹⁰² The thinking that a perpetrator uses to convince himself (and others) that he has been treated unfairly by his partner, and that he is therefore justified to take action (violent and controlling behaviour) against her.

- To develop and practice respectful and non-controlling ways of relating in relationship and family contexts, across a range of domains.¹⁰³
- Safety and accountability planning,¹⁰⁴ in which the man has active involvement and for which he takes some responsibility.
- At least some scaffolding of processes for the user of violence to work towards some degree of tertiary desistance support for the changes he is making.

The CIJ and SFV recognise that different theoretical orientations will differ in how some of these are interpreted. For example, some approaches would prioritise the teaching of communications skills as part of a focus on respectful and non-controlling ways of relating. Other approaches, however, might see this as counter-productive (and potentially harmful) if the perpetrator's underlying belief systems and intentions to use violence remain intact. Furthermore, given how complex and multi-faceted the behaviour change process can be, developing a list such as this is no simple matter. Undoubtedly, some important behaviour change foci have been inadvertently omitted or not described in the 'right' ways.

The CIJ and SFV have provided this tentative delineation of core and consistent components of behaviour change processes, however, to be transparent in the assumptions which underpin the starting points for the framework put forward in this paper.

Innovation and community-specific behaviour change processes

As noted above, the use of the term 'change-focused program' is deliberate in this paper due to the adaption and expansion, in recent years, of behaviour change work focusing specifically on particular perpetrator cohorts and community contexts. Many of these innovations are not considered to be a Behaviour Change Program as such, if they do not fully meet contemporary minimum practice standards. In some cases, program providers have needed to compromise on some of the standards due to constraints unique to their community or cohort, such as the unavailability of fully qualified and experienced practitioners, or due to the intervention being the program provider's first foray into running a specialist program with perpetrators. In other situations, one or more particular standards (developed for 'mainstream' MBCPs) might not translate completely into quite specific implementation and cultural contexts.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches towards addressing men's use of family violence in their communities have both important similarities, and notable differences, to mainstream MBCP work. These differences include:

- a substantial focus on healing intergenerational trauma arising from colonisation, dislocation and dispossession from country, community and culture;

¹⁰³ Such as the eight domains of the Power and Control, Equality and other wheels produced by the Duluth Abuse Intervention Programs <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheel-gallery/>

¹⁰⁴ Safety and accountability planning refers to individualised processes whereby a perpetrator is supported, over the course of an intervention, to progressively develop and strengthen a personalised plan for working towards primary, secondary and tertiary desistance goals. For further information, see pp. 54-59 of Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. J. (2019). *Evaluation readiness, program quality and outcomes in men's behaviour change programs* (Research report, 01/2019). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

- a strong focus on program participants' connection with their culture, country and their place in community as Indigenous men, within the spiritual worldviews of their communities and First Nations;
- extending the more individualised and nuclear family based motivational enhancement processes inherent in mainstream processes towards a focus on program participants' collective identity and collective accountabilities to their extended families and communities;
- community engagement processes that weave together what are often, in mainstream approaches, siloed out into quite separate 'primary prevention' and 'tertiary response' strategies;
- the flexible use of case management and program outreach; and
- to the extent possible and practicable, a long-term focus on connecting participants to supports who will help them to stay on track in their healing and journeys to become non-violent men.¹⁰⁵

Separately, Australia has only a handful of in-language, in-culture programs focusing on working with users of FDV from particular newly arrived or ethnocultural communities. While calls are frequently made for the development of more of these programs, substantial barriers exist towards their development, including the lead-in time required to recruit and train practitioners from the specific community to run change-focused interventions. The development of bicultural workforces in FDV perpetrator response is one of the most pressing priorities in the field.

The early experience of these programs, and the findings of research focusing specifically on best practice approaches in working with perpetrators from refugee communities,¹⁰⁶ suggests the need for additional specific considerations in conceptualising proximal indicators of behaviour change that might not be as applicable in 'mainstream' programs. They also suggest the need to interrogate any set(s) of indicators developed for mainstream change-focused programs in terms of the taken-for-granted, unspoken assumptions that come from adopting a predominant Anglo-Celtic worldview.

At the time of publishing, only three LGBTIQ+ organisations in Australia run behaviour change programs. These programs are adapting mainstream MBCP approaches towards interventions based on diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

¹⁰⁵ Blagg, H., Tulich, T., Hovane, V., Raye, D., Worrigal, T., & May, S. (2020). *Understanding the role of Law and Culture in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities in responding to and preventing family violence*, Ngarluma/Jaru/Gooniyandi (Hovane), Kimberley and Pilbara region, WA, Jabirr Jabirr/Bardi (Raye), Dampier Peninsula and Kimberley region, WA, Gooniyandi/Gija (Worrigal), Kimberley region, WA (Research report, 19/2020). Sydney: ANROWS; Hovane, V. (2015). *Our stories to tell: Aboriginal perspectives on domestic and family violence*. ANROWS Footprints, 1, 13-17; Gallant, D., Andrews, S., Humphreys, C., Diemer, K., Ellis, D., Burton, J., Harrison, W., Briggs, R., Black, C., Bamblett, A., Torres-Carne, S., & McIvor, R., (2017). Aboriginal men's programs tackling family & domestic violence: A scoping review. *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, 20(2), 48-68; Langton, M., Smith, K., Eastman, T., O'Neill, L., Cheesman, E., & Rose, M. (2020). *Family violence policies, legislation and services: Improving access and suitability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men* (Research report, 26/2020). Sydney: ANROWS; Mosby, E., & Thomsen, G. (2014). Gatharr Weyebe Banabe Program: Seeking behaviour change in Indigenous family violence. *Ending Men's Violence Against Women and Children: The No to Violence Journal*, Spring 2014, 7-28.

¹⁰⁶ Fisher, C., Martin, K., Wood, L., Lang, E., & Pearman, A. (2020). *Best practice principles for interventions with domestic and family violence perpetrators from refugee backgrounds* (Research report, 09/2020). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

This has recently been summarised in one such program as:

FF *The tailoring process involved adding content to the programs that reflected the lived experiences of LGBTQ people and invited participants to discuss what it means to identify as LGBTQ. This includes how LGBTQ experiences and self-perceptions may intersect with [domestic and family violence/intimate partner violence] and hinder or enable change. In tailoring both the perpetrator and victim/survivor programs, we aimed to provide clients with an opportunity to consider how they may draw upon the skills and knowledge they have gained from their own experiences of discrimination and/or victimisation. These experiences were framed as a resource to support desired changes to negative and potentially destructive behaviours in current and future relationships. Each program therefore includes content related to discrimination and social stigma commonly experienced by LGBTQ people and the impact of this on individual wellbeing (see LeBlanc, Frost, & Wight, 2015; Perales & Todd, 2017).*

By acknowledging and working with the impacts of discrimination, we do not mean to suggest that controlling and coercive behaviours are excusable or caused by these experiences. Many LGBTQ people engage in relationships which are not abusive despite their experiences of trauma, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, a point which is reinforced in both programs. However, we hope that greater awareness of the way that such experiences can impact an individual's thoughts and behaviours will help clients to identify problematic patterns in their responses to others and gain skills to manage their own strong emotions, and thereby engage in safer and more respectful relationships. This includes enhancing accountability within relationships for people who perpetrate abuse.¹⁰⁷

Adapting MBCP work for men with a cognitive impairment has been another area of (very recent) innovation, with two Victorian MBCP providers trialling programs for men with mild cognitive impairment and Acquired Brain Injury respectively. In addition to making a number of adaptations to program content and delivery, the development of these approaches requires consideration of theoretical orientations and models drawn from disability-related fields.¹⁰⁸ These considerations might not be captured in a common set of proximal indicators designed to apply across all perpetrator cohorts and situations.

It is clear that a framework of proximal or signpost indicators needs to have room to develop specific indicators for particular cohorts of perpetrators and community contexts. It is yet to be determined the extent to which this would involve supplementing a common set of indicators with a few additional ones developed for each cohort or community; modifying some of the indicators in this common set to match some of the differences related to the cohort; and/or requiring completely different sets for each community. Most likely, there is sufficient overlap in behaviour change processes across most or all cohorts to suggest that either or some combination of the first two options would entail.

¹⁰⁷ Gray, R., Walker, T., Hamer, J., Broady, T., Kean, J., & Ling, J. Bear, B. (2020). *Developing LGBTQ programs for perpetrators and victims/survivors of domestic and family violence* (Research report, 10/2020). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS. p. 29.

¹⁰⁸ Bethany Community Support Inc. (in preparation). *Adapting Men's Behaviour Change Program interventions for family violence perpetrators with a cognitive impairment. Practice Guideline: Interim Research Report.*

Change processes related to co-parenting in the context of FDV perpetration

The impacts of FDV on children, including the cumulative harm caused, are substantial and well documented in the research.¹⁰⁹ A large and growing body of research also shows that perpetrators often use FDV tactics to sabotage their partner's or former partner's relationship with their children, and to undermine her felt worth and capacity as a parent.¹¹⁰ This is a crucial area of assessing and intervening with the perpetrator's patterns of coercive control and the way he organises family functioning around his 'needs' and will.

Over the last fifteen years, a number of programs or program components have been developed focusing specifically on engaging FDV perpetrators who are fathers, led by Caring Dads arising out of Canada.¹¹¹ These programs and program components go beyond engaging participants in explorations of the impact of their use of FDV on their children, by focusing intensely on goals that MBCPs can generally, at best, only give limited time or attention.¹¹² These goals include working with these fathers to:

- become more child-centred rather than self-focused in their parenting;
- support rather than sabotage their (ex)partner's parenting capacity and relationship with her children, and to contribute positively rather than destructively as a co-parent; and to
- engage with their children in reparative ways informed by an understanding of their experience of trauma and re-traumatisation.

Most MBCPs do not have an extensive module or program component focusing on responsible, responsive and reparative fathering, beyond one or two group-work sessions focusing on impacts on children and beyond an attempt to weave in considerations of children's needs and experiences throughout the group-work curriculum. A framework of proximal indicators would need to consider what indicators related to the above goals could be included as part of a common set applicable to all MBCPs; and which would be supplementary and apply only to change-focused programs, or program components, with a specific and sufficiently intense focus on co-parenting and parenting.

It is critical that expectations of what standard MBCPs can achieve in relation to these goals are kept realistic, and that the standard or core set of proximal indicators reflects these limitations.

¹⁰⁹ For a recent review, see Taylor, A. (2019). *Impact of the experience of domestic and family violence on children – what does the literature have to say?* Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research. Mackay: Queensland.

¹¹⁰ Heward-Belle, S. (2015). The diverse fathering practices of men who perpetrate domestic violence. *Australian Social Work*, 69(3); Fish, E., McKenzie, M., & MacDonald, H. (2009). *Bad mothers and invisible fathers: Parenting in the context of domestic violence*. Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria. Melbourne: Victoria; Katz, E. (2019). Coercive control, domestic violence, and a five-factor framework: five factors that influence closeness, distance, and strain in mother–child relationships. *Violence Against Women*, 25(15), 1829–1853; Lapierre, S., Cote, I., Lambert, A., Buetti, D., Lavergne, C., Damandt, D., & Couturier, V. (2017). Difficult but close relationships: Perspectives on their relationships with their mothers in the context of domestic violence. *Violence Against Women*, 24(9), 1023-1038.

¹¹¹ <https://caringdads.org/>

¹¹² In the sense that while most MBCPs place considerable importance on the safety and wellbeing of children, and attempt to engage participants towards understanding the impacts of their behaviour on their children and towards becoming internally motivated to change their behaviour based on an awareness of these impacts, the need for MBCPs to cover such a wide range of content areas limits what can be achieved in this respect.

Indicators in the context of briefer change-focused interventions

A further series of innovations in change-focused work consist of interventions that are relatively briefer than MBCPs, but which still incorporate a strong change component. These interventions might operate at the mid-point or back-end of the spectrum of perpetrator interventions, and include:

- delivering behaviour change interventions in settings outside traditional specialist FDV NGO or Correctional contexts, such as by child protection authorities¹¹³ or delivered in health settings;¹¹⁴
- conjoint programs focusing on both FDV perpetration and substance abuse;¹¹⁵
- brief change-focused interventions that attempt to recruit (and accurately identify) low risk perpetrators, and/or provide a preliminary 'bridging' intervention prior to the men's participation in an MBCP;¹¹⁶ and
- the adaption of in-person behaviour change program work for video-conferencing or telephone modalities, of particular relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹⁷

These are very nascent innovations in perpetrator interventions, with very little publicly available evaluation evidence available at this stage of their evolution.¹¹⁸ Relatively brief and 'bridging' change-focused interventions are not designed to achieve the same degree of behaviour change outcomes as lengthier and more intense MBCPs. This raises the issue of how a framework for proximal indicators can accommodate the increasing diversity of change-focused programs, including those focused on facilitating modest, preliminary outcomes.

¹¹³ For example, the Walking with Dads initiative delivered by specialist FDV practitioners in Queensland Child Safety contexts.

¹¹⁴ Tarzia, L., Forsdike, K., Feder, G., & Hegarty, K. (2020). Interventions in health settings for male perpetrators or victims of intimate partner violence. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 21(1), 123-137.

¹¹⁵ Meyer, S., Burley, J., & Fitz-Gibbon, K. (2020). Combining group-based interventions for intimate partner violence perpetrators with comorbid substance use: An Australian study of cross-sector practitioner views. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, OnlineFirst, 29 October 2020; Meyer, S., McGowan, J., Helps, N., & Williamson, H. (2021). *Evaluation of the Taskforce Early Intervention for Family Violence Program (U-Turn): Final report*. Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre, Faculty of Arts, Monash University.

¹¹⁶ Bellini, R., Forrest, S., Westmarland, N., Jackson, D., & Smeddinck, J., (2020). *Choice-Point: Fostering awareness and choice with perpetrators in domestic violence interventions*. CHI '20: Proceedings of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems. Honolulu, USA. April, 2020.

¹¹⁷ Bellini, R., & Westmarland, N. (2021). A problem solved is a problem created: the opportunities and challenges associated with an online domestic violence perpetrator programme. *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, 5(3), 499-515.

See also <https://globalrightsforwomen.org/blog/webinars/>

¹¹⁸ See Meyer, S., McGowan, J., Helps, N., & Williamson, H. (2021), *ibid* for one example of a published evaluation study of an early intervention approach.

3. Reporting behaviour change outcomes

This chapter focuses on the rationale for developing a framework of proximal or signpost indicators based on the need to assist MBCPs and other change-focused programs to improve their reporting to referrers.

In this discussion the CIJ and SFV will focus specifically and separately on reporting to the mandated referrers of courts, child protection authorities, Corrective Services, and the family law system. Discussion will focus on what each of these referrers need from MBCPs and other change-focused programs in terms of reporting, why they seek exit reports and how they use the information provided. Throughout this discussion, the CIJ's and SFV's intent is to demonstrate why the provision of information limited to a list of service attendance dates can, in some circumstances, run contrary to the fundamental aim of MBCP work.

The chapter will then focus on exploring reasons for MBCP provider adherence to this practice of reporting attendance dates only. This exploration will build upon the role of minimum standards outlined in the [Background](#) section of this chapter, by focusing on historical and current program provider hesitations to provide anything more in reporting. This will be followed by an important contextualisation in providing exit reports to mandated referrers – the difference between reporting on perpetrator progress and reporting on risk. The chapter will conclude by drawing these analyses together to argue why a framework of proximal indicators of behaviour change is required to assist the MBCP field to evolve its current reporting practices.

Reporting, confidentiality and consent

First, however, it is important to clarify what is meant by 'reporting'. The focus in this section and paper is not on the sharing of risk-related information between agencies as part of ongoing risk assessment and risk management processes. Obviously, program providers are often in regular contact with referrers and other systems agencies as part of contributing towards an ongoing systems response to assessing and managing perpetrator-driven risk.

Rather, this section focuses on the practice of change-focused program providers reporting the outcomes of a perpetrator's participation in the program, generally through:

- the provision of exit reports at the conclusion of the perpetrator's participation in the program, whether this has occurred by virtue of the user of violence having completed the program, discontinued the program before completion ('dropped out'), or having been exited from the program by the program provider (for example, due to continuous disruptive behaviour or absence of any motivation to change);
- responding to requests from the referrer for updates of the perpetrator's 'progress' during the course of the intervention; or
- the program provider proactively offering updates during the course of the intervention (for example, in relation to a user of violence making little or no genuine effort to focus on his behaviour).

Program providers vary substantially in terms of what degree of reporting they provide in the above circumstances. Some providers construct exit reports for most perpetrators who have participated in their program; for others, this occurs only occasionally.

This variance between program providers depends on several factors, for example:

- the program's referral patterns and sources, including what proportion of referrals stem from particular mandated referrers;
- any reporting requirements specified in service agreements when a mandated referrer is a/the funder of the program (for example, when a program is funded through a contract with Corrective Services, there might be specific expectations about exit reports outlined in the agreement);
- the resources available to undertake tracking and reporting tasks both in terms of agency capacity as well as staff time;
- the provider's stance about reporting to referrers, including what role it plays in working collaboratively with referrers to assist them in their decision-making, and what confidence it has that referrers will use the information provided appropriately and productively;
- more generally, the provider's approach and practices concerning coordination and collaboration with other agencies; and
- how issues of confidentiality and consent are approached.

While each of the above factors will be referred to at various points in this chapter, it is worth providing some initial focus on the last of these. A provider's approach to issues of confidentiality and consent has a significant bearing on what information they provide to referrers as part of reporting and, more generally, on what information about the perpetrator and his behaviour – obtained from the user of violence – they are willing to share and under what circumstances.

State and territory information sharing legislation is obviously a factor here. At the time of writing, there are notable differences in information sharing legislation between jurisdictions in terms of the sharing of risk-related information obtained from the user of violence. For example, in Victoria risk-related information obtained through engagement with the user of violence can clearly be shared with (certain) other agencies without the perpetrator's knowledge or consent, irrespective of the level and degree of immediacy of risk faced by those experiencing his violence.¹¹⁹ In some other jurisdictions, there is less clarity, and varying interpretations between services, concerning the conditions in which such information can be shared without the perpetrator's consent.

These differences, however, go only a small part of the way to explain how program providers approach issues of confidentiality and consent when reporting to referrers (and when sharing information obtained from the user of violence more generally). Providers who view themselves predominantly as conducting a 'therapeutic' intervention, as distinct from one embedded within an integrated response to risk and safety, might consider the reporting of information without the perpetrator's consent to be harmful to the 'therapeutic relationship'. In this context, they might feel uncomfortable operating outside of the parameters of limited confidentiality associated with clinical codes of conduct in professions such as psychology, which the practice of reporting to referrers often

¹¹⁹ Family Safety Victoria (2018). *Family violence information sharing guidelines: Guidance for Information Sharing Entities*. Government of Victoria.

requires. This practice of reporting on or about the perpetrator with whom they are working can be seen, in this view, as contradictory to what is required to build a ‘safe’, confidential therapeutic relationship with the client.

Practices in seeking consent to share information and to report to referrers also differ substantially. Some providers, and not others, require the perpetrator’s consent for reporting and information sharing as part of their agreement to participate in the program. Some, to the extent possible and to the extent that it is safe (for victim-survivors) to do so, provide feedback to users of violence at regular points in the program about the current assessment of risk and about the perpetrator’s efforts and work towards change. These practices not only lay the foundations for the provider to report to referrers on behaviour change outcomes, but also in a way that is more transparent and that does not produce ‘major surprises’ should the user of violence have access to reports (or to redacted versions of them).

Overall, these different philosophical and practical considerations all have significant implications for the practice of reporting and the issues faced by providers who intersect with different parts of the service system.

Reporting to Magistrates and Local Courts¹²⁰

This section mainly focuses on MBCP reporting to Magistrates’ Courts through civil law pathways where respondents to a protection order are mandated to attend an MBCP.¹²¹ The section is also relevant, however, for arrangements in criminal jurisdictions where sentencing for a FDV-related crime is delayed for a set period of time, pending a perpetrator’s participation in an MBCP.¹²² This section does not focus on court-ordered participation in MBCPs associated with Correctional processes (for example, mandated participation in an MBCP associated with a community corrections or probation order), as this is covered later in this chapter.

Beyond the legislated and formal mechanisms described above, of course, any Magistrate can refer a respondent or offender to an MBCP without this being formally mandated. The degree to which such referrals are considered mandatory by the perpetrator depend in part on the engagement of the Magistrate or what consequences might arise if the perpetrator does not follow through with the referral.

¹²⁰ Local Courts are the equivalent to Magistrates Courts in NSW and the NT; this paper will from here-on adopt the latter term, inclusive of Local Courts.

¹²¹ At the time of writing, specific legislation or formal mechanisms have been enabled to mandate respondents to a protection order to participate in an MBCP – or at least initially, to be assessed for eligibility and suitability for MBCP participation – in Victoria (through five specialist family violence courts only), Queensland and South Australia. These mandated referral pathways are well established in each of these jurisdictions, resulting in significant volumes of referrals each year. Northern Territory Magistrates can also, in some circumstances, mandate men to attend a behaviour change program as part of a protection order condition. Current or proposed legislation enables mandated referral pathways of respondents to MBCPs in at least two other jurisdictions (Western Australia and NSW). At the time of writing, however, these mechanisms have generated few if any referrals and remain dormant at the current time.

¹²² These arrangements typically occur when a perpetrator pleads guilty and agrees to participate in an MBCP prior to sentencing. They are not widespread across Australia at the current time: examples include formal arrangements in specialist family violence courts in Geraldton (WA), Alice Springs and across several locations in South Australia.

In other words, whether:

- there is any monitoring of the perpetrator's follow-through after the referral is made;
- the perpetrator is expected to return to the court at a later date after participation in the MBCP; and
- the court will request a report or updates from the MBCP provider about the outcomes of the perpetrator's participation in the program.

There are few circumstances in Australia where courts *systematically* seek updates or exit reports from MBCP providers as part of a formal program that spans across multiple courts, as distinct from any arrangements put in place by a specific Magistrate in a specific court. Indeed, judicial monitoring of FDV perpetrators is still quite rare across the vast majority of Magistrates' Courts in Australia.¹²³

Some degree of Magistrate-specific judicial monitoring occurs on an idiosyncratic basis. Some Magistrates, for example, adopt the practice of standing a matter down or deferring sentencing to enable time for a user of violence to participate in an MBCP and for the program provider to report back to the court on outcomes of the man's participation in the program. On occasions, some delay the finalisation of a protection order (that is, maintains the order as interim for an extended period) to provide a reason for the respondent to return to court in several months' time so that an MBCP provider has time to work with him and compile a report for the court.¹²⁴

The idiosyncratic nature in court approaches towards referring FDV perpetrators, judicial monitoring, and towards requesting and utilising exit reports, is underpinned in part by widely disparaging views about what perpetrator interventions are able to achieve, as well as how success is defined. Recent nation-wide ANROWS research on the perspectives of judicial officers found that:

FF *Interviewees' definitions of successful interventions in the context of [domestic and family violence] offending varied widely. There was little consistency within jurisdictions or among similar roles when defining the effectiveness of [domestic and family violence] interventions, with measures of "success" ranging from prevention, to reduction in recidivism, improving safety outcomes for victims/survivors, demonstrated attitudinal change by perpetrators, or simply ensuring accountability (as defined by each interviewee).*

*These diverse responses reflected a lack of cohesion nationally among judicial officers about the objectives of perpetrator interventions in both general and individual contexts. In fact, interviewees in similar roles within the same jurisdiction frequently conceptualised success very differently to each other, suggesting their approaches were highly individualised and grounded in personal understandings of dynamics of [domestic and family violence], belief in whether behaviour change was achievable, and even basic definitions of "interventions"*¹²⁵

¹²³ Fitz-Gibbon, K., Maher, J., Thomas, K., McGowan, J., McCulloch, J., Burley, J., & Pfitzner, N. (2020). *The views of Australian judicial officers on domestic and family violence perpetrator interventions* (Research report, 13/2020). Sydney: ANROWS; Spencer, P. (2016). Strengthening the web of accountability: Criminal courts and family violence offenders. *Alternative Law Journal*, 41(4), 225–229.

¹²⁴ These arrangements are contentious due to consequent delays in the finalisation of protection orders for victim-survivors.

¹²⁵ Fitz-Gibbon et al. (2020), *ibid*, pp. 56-57

The researchers further noted:

FF *Despite the lack of consensus generally about defining “success” in relation to perpetrator interventions for [domestic and family violence], clear themes emerged where interviewees considered either decreased recidivism, behavioural change, and/or better outcomes for victims/survivors as key measures of the effectiveness of interventions. However, again, there were diverse views about the extent to which each of these indicators could be measured and, particularly in respect to behavioural change, how that could best be achieved and/or demonstrated. These views were evidenced by both judicial officers and MBCP providers reflecting on their work.*

... some judicial officers thought that behaviour change was difficult to achieve and sustain in the long term, particularly when using one-off interventions, thus making it difficult to assess the impact of interventions on an individual’s behaviour. These disparate views often reflected the underlying differences in interviewee understandings of [domestic and family violence] dynamics and beliefs in the ability of interventions to change behaviour (as discussed further in the section Can behaviour be changed?). Some judicial officers viewed any engagement with an MBCP (regardless of completion) positively and some MBCPs encouraged repeated engagement with programs, as they viewed behaviour change as an incremental process. For those interviewees, “success” was defined by ongoing engagement, rather than a specific outcome.¹²⁶

The research, however, indicated fairly consistent support both amongst judicial officers and MBCP providers for Magistrates to have a clear role in contributing towards perpetrator accountability, as well as for strengthened judicial monitoring and oversight.

These views are broadly consistent with findings from a recent international review of best-practice approaches towards strengthening perpetrator accountability in the context of specialist FDV courts. This review highlighted, amongst other things, the important role that MBCP reporting can perform in assisting judicial monitoring and oversight in the context of an integrated response that promotes both accountability-based and ‘therapeutic’ goals.¹²⁷ Indeed, several judicial officers in the above-mentioned ANROWS research acknowledged the incremental nature of behaviour change and that, particularly for higher-risk perpetrators, courts have a role in monitoring perpetrators over a considerable period of time spanning across multiple interventions and across periods where the user of violence does not comply.

Future developments in MBCP reporting to courts

It is difficult to predict what future developments might arise in terms of formal arrangements between Magistrates’ Courts and MBCP providers involving the mandated referrals of FDV perpetrators, particularly arrangements that span across multiple courts within a jurisdiction. If the past fifteen years are any indication, the establishment of new programs by jurisdiction-wide court

¹²⁶ *ibid*, p. 59

¹²⁷ Centre for Innovative Justice (2018). *Beyond ‘getting him to a program’: Towards best practice for perpetrator accountability in the Specialist Family Violence Court context*. Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University.

authorities or justice departments involving the mandated referral of respondents to a protection order, or of offenders as part of a delayed sentencing arrangement, will occur very infrequently.

These programs generally require new legislation. They are also costly because, to be effective, they require at least some degree of FDV specialisation to be present in the broader court context. This could include specialist FDV processes to support victim-survivors, court-based respondent workers, judicial officers and registry staff with sufficient training and supervision to become at least part-specialised in FDV matters, as well as an enhanced emphasis on coordinated and collaborative practice with statutory authorities and community sector organisations.¹²⁸

It is likely, however, that momentum towards increased collaboration between Magistrates' Courts and MBCP providers will build, albeit in a gradual fashion. Indeed, beyond any developments in formal collaborative arrangements linked to jurisdiction-wide approaches, momentum towards Magistrates' Courts becoming more embedded within local integrated responses is likely to lead to opportunities for program providers to report to courts regarding outcomes of perpetrator participation in their program. The extent to which these opportunities translate into actual reporting practice will depend on the nature of locality-specific collaborative relationships.

In many circumstances, users of violence both begin and end participation in an MBCP with a protection order in place. In general, protection orders automatically lapse after the specified period. In situations where a user of violence is not demonstrating movement towards reaching 'first or second base' in a change process – and where, after the perpetrator's completion of the program, a protection order is due to expire – it could be argued that program providers have a responsibility to inform the court of the potentially heightened risk that affected family members might face once the order expires.

Of course, in these situations the court cannot initiate action to prolong the order unless the matter is listed to return to court at expiry. In jurisdictions where legal mechanisms exist for orders to be prolonged through police or child protection authority application, however, MBCP reporting to the court can occur 'indirectly' through supporting third party action.

MBCP reporting can also assist in relation to the variation of conditions of a protection order. For example, during the course of a perpetrator's participation in a program, it might become clear to an MBCP provider that the perpetrator's use of violent and controlling behaviour towards his partner is having substantial impacts on child and family functioning. If a current protection order is in place with no or insufficient conditions focusing on the safety of children exposed to the perpetrator's violent and controlling behaviour, MBCP reporting can assist child protection authorities or police to apply for these conditions to be strengthened (or more fundamentally, for children to be named on the order if they currently are not).¹²⁹

In other words, even if no formal or informal arrangements are in place for an MBCP to provide exit reports to the court, opportunities can arise for 'indirect' reporting based on coordinated and collaborative risk management.

¹²⁸ Bond, C., Holder, R., Jeffries, S., & Fleming, C. (2017). *Evaluation of the specialist domestic and family violence court trial at Southport*. Griffith Criminology Institute; Stewart, J. (2010). *Specialist Domestic Violence Courts: What we know now – how far have Australian jurisdictions progressed?* Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearing House, Topic Paper.

¹²⁹ Indeed, where jurisdiction-specific FDV protection order legislation allows, supporting child protection authority and police action to apply for strengthened order conditions can be an alternative to child protection removal of children from the non-perpetrating parent.

The CIJ and SFV recognise that MBCPs and other change-focused programs often face significant challenges in reporting to courts, irrespective of how direct or indirect, formal or informal the arrangement. Reports provided to courts need to be kept succinct; yet have sufficient detail to inform court decisions beyond a user of violence simply having met the program's attendance requirements. Reports need to demonstrate the value of specialist MBCP expertise, while being sufficiently clear and factual to support judicial decision making.

Reporting on proximal indicators as a 'proxy' for victim-survivor disclosures

Program providers need to be highly conscious that reports provided to Magistrates, if tabled by the court, become documents to which respondents/defendants and their legal representation have automatic access. In situations where victim-survivor disclosure has a central role in guiding the report's conclusions, providers need to find creative ways of representing this information so as not to make the perpetrator aware of her disclosures.

In this context, the use of proximal indicators can be a way of conveying risk-related information obtained through victim-survivor disclosures without alerting the user of violence to these disclosures. The following is a hypothetical example of a possible approach, adapted from previous work by the CIJ. The first example involves a situation where the perpetrator was either already aware of the victim-survivor's disclosures to the program provider, or where the victim-survivor and the provider both deemed that there would be little risk to her of the perpetrator learning about her disclosures should he obtain access to the report:

In the period of participating in our program, X has continued to use some forms of violence against Y, particularly social and emotional violence. However, Y has reported no physically violent and intimidating behaviour since X commenced the program. X followed-up with our referral for him to attend AOD counselling in parallel with our MBCP, and according to Y has reduced the frequency of his alcohol consumption, but still binge drinks on a weekly to fortnightly basis. Y reports that she is at heightened risk of verbal abuse when X binge drinks. X is no longer monitoring Y's social media accounts. However, he is still intermittently verbally abusive when Y sees friends he does not want her to see.

X therefore appears to be taking responsibility for some, but not all, of his violent and controlling behaviours. At this point we do not have concerns for Y's physical safety. However, X's continued emotional and social violence, while at lower levels, still has significant impacts on his family, including for his children who witness X criticising Y's parenting on at least a fortnightly basis. We have recommended to X that he participate in a FV-informed fathering program to focus on the impact of his behaviour on his children and on being supportive rather than critical of Y's parenting, but he declined this option.

In situations where the perpetrator learning about the victim-survivor's disclosures could place her at risk, the following hypothetical rewording could indirectly convey what she had reported:

Y has reported no physically violent and intimidatory behaviour since X commenced the program. X followed-up with our referral for him to attend AOD counselling in parallel with our MBCP. According to the AOD provider, X has made some gains in reducing his alcohol consumption, but there is still further progress to be made. Given that X frequently used alcohol consumption over a period of four years as an excuse to use violence, X's remaining patterns of alcohol abuse is likely to be placing Y at continued risk of some forms of violence.

X has acknowledged his use of physical violence. However, our observations of him through the program is that he does not yet understand the significance of other tactics **of violence, including emotional and social abuse**. Despite repeated focus throughout the program on emotional and social violence, at the point of program completion, X has

disclosed little more about these behaviours than he did on intake. He therefore does not appear to be taking responsibility for his wider patterns of coercive controlling behaviour beyond physical violence.

We have recommended to X that he participate in a FV-informed fathering program to focus on the impact of his behaviour on his children, and to take a more child-centred approach in his parenting. X has made critical comments in individual behaviour change sessions that accompany group-work about Y's parenting style, and we are concerned about whether he might be undermining her parenting. X declined the offer of a referral to this program, however, and maintains that he is a 'good father to his children'. Despite three individual sessions focusing specifically on X's role as a co-parent, and two group-work sessions on the impact of family and domestic violence on children, X continues to minimise the impact of his behaviour on his children, and is not able to articulate how important the children's relationship with their mother is for the children's wellbeing and development.

This example foreshadows a few of the proximal indicators that will be tentatively presented in chapter seven for consideration by the MBCP field. The CIJ and SFV hope that this will provide an opportunity to advance quality practice in MBCP reporting to Magistrates' Courts in both civil and criminal jurisdictions.

Reporting to child protection referrers

Mandated referrals from child protection authorities have formed an increasing proportion of MBCP caseloads over the past fifteen or so years. They are one of the largest sources of referrals for many program providers.

Child protection authority referrals usually arise after child protection concerns have been substantiated through an investigation or appraisal process. Sometimes, they take the form of active referrals with written referral information supplied to the program provider with the expectation that the provider contacts the user of violence to arrange intake and initial assessment, or that the user of violence makes contact to do so.

At other times, the child protection authority simply instructs the perpetrator to contact a program without any direct liaison with, or the supply of any information to, the program provider beforehand. It is not uncommon in these situations for the program provider to be initially unclear about the nature of the enquiry or referral, and about what the child protection authority is seeking from the referral.¹³⁰

Child protection referrals generally take the form of 'soft' mandates without legal ramifications if the user of violence does not follow through with the referral, except if the referral has been made through a Children's Court. However, child protection referrals are generally considered by a perpetrator father to be mandated referrals due to the consequences that can occur if the user of violence does not follow through, related to the perpetrator's access to his children. Consequences can be based on the child protection authority's statutory powers, and/or through orders made by the Children's Court at the request of the child protection system.

The exact nature of the 'stick' associated with a child protection referral can be opaque, not only to the user of violence, but also to the program provider. The user of violence might have a general

¹³⁰ Of course, this can be clarified through program provider liaison with the perpetrator's child protection worker; however, sometimes this communication occurs mostly over email and might take some weeks to unfold.

sense that, by not complying with the referral, the child protection authority can impact his access to his children, although he might not know the exact mechanisms through which this might occur. Often, however, the referral is associated with an intention to remove restrictions that were initially imposed, either through the authority's statutory powers or by a Children's Court order, provided that the user of violence attends the program.¹³¹ In other words, the implication is that, if the user of violence participates in the program, the authority will:

- remove or reduce restrictions it has directly placed or negotiated with the perpetrator; and/or
- apply for an order limiting the perpetrator's access to his children to be revoked or relaxed by the Children's Court;¹³² and/or
- close the case.

What is meant by 'participates' is crucial in the context of this paper. One of the central arguments for developing a framework of proximal indicators in the context of child protection referrals is to attempt to change the practice of authorities basing decisions solely on whether the user of violence has met the referred-to program's attendance requirements. The systemic pressures on child protection authorities to focus on perpetrator attendance alone are substantial. With such high caseloads and volumes of incoming referrals, authorities are under continuous and ongoing pressure to process and finalise cases as quickly as possible.

In some situations, referrals to an MBCP are associated with the authority's long-term work with a family over a time-frame of twelve months or more. This can occur, for example, when one or more children have been removed into care and a family reunification/preservation order applies.

Information sought by child protection authorities

As mentioned above, the specific purpose of the referral made by a child protection authority is not always clear. A number of factors can be at play here, including how the case is conceptualised.

It is widely recognised across all Australian jurisdictions – and indeed across the Western world – that child protection authorities still have a long way to go to adopt a perpetrator pattern based lens to FDV work, rather than holding mothers responsible for 'not protecting their children' from the father's violence.¹³³ Substantial barriers exist at the systems, organisational, policy and practitioner

¹³¹ Child protection authority direct statutory powers, without the need for court approval, are generally limited. However, the difference between what a child protection authority can directly do, and what requires determination from an independent Children's Court, is sometimes unclear to the perpetrator. This is particularly in situations of initial and relatively routine orders from Children's Courts that provide child protection with the authority in a given case to make initial assessments, take emergency protective action, etc. Child protection authorities can also enter into a 'voluntary agreement' with the perpetrator without the backing of a court order, with the implication that non-compliance might lead to more formal child protection action.

¹³² For example, the removal of a Supervision Order, or the cessation of a Family Preservation Order that has involved conditions limiting the perpetrator's access to his children.

¹³³ Arnall, E., & Stewart, S. (2021). Developing a theoretical framework to discuss mothers experiencing domestic violence and being subject to interventions: A cross-national perspective. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, 10(2), 113-126; De Simone, T., & Heward-Belle, S. (2020). Evidencing better child protection practice: Why representations of domestic violence matter. *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 32(4), 403-419; Humphreys, C., Healey, L., & Mandel, D. (2018). Case reading as a practice and training intervention in domestic violence and child protection. *Australian Social Work*, 71(3), 277-291; Kelton, K., Elrod, N., Kaylor, L., Copeland, M., & Weaver, T. (2020). "She's just a bad mother": Perceptions of failure to protect children in relationships with intimate partner violence. *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development*, 17(4), 295-316; Philip, G., Clifton, J., & Brandon, M. (2019). The trouble with fathers: The impact of time and gendered-thinking on working relationships

levels that maintain a child protection focus, in FDV cases, on what mothers need to do to stop their children being exposed to (and experiencing) the violence, and that keep perpetrators as the cause of the harm invisible in child protection casework.¹³⁴ It is well documented how this focus can lead to mothers being blamed and punished for ‘failing to protect’ their children without an understanding of their choices, protective actions and resistance to the violence in the light of the perpetrator’s patterns of coercive control and social entrapment.¹³⁵

While principal practitioners and child protection leadership across most Australian jurisdictions are attempting to shift this focus and approach, the barriers referred to above are making it difficult for these intentions to translate into changed frontline practice on the ground. This is not to say that there are not pockets of highly promising practice, but they remain the exception rather than the rule.

Referrals of FDV perpetrators to MBCPs, therefore, are most likely to arise in the context of the child protection authority placing expectations both on mothers and fathers alike, such as for each to participate in particular services and address particular issues. These referrals are unlikely to be accompanied by an analysis of the perpetrator’s patterns of behaviour, or by specific goals regarding what the perpetrator needs to do to contribute positively towards, rather than (severely) harm, child and family functioning. The mere fact of making the referral, however, indicates at least some shift in practice towards attempting to hold the user of violence responsible, or at least part responsible, for the harm caused.

In general, child protection authorities make referrals to MBCPs because they seek the perpetrator’s commitment to change his behaviour so that he no longer causes harm to his children. What feedback they seek from the program provider about the perpetrator’s ‘progress’ depends on the casework circumstances associated with the referral. Often, the authority is mostly seeking to know whether the user of violence attends all or most program sessions. Unfortunately, child protection authorities (and other mandated referrers) often look no further than program attendance, and erroneously assume that meeting the program’s attendance requirements is itself an indicator of successful behaviour change. In this respect, the referrer seeks to know whether the user of violence has done what has been asked of him – that is, attended every session of the program.

At other times, the MBCP provider is asked for additional information, based on very general questions such as “is he taking his participation in the program seriously?” or “is he changing his behaviour?” In longer-term cases involving multiple multi-agency case conferences and a very high degree of risk, the reporting that the child protection authority seeks might be more nuanced.

Sometimes, these more nuanced expectations can include a request for information about whether the perpetrator (during his participation in the program or after program completion) understands the impact of his behaviour on his children, and is committed to change his co-parenting and parenting practices in the light of this understanding. These requests can test the limits of what some

between fathers and social workers in child protection practice in England. *Journal of Family Issues*. 16(40), 2288-2309.

¹³⁴ Humphreys, H., Healy, L., & Heward-Belle, S. (2020). Fathers who use domestic violence: Organisational capacity building and practice development. *Child & Family Social Work*, 25(51), 18-27; Olszowy, L., Jaffe, P., Dawson, M., Straatman, A-L., & Saxtona, M. (2020). Voices from the frontline: Child protection workers’ perspectives on barriers to assessing risk in domestic violence cases. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 116, published online 30 June 2020;

¹³⁵ Archer-Kuhn, B., & de Villiers, S. (2019). Gendered practices in child protection: Shifting mother accountability and father invisibility in situations of domestic violence, *Social Inclusion*, 7(1), published online 28 February 2019; Cramp, K., & Zufferey, C. (2020). The removal of children in domestic violence: Widening service provider perspectives. *Affilia*, published online 2 September 2020.

MBCPs assess and are able to report on, particularly those that do not have a strong component on responsible, restorative and reparative fathering in the context of FDV.¹³⁶ As outlined earlier, standard MBCP work allocates only a relatively small amount of program time to fathering and to issues specifically relating to respectful, safe parenting and co-parenting in the context of children experiencing FDV.

As indicated earlier, child protection might be seeking information to assist with major decisions in relation to the case. This could include, for example, whether to apply to a Children's Court for the continuation of an order restricting the perpetrator's access to the children; to deem that the user of violence has met the conditions and requirements applicable to him in relation to a family preservation order; or to close the case. Decisions such as these, if ill-informed, can have significant impacts on child and adult victim-survivor safety and wellbeing.

In most situations, child protection workers seek MBCP reporting within a timeframe of a few months after making the referral. This can be due to organisational pressure to close cases 'as soon as possible' stemming from constantly high volumes of incoming referrals, as well as a preference not to keep families 'on the books' for any longer than necessary, due to the stigmatising nature of child protection involvement. This can present a quandary for MBCP providers, who understandably might find it difficult to report on outcomes after just a few months of working with the user of violence.

In some situations, MBCP providers find that the child protection authority no longer seeks feedback, and indeed might have closed the case. This can occur, for example, if the adult victim-survivor decides to separate from the perpetrator. Unfortunately, child protection authorities often still erroneously view this as a reason to close the case due to the mother taking 'sufficient protective action', without considering the escalated risk that can occur during and after the separation process. This has led some program providers to develop very specific referral requirements including that the referring agency must commit to remain actively involved in the case throughout the whole program cycle.

In other situations, the timelines for reporting are less pressured, for example when the authority is working with the family in the context of a family reunification order, or where the case is prioritised as involving very high to severe risk.

Child protection authorities also often expect reports from MBCP providers to be very brief; for example, a few lines of text in an email. This differs from reporting to some other mandated referrers (for example, Corrective Services), who often request more formal (and sometimes highly structured) reports.

Supporting child protection shifts in practice

Irrespective of what expectations for reporting come with the referral, there are several opportunities for change-focused programs to report in areas additional to the mere provision of attendance dates, in ways that might help to make positive shifts in child protection practice over time.

First, in some situations, the partner contact practices associated with the MBCP will result in deeper and more finely tuned engagement with the adult victim-survivor than what the child protection

¹³⁶ That is, beyond one or two group-work sessions focusing on impacts on children, and beyond motivating men's participation in the program through appealing to their values and self-image associated with fatherhood.

practitioner was able to achieve. In addition, some MBCP providers have collaborative relationships and information sharing practices in ways that the local child protection authority might not have; or alternatively, might have more time (relatively speaking) to engage in information sharing activities. Due to these factors, the MBCP provider might discover more about the adult victim-survivor's (and the children's) patterns of resistance, strengths and protective actions than what the child protection authority has identified. Sharing this information with the child protection authority can be one means to promote understanding of the mother's choices, actions, strengths and protective actions.

Second, MBCP providers can report information pertaining to the perpetrator's specific patterns of violent and controlling behaviours, and the harm that these patterns cause to child and family functioning. In the vast majority of cases, MBCPs are likely to identify patterns and impacts beyond those known to the child protection authority and will therefore be much more adept at describing them and drawing implications in relation to risk and case goals.

Of course, child protection workers generally do not ask for these types of information. As mentioned earlier, referrals to MBCPs are often conducted after the initial investigation or appraisal process has been completed. At that point, the child protection worker might have considered the initial assessment to have been 'completed'.

There are still highly important reasons for this information to be shared, however, to the extent that it is identified through the MBCP provider's engagement with the perpetrator and his (ex)partner. The provision of this information can exert an indirect influence, at least, on how the child protection practitioner(s) involved in the case engage with the adult victim-survivor and with the perpetrator, and on how the case and case plan are conceptualised.

Furthermore, without this information being shared by the MBCP provider, the victim-survivor's resistance, protective actions and the reasons why she made particular decisions and engaged in particular behaviours in response to the perpetrator's patterns of coercive control will remain invisible to the system as a whole; as will the perpetrator's patterns and impacts on child and family functioning. Even if this information does not influence child protection practice in relation to the case, if shared it becomes available for use by the system at a later point.

Third, MBCPs have an opportunity to provide preliminary reports to child protection in situations where it is clear that the user of violence is not reaching fundamental behaviour change steppingstones. As outlined later in this paper, it is not uncommon for MBCP providers to work with perpetrators referred from child protection authorities (or from other sources) who, even after two or three months into the program, are still not starting to take responsibility for their behaviour. These might be perpetrators, for example, who continue to deny engaging in any violent or controlling behaviour beyond a single incident (the incident that precipitated police involvement); who continue to blame their partner for those aspects of their behaviour that they are willing to admit; and/or who show few signs of understanding impacts. The CIJ and SFV argue that MBCPs have an opportunity – and a responsibility – to report information to mandated referrers relating to a perpetrator's lack of stepping into the initial stages of a behaviour change process.

This can mean proactively sharing this information prior to when the referrer is expecting an exit report. There are major implications of a user of violence reaching the half-way or two-thirds point of a change-focused program who has not 'reached first or second base' of a behaviour change process. Waiting to provide this information until the user of violence completes the program might in some instances be too late. By then, the child protection authority might have closed the case or made other ill-advised decisions on the basis of the information that it possessed at the time.

The CIJ and SFV argue that proactively sharing this information in a timely manner is an important part of adopting a collaborative across-agency approach towards ongoing risk assessment and risk management, and towards addressing the motivational or other barriers to the user of violence participating in a genuine change process. This paper argues that developing a framework of proximal or signpost indicators will assist change-focused program providers with the concepts and language to articulate such information clearly and succinctly to mandated referrers.

Overall, the task facing child protection systems to become more FDV-informed and to adopt a perpetrator pattern-based lens is enormous. In the CIJ and SFV's view, MBCP reporting that focuses solely on the provision of service participation dates reinforces the misleading equating of program completion with behaviour change. It also denies child protection authorities the information that they need to make perpetrator patterns and their impacts more visible, and to understand victim-survivor strengths and protective capacities in the light of these patterns.

Reporting to Corrective Services

MBCP reporting to Corrective Services is perhaps, on average, the most formalised and developed compared with reporting to any other mandated referrer. This is because such reporting often occurs in the context of specific requirements which are set (or at least initially set and then modified through negotiation) as part of funding service agreements between Corrective Services and the program provider.

Some Australian Correctional authorities¹³⁷ run all of their FDV-specific offender intervention programs in-house, both in prison and community corrections contexts. Most, however, contract the provision of some of these programs to NGO providers, usually in relation to users of violence who are assessed by Corrections to be at low or moderate risk of reoffending.¹³⁸ These contracts either specify MBCP providers to run a certain number of Corrections-specific groups; or alternatively, enable Corrections referrals to be placed in mixed groups referred from a variety of sources. In both arrangements, Australian MBCPs are generally permitted to run their own style of program and curriculum, provided that they meet jurisdiction-based minimum standards, although contracts might include specific additional prescriptions beyond the applicable standards. Some program providers also receive Community Correctional referrals on an ad hoc basis; not attached to a funding agreement; and accepted as one of a number of varied community sources of referrals.

There are some notable differences in MBCP reporting to Corrective Services referrers than to child protection authorities or Magistrates' Courts. First, it can be less clear what influence this reporting will exert on Correctional decision-making, particularly in Community Correctional contexts where the majority of FDV perpetrator work in the Corrections space occurs.

¹³⁷ At the time of writing, this included South Australia and Tasmania.

¹³⁸ There is widespread anecdotal evidence across Australian jurisdictions that Correctional assessments of re-offending risk often under-estimate the degree of FDV risk, and are based on a different understanding of risk to that underpinning the work of specialist community-based FDV services. Correctional assessments of risk are often based on a generalist understanding of offending, rather than a specific understanding of FDV, and can be weighted towards assigning low risk for perpetrators who have no general criminal orientation. These assessments can sometimes give insufficient weight to the types of evidence-based risk factors inherent in common FDV risk assessment frameworks. Furthermore, Correctional assessments are often based solely on information provided by the offender (directly through interview, and indirectly through psychometric testing), and can therefore miss highly important risk-related information that the wider system currently holds, including that obtained from the victim-survivor.

Community Correctional supervision of FDV offenders varies markedly. Some is of a predominantly administrative nature, with little involvement from the community corrections or probation officer beyond monitoring whether the offender has met the service attendance requirements of programs to which he has been referred. Other supervision arrangements, however, are based on a more active, and even intensive, case management model. Differences can be based on the skill and orientation of individual Community Corrections and probation officers; the size of their caseload; and the level of (general re-offending) risk that the offender is deemed to present to the community.

In this context, some MBCP practitioners have expressed concern about whether exit reports are even read by supervising Community Corrections officers, believing that their case notes and exit reports may only be accessed if the offender subsequently re-offends and re-enters the Correctional system at a later point.¹³⁹ MBCP communication and collaboration processes with Correctional referrers also vary substantially – not only between jurisdictions, but also *within* them – and often rest in part on the particular approach of the Community Corrections or probation officer involved. While the ongoing and timely sharing of risk-related information is as important in Correctional referral contexts as in other situations, the purpose and impact of exit reporting is not always clear.

Second, and as mentioned above, MBCP providers who enter into funding service agreements with Correctional referrers can be provided with specifications, and even templates, regarding what to provide in weekly updates and end-of-program exit reports. This was recently described by MBCP practitioners as follows:

FF *The [C]orrectional service focus group participants were very interested and engaged in the discussion about how to best assess program performance and collect the types of data that can evidence some of the claims that are made in their end of program assessments. There was a lot of discussion about the different methods that were used to inform the post-program assessment reports, although these methods did not always appear to be well integrated. There was, for example, a standardised treatment completion report that required the facilitator to make comments about a number of areas, including, behaviour in the program, insight, victim/ survivor stance and so on. These areas were not rated, with the only formal re-assessment occurring if there was a rescoring of the original risk assessments, which might only occur following a new offence.*

... The pre-program structured assessments of risk used by correctional agencies (e.g. the Violence Risk Scale and the SARA) were not viewed as particularly helpful in assessing change (and were described by one participant as “not fit for purpose”). Some participants noted that although psychometrics were re-administered at the end of the program, they were not formally reported in the end-of-program report. The weekly assessment of program performance was not collated in these either. Rather, a free text pro forma was completed (with the following headings: program participation; responsibility taking; commitment to non-violence; alternatives to using violence; impact of violence and abuse; dangerous thinking; and summary and recommendations).¹⁴⁰

This discussion highlights the work that is required for MBCP providers to negotiate an approach towards reporting in Correctional contexts that is practicable, meaningful and that is fit-for-purpose according to the theory of change adopted by the providers. This represents a significant challenge

¹³⁹ See p. 67 of Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2019). *Evaluation readiness, program quality and outcomes in men's behaviour change programs* (Research report, 01/2019). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*, p. 65

when Correctional referrers often employ an incident-based understanding of FDV centred on concepts of ‘recidivism’ and ‘re-offending’, and when they prioritise psychometric assessments of the offender over the experiences of victim-survivors.

Reporting and the family law system

The ways in which many FDV perpetrators make use of the family law system to control and punish victim-survivors, and to target mother-child relationships, are widely documented.¹⁴¹ Unfortunately, the family law system is highly amenable to manipulation by perpetrators and is ill equipped to respond to FDV issues, particularly in the context of a legislative emphasis on shared parenting.¹⁴²

There is little existing data on the frequency of family law system referrals of FDV perpetrators to MBCPs. It is likely that NGOs that simultaneously provide family law services (for example, through Family Relationships Centres) and MBCPs are generating internal referrals from the former to the latter on a voluntary basis. For example, a recent evaluation of the Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS) program suggests that men’s FASS practitioners are referring some perpetrators to MBCPs (again, on a voluntary basis). There were no indications through the evaluation, however, of the volumes in which such referrals are occurring.¹⁴³ Certainly, the Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan of Action to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children includes funding to place men’s workers within all FASS locations, with the intention to generate referrals to MBCPs.¹⁴⁴

Referrals generated through these parts of the family law system are unlikely to result in reporting requests, as they are informal and voluntary. The generation of formal referrals through the family law system to MBCPs in Australia is, at best, unsystematic, and likely to be occurring at low volumes.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that, when a man is referred to an MBCP in the context of a family law matter, generally no referral documentation accompanies the referral. Often, the referral transpires through the user of violence simply saying at MBCP intake that he has been asked by the Family Court Judge or by his solicitor to attend the MBCP. In these situations, it is usually unclear to whom the MBCP provider would actually report, and whether the relevant court would be amenable to receiving a report at the completion of the perpetrator’s participation in the program. More streamlined referral processes that involve clear expectations and processes of reporting back in the context of the family law jurisdiction are likely to occur in contexts where an MBCP provider has developed a strong collaborative working relationship with the court in question.

¹⁴¹ Campbell, E. (2017). How domestic violence batterers use custody procedures in family courts to abuse victims, and how courts can put a stop to it. *UCLA Women’s Law Journal*, 24(1), 41-66; Laing, L. (2017). Secondary victimization: Domestic violence survivors navigating the family law system. *Violence Against Women*, 23(11), 1314-1335; Roberts, D., Chamberlain, P., & Delfabbro, P. (2015). Women’s experiences of the processes associated with the family court of Australia in the context of domestic violence: A thematic analysis. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 22(4), 599-615; Silberg, J., & Dallam, S. (2019). Abusers gaining custody in family courts: A case series of over turned decisions, *Journal of Child Custody*, 16(2), 140-169; Thiara, R., & Humphreys, C. (2017). Absent presence: The ongoing impact of men’s violence on the mother-child relationship. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(1), 137-145.

¹⁴² Australian Law Reform Commission (2019). *Family law for the future: An inquiry into the family law system*. ALRC Report 135. Commonwealth of Australia; Kirchner, I., & Tassone, S. (2020). *Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Australia’s Family Law System*. Melbourne, Victoria: No to Violence; Rathus, Z. (2020). A history of the use of the concept of parental alienation in the Australian family law system: Contradictions, collisions and their consequences. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 42(1), 5-17.

¹⁴³ Inside Policy (2018). *An evaluation of the Family Advocacy and Support Services: Final report*. Prepared for the Attorney General’s Department of the Australian Government.

¹⁴⁴ <https://plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au/initiative/dedicated-mens-support-workers-in-all-family-advocacy-and-support-services/>

On this issue No to Violence recently wrote:

FF *MBCPs currently receive only a small number of referrals through the family law system. While a significant number of MBCP participants have current family law proceedings or parenting orders, they are rarely referred into the program by the family law system, and there is virtually no information shared between the MBCP and the family law system.*¹⁴⁵

There have been multiple calls in recent years for referral processes of FDV perpetrators from family law jurisdictions to MBCP providers to become more streamlined and formalised, to contribute towards assessments of fathers' safe parenting capacity.¹⁴⁶ No to Violence writes:

FF *The assessment of men's safe parenting capacity in the context of a history of family and domestic violence perpetration is complex. There is no single assessment tool or template that can be used by non-family violence specialists to determine whether a father is making progress in addressing and reducing his use of family and domestic violence; and whether he is engaging in reparative, restorative and responsible parenting mindful of the effects that his violence has had and is having on his partner, his children and the mother-child bond. Many family and domestic violence perpetrators engage in a range of behaviours and tactics to undermine their partner's or former partner's confidence and ability to parent, and the relationship she has with her children. MBCPs, working with men over a period of time and collaborating with child protection authorities and family services providers, are in the best position to provide accurate and informed advice in family court situations about the risk that family and domestic violence perpetrators pose to their children, and whether he is making the changes required to provide safe, reparative and restorative parenting.*

These calls have included recommending the establishment of an independent body that would serve a similar function to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) in the UK, commissioning reports from relevant services to assist the Family Court to make determinations that are in the best interests of the child, including when FDV is involved.¹⁴⁷ CAFCASS is one of the largest referrers of men to domestic violence perpetrator programmes (DVPPs) in the UK, requesting reports from these providers regarding the extent of the perpetrator's safe parenting capacity.

While any such developments are a matter for the future, it is likely that momentum towards a more streamlined and formal process for referring users of violence through the Family Court will build at some point. As the above comments from No to Violence attest, reporting on safe parenting capacity in the context of FDV is complex, and requires a focus on the father's patterns of behaviour including towards his (ex)partner and those impacting her relationship with their children.

Consistent with a general theme of this paper, in some situations this reporting will need to be based predominantly on observations of the user of violence through his engagement in the MBCP, especially given that many partners who have firmly separated from the perpetrator decline the offer of partner contact. The CIJ and SFV recognise the need for a set of proximal or signpost indicators that can be used in reporting of perpetrator safe parenting capacity in these contexts, to

¹⁴⁵ Kirchner, L., & Tassone, S. (2020), *ibid*, p. 10

¹⁴⁶ Family Law Council (2016). Families with complex needs and the intersection of the family law and child protection systems: Final report. Attorney General's Department: Commonwealth of Australia; Kirchner & Tassone (2020).

¹⁴⁷ See <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parents-and-carers/domestic-abuse/>

supplement the core set of indicators as part of the signposts framework. This supplementary set would be applicable more broadly to situations where reporting back to the referrer includes a focus on perpetrator behaviour change in relation to impacts on children and family functioning – whether this be in post-separation contexts or when the family still resides together as a unit. Some considerations in developing this supplementary set are explored in Chapter Seven of this paper.

Reporting on risk, rather than on progress

As highlighted throughout this paper, some MBCP provider concerns about reporting anything other than service attendance dates centre on the understandable hesitation to respond to questions about perpetrator ‘progress’. The CIJ and SFV share this hesitation and see it as worthwhile in this context to draw upon some analysis on the difference between reporting on risk, rather than on progress.

Reflecting upon his experience managing MBCPs in South Australia, ten years ago Shephard-Bayly strongly cautioned against reporting about men’s progress.¹⁴⁸ Highly relevant to the current paper, it is worth quoting from his work at length:

FF ... we are often asked to comment on how much ‘progress’ men have made in the group. Our assessments may in turn inform important decisions such as: where the offender resides; whether contact with the partner or children is permitted; and sentencing outcomes... However, our experience suggests that using the notion of men’s ‘progress’ as the basis of these decisions can be problematic and potentially dangerous.

One of the main challenges we face is to report men’s ‘progress’ within a context that acknowledges the history of violence towards their partners and/or children. The reporting of ‘progress’ can be extremely problematic due to underreporting of domestic violence within the criminal justice system. Even when reported to police, the evidence required for conviction tends to lead to both a low conviction rate and convictions primarily for physical acts of violence and abuse. As a result, the starting point from which a man may make any ‘progress’ is often a more extensive use of violence and abuse than is apparent at face value.

... in the absence of women and/or children’s feedback, any reporting of ‘progress’ focused only upon a man’s favourable attendance, group interaction, understanding and application of the [men’s behaviour change] concepts is vastly inadequate. Such reporting cannot claim to reflect levels or occurrence of violence. Even where feedback from partners is available, including this information within formal reports without further endangering victims may be extremely difficult.

Another factor to consider is that during the time when men attend stopping violence programs, they are usually subjected to significant monitoring, for example by police, courts, correctional services, domestic violence services, child protection services and possibly their partner. Program attendees may face serious criminal, statutory and/or social sanctions for further acts of violence or non-compliance, including incarceration, child protection orders, family law orders or separation. Because of this monitoring, the man may be on his ‘best behaviour’.

¹⁴⁸ Shephard-Bayly, D. (2010). *Working with men who use violence: the problem of reporting “progress”*. Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse Newsletter 39.

*... It is often counterproductive to violence reduction goals to assume that men's 'progress' can be ascribed to the men's group program. Ironically, if the complex array of factors that enable 'progress' to be made in relation to men's violence (including criminal justice responses, support for women and children, monitoring and intervention) are not formally acknowledged, then this may lead to decisions that discontinue these very measures, on the basis of the presumed 'success' of the men's group.*¹⁴⁹

Critiquing the notion of reporting on a man's 'progress' to referrers at the completion of the program, Shephard-Bayly emphasises the alternative of reporting on the risk, at that point, that the man poses to those experiencing his violence:

FF *... we have identified a number of strategies that serve as effective alternatives to 'progress' reporting... One of our main responses has been to ensure that the principles of safety and accountability are prioritised within 'progress' reports for men attending [our program]. These principles have shaped a number of practices. Men's reports are qualified with clear statements if and when men's demonstrated behaviour within intervention sessions is not correlated with actual behaviour change outside of the group. Where available and when safe, the feedback from men's partners, former partners or children is included within the report. Men's self-disclosure around additional, unreported acts of violence and/or abuse and patterns of power and control are included.*

At a systems level, the implementation of risk and safety reports for women has been a vital component in documenting women's experiences and highlighting domestic violence risk factors within the criminal justice system... where 'progress' reports are requested by other statutory agencies, concurrent women's and children's risk and safety reports may be submitted by women's or children and young people's advocates. Both of these practices serve to challenge the often minimised, blaming and manipulative accounts offered by men who use violence.

¹⁵⁰

This discussion raises the critical question of what a framework of proximal or signpost indicators represents, and what it does not. This question is far less complex or contentious when it is clear that a user of violence is not demonstrating these signposts. If, at the point of reaching half or most of the way through a program, a perpetrator is still denying his use of violence; remains heavily committed to victim stance thinking; and shows little willingness to consider the impacts of his behaviour; it is clear that he is not making much or any 'progress'.

If a program participant does demonstrate proximal indicators, however, the question is raised of whether this means he is making 'progress' or, rather, that he is only taking steps along a journey that might or might not ever translate into actual behaviour change. In other words, are the signposts actual indicators of the man's 'progress' in making changes to his behaviour, or 'just' indicators of the man's willingness to enter into a journey towards or process of change?

The difference between these two is far more than semantic. In this paper the CIJ and SFV adopt the latter interpretation, for two reasons.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 6-7

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 7

First, there has been little or no research investigating links between the demonstration of the types of proximal indicators suggested in this paper with actual behaviour change. Second, the conceptual basis for determining the draft indicators arises from what MBCPs – across different theoretical orientations – posit as essential components of a behaviour change *process*.

Of course, while the difference between these two interpretations of what these signposts demonstrate might be clear to MBCP providers, it might not be clear to referrers. Their automatic default position might be to consider these signposts as indicative of perpetrator progress in the ways that Shephard-Bayly warned against.

The framing of these indicators will therefore be highly important in the course of reporting. Again, this will be easier in situations where a user of violence, despite having completed a significant proportion of the program, is failing to demonstrate the signposts. The lack of reaching ‘first or second base’ in a behaviour change process will often strongly suggest that the program has not been successful in reducing the risk that the user of violence poses to the safety and wellbeing of adult and child victim-survivors; and that, as per Shephard-Bayly’s analysis, any reduction in risk that has occurred is likely to be due to other aspects of the integrated response. Any links made between a perpetrator’s positive demonstration of the indicators and reduced risk to victim-survivors, however, need to be much more cautious and tentative.

More generally, the reporting of signpost indicators should not be used as an alternative to other available information that can help to provide an analysis of where current risk lies. **Victim-survivor reports of the perpetrator’s behaviour are, of course, a far more important measure of risk than the signpost indicators proposed in this paper.** When available, information obtained from victim-survivors needs to take priority in the reporting process, where it would not place the victim-survivor at increased risk as a result of the information being included in reporting.

MBCP provider hesitation in reporting back to referrers

As outlined earlier in this paper, minimum standards for MBCP work that were first introduced in Australia (specifically in Victoria) prohibited program providers from reporting back to referrers anything other than a list of service attendance dates, outside the context of risk-related information sharing for the purposes of managing current risks. While there have been some changes to this in some of the most recent iterations of minimum standards, this initial stance firmly shaped reporting practice in the 1990s, 2000s and well into the 2010s.

There are a number of reasons why some, if not many, MBCP providers are still highly concerned about the practice of reporting anything other than attendance dates. These are briefly described below, not in any order of the frequency or strength within which these views are held. At this point of the paper, these reasons will simply be described; the CIJ and SFV will offer alternative viewpoints in the last part of this chapter.

“Our role is to provide a therapeutic intervention, not to do [insert name of referrer]’s work for them” or, specifically in the case of child protection contexts, “If child protection wants to know if he’s safe to be with his kids, they will need to assess this themselves, it’s not our role to do so”.

This specific hesitation is based, in part, on an attempt to set firm boundaries concerning the role and purpose of the MBCP, and for this not to stretch based on the expectations of referrers. Program providers that adopt this view are likely to be those that position themselves as somewhat ‘stand-alone’ therapeutic programs that accept referrals from various sources, rather

than being embedded as part of an integrated response focusing on risk.¹⁵¹ The nature and pressures of funding service agreements, and the ways in which they can shape inflexible practices based on ensuring throughput and client numbers, can also be a factor here.¹⁵²

“We are a therapeutic intervention, not part of the ‘stick’ that child protection or the courts wield. If the men think we are reporting back about them, they will not trust us, the therapeutic relationship will be harmed, and they will disengage. We can’t work with them positively towards change and be part of ‘the stick’ at the same time.”

This hesitation follows from the above, in part reflecting an orientation to the work that prioritises therapeutic goals over those focusing on risk management and accountability. It can also reflect the genuine difficulty of adopting a balanced lens that views perpetrators as inherently capable of being loving, non-violent men, and also as men who use patterns of coercive control and social entrapment that substantially harm (and, in some cases, terrorise) their family members.¹⁵³

This hesitation can also arise in contexts where particular cohorts of perpetrators are from communities who have experienced, and continue to experience, oppressive and colonising responses from state-based authorities. FDV perpetrator change-focused program providers embedded within these communities often face a quandary between the need to make use of state-based authorities and services to contribute towards protecting victim-survivors and managing the risk posed by the user of violence, while wanting to differentiate themselves clearly from these authorities, due to this history of colonisation and oppression.¹⁵⁴

“If we report anything to the referrer other than a list of attendance dates, whatever we write will be misconstrued, particularly if we say anything positive about the perpetrator’s participation in the program.”

As outlined earlier in this paper, this has historically been the major concern underpinning the position taken in Australian minimum standards until recently. The concern is reinforced by the lack of research on the correlation between any nuanced program participation variables – beyond the blunt binary of program completion or drop-out – and behaviour change.¹⁵⁵ The concern is also reinforced by the common experience of practitioners encountering program participants who *appear* to be genuinely participating in their program but who are not actually making shifts in their behaviour (as evidenced, for example, by partner reports) – or who make shifts that are only partial or temporary.

¹⁵¹ Diemer, K., Humphreys, C., Laming, C., & Smith, J. (2015). Researching collaborative processes in domestic violence perpetrator programs: Benchmarking for situation improvement. *Journal of Social Work*, 15(1), 65-86.

¹⁵² Carson, E., Chung, D., & Day, A. (2009). Evaluating contracted domestic violence programs: Standardisation and organisational culture. *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, 9(1), 10-19.

¹⁵³ Kuskoff, E., Clarke, A., & Parsell, C. (2021). What about men? The marginalization of men who engage in domestic violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, OnlineFirst, published 18 February 2021; Vlasis, R. (2014). *Domestic violence perpetrator programs: Education, therapy, support, accountability 'or' struggle?* Melbourne, Australia: No to Violence.

¹⁵⁴ Shah, P. (2017). *Seeding generations: New strategies towards services for people who abuse*. Interagency Working Group on NYC’s Blueprint for Abusive Partner Intervention. New York.

¹⁵⁵ Mackay, E., Gibson, A., Lam, H., & Beecham, D. (2015). *Perpetrator interventions in Australia: Part one – Literature review*. State of knowledge paper (ANROWS Landscapes, PP01/2015). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS; Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2019), *ibid*.

In part, this concern also arises due to varying expectations in relation to the time period during which users of violence may be able to show some indications of any shift. Of course, both program providers and referrers seek behaviour change to occur as quickly as possible. However, referrers will often want to know “has he changed his behaviour?” in order to make decisions, as outlined earlier in this chapter, about child access or supervision arrangements in a child protection context, or about court orders and sentencing. The positive signs that a user of violence might demonstrate in an MBCP context – such as genuinely grappling with the program content, or commencing some acknowledgement of his violent behaviours and their impacts – might or might not translate into significant shifts in his behaviour within the four or five month timeframe of the program. They might, however, at least be indicative of the user of violence taking some initial and genuine first (and even strong) steps on a journey towards change. Program providers rightly fear that providing ‘positive feedback’ about these steps can result in the referrer misconstruing their meaning, due to their concentrated focus on the question “Has he changed?”

An additional complication is that, for some users of violence, it can be difficult to tell if indicators of regular participation, and commitment to the program and to the work required to make shifts in behaviour, are genuine. Common quandaries experienced by MBCP practitioners include “He is saying the right things, but does he really mean it?” and “If his partner was observing, what sense would she make out of [what he said, what emotion he expressed, etc] – would she see that as something new in his attitudes or focus, or just more of the same?”

“We cannot report on outcomes as providing any information disclosed by the perpetrator’s partner will put her at risk.”

This concern has been highlighted in this chapter in relation to MBCP reporting to courts but manifests more broadly than this. There is a reasonably widespread (and, to some extent, well-founded) fear in the sector of perpetrators being able to access case file notes and reports, either through Freedom of Information requests, or via court subpoenas. This is one of the reasons why a standard dictum in MBCP perpetrator case file documentation is not to include direct disclosures from the victim-survivor, or at least not to include the detail.

In response to this fear, some program providers occasionally record the details of partner contact in informal ways so that these cannot be subpoenaed, and destroy these details relatively soon after contact with the victim-survivor ends. While SFV and the CIJ consider this to be inappropriate practice due to the consequent loss to the system of highly relevant and important risk-related information,¹⁵⁶ there is no doubt that the inclusion of details from victim-survivor disclosures can, in some circumstances, put them at increased risk where these details are reported to referrers.

“We won’t know if he’s changed until months after he’s completed the program, but the referrer wants the report now” ... “We don’t follow up with men or partners, we never know if change is actually occurring or will be sustained – we have no solid basis on which to write a report now.”

Again, this concern has been highlighted previously in this chapter, and reflects the pressure that program providers experience to address the question “Has he changed his behaviour?”

¹⁵⁶ In SFV’s and the CIJ’s experience, many program providers who have taken ‘highly cautious’ measures such as these have done so without seeking legal advice regarding available rights and powers to redact certain parts of case notes and reports when these have been subpoenaed, on the basis of the risk to the victim-survivor of the perpetrator learning of her disclosures. For example, there are provisions outlined in section fifteen of the NSW Domestic Violence Information Sharing Protocol for practitioners to request that particular information disclosed by victim-survivors not be tabled in court when a document containing this information is subpoenaed, if tabling it would create a safety risk for the victim-survivor.

Understandably, attempting to respond to this type of question at the point of program completion can be difficult in many circumstances.

“We don’t have the skills to write program exit reports.”

Historically, there has been very little, if any training provided for MBCP practitioners on constructing exit reports to referrers, either through the very few foundational training courses that exist for new practitioners in the field,¹⁵⁷ or via professional development workshops. There is also very little written practice guidance available on the matter, that is specific to the MBCP field. In this context, it is understandable for practitioners to feel ill-equipped to do so.

“We are not funded or contracted to write program exit reports.”

While it is unlikely that any MBCP provider would consider that they are funded sufficiently for the work that they do, the funding models used by different state and territory governments for MBCPs differ substantially. There can also be differences within jurisdictions; for example, due to the introduction of pilot initiatives which are well-funded relative to existing programs.

While the next section of this chapter will offer some reflections and perspectives in relation to the concerns outlined above, it is prudent to consider recent research into the partner contact components associated with MBCPs in Australia.¹⁵⁸ This research found that a significant proportion of partner contact practitioners and other MBCP provider stakeholders stated that their funding contracts do not cater for the provision of partner contact. In other words, that they are not funded to do this work.¹⁵⁹ None of these practitioners and stakeholders, however, perceived this as sufficient reason for them not to provide a partner contact service (though funding constraints had a major impact on the type of service they could provide). Similarly, MBCP peak bodies in Australia do not see this as a reason not to advocate for this component of MBCP work to be funded sufficiently.

In similar fashion, the CIJ and SFV believe that it is important for the field to shift its focus on reporting, away from the stance “this is something we do not have the time and resources to do”, and towards acknowledging this as part of providing a safe and potentially effective program. It is only when this shift occurs that both the capacity and capability requirements (including practitioner training) for this practice to evolve will come into view.

Reasons for reporting more than a list of attendance dates

While the CIJ and SFV understand that many of the above hesitations are based on important considerations that have significant merit, both organisations believe that there are compelling reasons for MBCP and other change-focused program providers to, in many circumstances, provide more than a list of service attendance dates when reporting back to referrers.

¹⁵⁷ The Graduate Certificate in Men’s Behaviour Change Individual and Group Work Interventions, run by the NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence and introduced in 2018, includes specific content and assessments focused on writing program exit reports to referrers.

¹⁵⁸ Chung, D., Anderson, S., Green, D., & Vlasis, R. (2020). *Prioritising women’s safety in Australian perpetrator interventions: The purpose and practices of partner contact* (Research report, 08/2020). Sydney: ANROWS.

¹⁵⁹ It is possible in some of these cases that the funder would not agree with this assertion, and would claim that the provision of partner contact is implied in the contract.

Ensuring that program completion is not equated with behaviour change

As outlined previously, an erroneous assumption frequently made by referrers to MBCPs – across child protection and justice system contexts – is that program completion (in terms of the perpetrator meeting all program attendance requirements) automatically translates into behaviour change.¹⁶⁰ In a range of key policy papers published in recent years, the CIJ, SFV and other Australian and international organisations have warned strongly against referrers assuming that a perpetrator's completion of an MBCP or other change-focused intervention is in itself an indicator of change.¹⁶¹ This is due to the overwhelming evidence that outcomes of participation in an MBCP vary substantially between users of violence, and that it is highly difficult to predict at the outset of an intervention what its impact will be and whether it will help to reduce risk.¹⁶²

In the context of high caseload pressures, it is understandable that many referrers would seek to consider their responsibilities as having been discharged by 'getting the perpetrator to a program.' Given that the correlation between program completion and sustained behaviour change outcomes is moderate at best, however, this assumption often results in referrers basing decisions with important bearings on risk and safety primarily on administrative milestones, rather than on any actual changes in risk.

When reporting a list of attendance dates, MBCP providers often include strong provisos about the inappropriateness of reading too much into a perpetrator's program participation and completion metrics. The *Towards Safe Families* manual, for example, recommends the following text be included in program exit reports:

*The process of behaviour change is a long one, and participation in our program is in no way predictive of positive change. While there is evidence that men can and do modify their behaviour, research over the longer term demonstrates that it is exceedingly difficult to predict which men will sustain positive change or for how long ... We strongly believe that men should not use their participation in men's behaviour change programs as a means to avoid the penalties that they are due, or in any other way to lessen the strength of a justice or child protection response to men's violent and controlling behaviour. We urge you not to take xxx's participation in our program into account when making decisions.*¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Centre for Innovative Justice (2018). *Beyond 'getting him to a program': Towards best practice for perpetrator accountability in the Specialist Family Violence Court context*. Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University; Mandel, D. (2020). *Perpetrator intervention program completion certificates are dangerous*. White paper: Safe and Together Institute; Scott, K., & Crooks, C. (2006). Intervention for abusive fathers: Promising practices in court and community responses. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 29(44), 29-44.

¹⁶¹ Centre for Innovative Justice (2018), *ibid*; Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2019). *Evaluation readiness, program quality and outcomes in men's behaviour change programs* (Research report, 01/2019). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS; Mandel, D. (2020), *ibid*; Respect (2017b). *Respect Outcomes Framework*. London: Respect UK; Scott, K., & Crooks, C. (2006), *ibid*; Vlasis, R., & Green, D. (2018). *Developing an outcomes framework for men's behaviour change programs: A discussion paper*. Stopping Family Violence.

¹⁶² Arce, R., Arias, E., Novo, M., & Fariña, F. (2020). Are interventions with batterers effective? A meta-analytical review. *Psychosocial Intervention*, 29(3), 153–164; Cheng, S-Y, Davis, M., Jonson-Reid, M., & Yager, L. (2021). Compared to what? A meta-analysis of batterer intervention studies using non-treated controls or comparisons. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 22(3), 496-511; Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2019), *ibid*; Wilson, D., Feder, L., & Olaghere, A. (2021). Court-mandated interventions for individuals convicted of domestic violence: An updated Campbell systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 17(1), open access.

¹⁶³ NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice (2012). *Towards safe families: A men's domestic violence men's behaviour change practice guide*. Sydney: Government of NSW. Written by No to Violence and Red Tree Consulting.

It is highly unlikely, however, that the inclusion of cautions such as these will make much, if any, difference to the meanings that referrers currently draw from 'program completion'. Indeed, these cautions are directly contradicted when exit reports contain no information other than a list of service attendance dates – the unintended, but inherent, message being that if only program attendance dates are reported, then that is the main or sole type of information on which referrers should base decisions. In other words, the provision of attendance dates alone, if anything, feeds the assumption that program completion is the most important proximal outcome or signpost on which to base decisions.

To notify referrers of perpetrators who are clearly not reaching 'first or second base'

Undoubtedly, and as outlined in the previous section of this chapter, MBCP practitioners frequently come across situations where there are signs that a program participant is taking responsibility for his behaviour, but where it is difficult to tell if these signs are genuinely indicative of behaviour change. Furthermore, it may be difficult to ascertain whether these signs are indicative of behaviour change that is starting to occur now or will occur in the near future; or alternatively, indicative of the user of violence taking very initial steps of a lengthy change journey that might result in significant behaviour change at some point in the future. The CIJ and SFV understand that reporting positive proximal indicators or signposts of behaviour change can be difficult in these situations.

MBCP practitioners also frequently come across situations, however, where perpetrators, at the mid-point or at a later stage in the program, are still clearly and unambiguously not taking responsibility for their behaviour. In other words, perpetrators who clearly have not, at least up until that point, genuinely commenced on a journey of change. Alternatively, providers come across users of violence who are taking initial tentative first steps towards taking responsibility, but who are struggling to progress beyond 'first base', despite being close to completion of the program.

In these situations, the risk that the user of violence poses to affected victim-survivors might temporarily be lower due to him being monitored by the system, and/or due to protection order or other court order conditions with which he might be motivated to comply. Once these temporary restraints on and monitoring of his behaviour are removed, however, it is unlikely that these perpetrators will become safer men for current and/or future family members to be around.

These situations – of perpetrators who either demonstrate no genuine steps towards taking responsibility, or who make some initial fledgling steps but do not shift any further – are not uncommon. As outlined elsewhere in this paper, there is substantial evidence that behaviour change outcomes vary considerably between perpetrators; that change is incremental; and that expectations of the success of these programs need to be realistic rather than being set much higher than expectations of programs in related fields (for example, in the AOD and mental health sectors).

The CIJ and SFV therefore believe that the field should consider what it means for MBCP providers to hold on to this information about these perpetrators, rather than to report the information to referrers. We suggest that MBCP providers would benefit from being able to draw upon a framework of proximal or signpost indicators to communicate this type of information clearly and consistently to referrers.

In other words, a framework of indicators would equip MBCP providers with the language required to explain to referrers why particular perpetrators should still be considered a significant risk to victim-survivors. It would equip providers with the language to explain what particular perpetrators have not demonstrated, that they would need to have demonstrated at a particular point in the program to be 'on the way' towards reducing the risk that they pose.

This is not to say that these users of violence will not, at a later point, become safer men for family members to be around. Rather, the focus of reporting in these situations is to convey that the lack of a user of violence being able to demonstrate particular signposts relative to his time in the program, makes it highly unlikely that he poses less of a risk to, and impact on, victim-survivors, beyond the temporary risk-reducing effects of other actions of the system.

Reporting of this kind is important not only in the context of program exit. As outlined earlier in this chapter, change-focused program providers can also proactively report this information at earlier points, in a timely manner to have input into referrer decision-making given that reserving this reporting until exit reporting can sometimes be too late.

To increase visibility of perpetrator patterns of behaviour

The sole provision of attendance dates also contributes to the continued invisibility of perpetrators, in the sense of the lack of attention to their patterns of behaviour; the impacts of these patterns on victim-survivors; and what is required for these perpetrators to be accountable to these impacts. Equating accountability with program attendance and completion can be dangerous practice, especially given that some perpetrators who have completed an MBCP adopt the narrative “I’ve done my bit, it’s now her [the victim-survivor’s] responsibility to do hers”. Qualitative research into the experiences of victim-survivors whose partner has completed an MBCP is unfortunately replete with examples of how perpetrators have used their participation in a program as leverage, or as a direct or indirect tool to control their behaviour in further ways.¹⁶⁴

The provision of information limited to attendance dates in program exit reporting can potentially collude with these narratives, by inadvertently implying that the user of violence has met his accountability requirements solely through attending the program. This practice can also result in information about his patterns of behaviour remaining ‘locked away’ within the program provider’s case file notes or undocumented knowledge, thereby inaccessible to other agencies and services who engage with the user of violence or with affected family members, either now or in the future.

To build positive change momentum over time when perpetrators attend multiple programs

Some, if not many, users of violence will require participation in more than one MBCP to make significant and sustainable changes to their behaviour. Often this occurs when, some time after completing an initial program, a perpetrator is referred again as a result of police attendance at a new FDV incident or because of some other service system touchpoint. This might involve the same victim-survivors across both incidents or a different relationship or family configuration. Similarly, he might be referred to the same or to a different program provider.

MBCP exit reporting is important, in these contexts, to assist practitioners involved in working with the man for the second time to benefit from information about his participation in the initial program. This will not be difficult if the same program and practitioners are involved, and these practitioners have a clear memory of his prior participation; however, this is often not the case.

¹⁶⁴ Chung, D., Anderson, S., Green, D., & Vlasis, R. (2020). *Prioritising women’s safety in Australian perpetrator interventions: The purpose and practices of partner contact* (Research report, 08/2020). Sydney: ANROWS; Day, Vlasis, Chung & Green (2019); McGinn, T., Taylor, B., McColgan, M. (2021). A qualitative study of the perspectives of domestic violence survivors on behavior change programs with perpetrators. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36 (17-18); Opitz, C. (2014). Considerations for Partner contact during men’s behaviour change programs: Systemic responses and engagement. *Ending Men’s Violence Against Women and Children: The No to Violence Journal*. Autumn, 114–142.

Without any systematic way to analyse the perpetrator's participation in the initial program, practitioners involved in the second program will need to hope that they can speak with one of the practitioners who worked with him during the initial program, and that the practitioner remembers details about his participation.

Even if the initial program had no need to provide a post-program report for the referrer, without a systematic way to assess proximal or signpost indicators, it will be difficult for practitioners from the initial program to provide a coherent picture about the extent and nature of his change journey.

For the reasons outlined above, overall, the CIJ and SFV believe that change-focused program providers have a responsibility to report more than a list of the perpetrator's service attendance dates. As program providers will generally not be in a position to report actual behaviour change outcomes – as these are often not discernible until some months after the user of violence has completed the intervention, when the provider is likely to be no longer working with him – a framework of proximal or signpost indicators is required to guide reporting.

4. Assessing part of the client's behaviour change journey

Ongoing assessment of each user of violence is crucial in MBCP work. This includes an ongoing focus on changes in the risk landscape (for example, in dynamic risk factors, and the identification of current or upcoming potential spikes in risk), and the extent to which the user of violence is stepping into the required elements or 'threads' of a potentially productive behaviour change journey.

These two areas of ongoing assessment are obviously related, but are not the same. As many practitioners know well, a user of violence making genuine efforts to step into some of the areas of exploration (in thinking and in behaviour) required for a productive change journey does not automatically translate into significantly reduced risk for affected family members in the short- and even longer term. Furthermore, changes in the risk landscape can sometimes occur for reasons that have little to do with whether, and to what extent, a user of violence is stepping into the work.

Nevertheless, ongoing assessment of the degree of the perpetrator's commitment to a behaviour change journey, and the degree to which he is stepping into required change elements or 'threads' of the journey, is a crucial part of behaviour change work. This chapter will explore the potential usefulness of a framework of signpost indicators in this respect.

Ongoing monitoring to inform program tailoring

As outlined in Chapter One, the specialist FDV perpetrator intervention field is attempting to move beyond the approach of "delivering generalised interventions with the hope that 'something would get through'" to the man,¹⁶⁵ and towards more tailored, individualised approaches that still most often include group-work as a core component. Tailoring change-focused perpetrator intervention work is based on determining for which perpetrators some adaption of a 'standard intervention' might be required and, furthermore, what these adaptations or extensions need to entail.

While these determinations can sometimes be made during the program's intake and initial assessment process, at other times observations of the man's participation during the early stages of the program can offer highly valuable information on what adaptations might be required. Indeed, it can sometimes be difficult to ascertain, based solely on the information obtained through intake and initial assessment, the length and intensity of intervention which might be required for a particular user of violence, and/or what areas or parts of the change process will need more or less focus.

In this context, individual monitoring and assessment of where a user of violence is at in a behaviour change journey is an important precondition for being able to tailor the program. This includes monitoring, among other things:

¹⁶⁵ McMaster, K. (2013). The changing nature of family violence interventions. *Te Awatea Review: The Journal of Te Awatea Violence Research Centre*. 10(1&2), 8-11, p. 11

- in what ways the user of violence is, and is not, starting to take responsibility for his violent and controlling behaviour;
- what types of tactics associated with his violent and controlling behaviour for which he is, and is not, starting to take responsibility;
- how he is enacting any steps towards responsibility-taking;
- what he uses or draws upon (for example, patterns of thinking and beliefs) to keep minimising responsibility;
- his attitudes towards participating in the program;
- changes in externally and internally focused motivations that influence his participation in the program;
- what areas of the program content he is, and is not, willing to genuinely explore; and
- what aspects of the experiences of those affected by his use of violence he appears willing and open to explore.

MBCP practitioners have always paid attention to ongoing monitoring of users of violence to some extent; this is not a new concept by any means. In general, however, practitioners have used somewhat informal processes to do so, often through discussions between facilitators after group-work sessions.¹⁶⁶ The CIJ and SFV propose that a more formal framework of behaviour change signposts could significantly help to strengthen monitoring efforts.

Providing feedback to perpetrators

A significantly under-explored area in the specialist FDV perpetrator program field is the provision of feedback to program participants, during the course of the program, regarding aspects of their participation. Program providers vary substantially in the provision of this feedback, both in the circumstances in which such feedback is provided, and what areas the feedback covers.

Most if not all program providers obviously have experience in providing feedback to users of violence whose participation in group-work is disruptive, and in attempting to motivate participants who are not taking the program seriously. In addition, the provision of positive feedback in relation to genuine efforts towards change, within limits, can of course be an important part of enhancing perpetrator motivation and confidence in the change process.¹⁶⁷

Much less has been noted about the provision of feedback to users of violence who are meeting attendance requirements, and who are not being disruptive in group-work settings, about their progress in achieving steppingstone goals that form part of the behaviour change process. There is very little written practice guidance available to help inform the provision of feedback to perpetrators, or to suggest what quality practice might look like in this respect.

¹⁶⁶ A further substantial stumbling block to individual perpetrator monitoring is the lack of program resources and consequent practitioner time to do so.

¹⁶⁷ Woldgabreal, Y., Day, A., & Ward, T. (2016). Linking positive psychology to offender supervision outcomes: The mediating role of psychological flexibility, general self-efficacy, optimism, and hope. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 43(6), 697-721; Wendt, S., Seymour, K., Buchanan, F., Dolman, C., & Greenland, N. (2019). *Engaging men who use violence: Invitational narrative approaches*. ANROWS research report.

Certainly, a number of providers incorporate opportunities in their program to give feedback to program participants, such as through a mid-program review. For example, a recent review of approaches to improve the quality of MBCPs in Australia stated:

FF *The mid-treatment point of an MBCP provides an opportunity for participants and facilitators to review progress. Discussion of the quality of engagement with program content is an important part of this process, including a review of the relevance of existing goals and additional in-session or out-of-session goals pertinent to each individual participant.*¹⁶⁸

The provision of feedback to the user of violence can be fraught if disclosures from the man's (ex)partner, obtained through partner contact, contradicts observations of the man's engagement in the group and with the program content. In these situations – when a man appears to be participating productively but his behaviour towards affected family members shows little or no sign of change – practitioners are often in a bind. When seeking to tailor the intervention to the user of violence based on ongoing feedback from his (ex)partner, practitioners often face the dilemma of how to motivate him to agree to the adaption or extension (for example, to repeat a group-work module or participate in supplementary individual sessions) without providing a rationale that directly or indirectly exposes what his (ex)partner has disclosed to the program.

The CIJ and SFV believe that this presents an important rationale for the development of a framework of proximal indicators or signposts, in ways that do not rely exclusively on information from (ex)partners as the source material. A framework could provide practitioners with ways to use observations – such as those derived through the perpetrator's discourse and participation in the program – rather than victim-survivor disclosures as the means to provide feedback to him about his progress through the program. A framework could also help to explain the rationale behind suggestions or mandated stipulations to extend the length or intensity of the program, or to tailor it in particular ways.

Without being overly complex, a framework of proximal or signpost indicators must be sufficiently nuanced to avoid the dilemma outlined above. If indicators are too general and broad, practitioners have little scope to provide feedback to a user of violence about the need for him to work harder in the program, or to be involved in a longer or more intense intervention, without tipping him off to the disclosures made by his (ex)partner regarding his ongoing behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs.

Furthermore, as outlined in the previous chapter regarding exit reporting, in some situations a perpetrator might be able to gain access to reports written by program providers to a court. In situations where it would put the victim-survivor(s) at too much risk to include their disclosures about his behaviours in the report, alternative ways need to be found to convey the degree of risk he continues to pose. Again, a framework of proximal indicators needs to be sufficiently nuanced to identify aspects of the perpetrator's participation in the program that are consistent with the risk that he continues to pose.

The CIJ and SFV need to reiterate, however, that **signpost indicators should not be used as an alternative to other available information that can help to provide an analysis of where the perpetrator is at in a behaviour change journey, and where the current risk lies**. Victim-survivor reports of the perpetrator's behaviour are, of course, a far more important measure of risk than the signpost indicators proposed in this paper.

¹⁶⁸ Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2019). *Evaluation readiness, program quality and outcomes in men's behaviour change programs* (Research report, 01/2019). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS, p. 52

Monitoring perpetrators through group-work session ratings

The use of templates to record certain qualities or characteristics of each perpetrator's participation in MBCP group-work sessions was first trialled approximately 20 years ago, and has been adopted by a small number of MBCP providers since then. The *Towards Safe Families* practice guide, for example, provides a tool through which group-work facilitators, after each session, can rate each participant according to six criteria, outlined overleaf.¹⁶⁹

Each group-work participant is rated on each of these six criteria using a score from -3 (very negative) to +3 (very positive), with the results charted across group-work sessions to determine trajectories across each criterion. The *Towards Safe Families* manual provides the following instructions for the tool's use:

FF *This form enables facilitators to record and track their observations of each participant's behaviours, values and attitudes in the group, according to six dimensions. These dimensions attempt to synthesise a number of (but by no means all) elements of praxis¹⁷⁰ (see page 139), and can be modified by program providers to reflect the elements of practice appropriate to that program.*

The form can be used as part of post-session debriefing to record the facilitators' ratings of each man across a number of dimensions, [and] any risk indicators, safety concerns or other issues that have arisen in the session. As many programs do not have the resources to make individual file notes regarding each man's participation after every session, this form is a way of capturing some (but not all) of the information required to keep track of changes or issues arising for individual men through the program. Men's individual ratings can be mapped onto their review forms ... and compared against information obtained from partners.

It is critical to keep in mind that while the facilitators' ratings represent their best knowledge of the man, taking into account their own observations, and (to a limited extent) the man's disclosures, these ratings may not match the man's actual behaviour as experienced by his (ex)partner and children. In this situation, unless there are significant clinical reasons to the contrary, the reports of the man's family should prevail.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice. (2012). *Towards safe families: A men's domestic violence behaviour change practice guide*. Sydney, Australia: State of New South Wales, p.253. This tool was adapted from a version developed by Whitehorse Community Health Service.

¹⁷⁰ The approach used by *Towards Safe Families* to define what the manual terms as "elements of praxis" – or elements of a successful behaviour change journey – will be explored in a [later chapter](#) of this paper.

¹⁷¹ *ibid*, p. 252

Behaviour change elements from *Towards Safe Families*¹⁷²

<p>Responsibility-taking</p> <p>Admits the nature and level of his violent behaviour</p> <p>Accepts and understands the types and breadth of his use of violence and controlling behaviour</p> <p>Does not minimise, deny, justify or blame partner or external factors for his use of violence</p> <p>Does not play 'the victim'</p> <p>Does not use violence-supporting narratives and beliefs to make a case for his use of violence</p> <p>Does not collude with other participants' attempts to minimise responsibility</p> <p>Challenges other members' use of violence and the excuses they make</p>	<p>Other-centredness</p> <p>Does not display or collude with sexist understandings or comments</p> <p>Speaks respectfully about his partner and children</p> <p>Speaks respectfully about women and children in general</p> <p>Understands the perspectives and emotions of those affected by his violence</p> <p>Understands the effects of his violence on others</p> <p>Understands how those in his family might be responding to him due to his past (and present) use of violence</p> <p>Shows genuine empathy rather than only intellectualising these understandings</p> <p>Feels other-centred rather than self-centred remorse</p>
<p>Interactions with others in the group and facilitators</p> <p>Attended session on time</p> <p>Lets others speak without interrupting</p> <p>Listens intently to what others say</p> <p>Acknowledges and responds positively to others</p> <p>Does not interrogate or overly try to fix the problems of others</p> <p>Was not disruptive or dominant</p>	<p>Conceptualisation</p> <p>Understands discussion, concepts and strategies towards change</p> <p>Engages openly with new ideas and perspectives</p> <p>Participates actively in group activities focusing on particular topics or themes</p> <p>Reflects on his own behaviour</p> <p>Identifies his entitlement-based and self-righteous attitudes and behaviours</p>
<p>Depth of participation</p> <p>Shows interest and engagement</p> <p>Displays attentive body language and nonverbal behaviours</p> <p>Speaks with feeling</p> <p>Reveals struggles, feelings, fears and self-doubts</p> <p>Does not withhold or evade issues</p> <p>Is not defensive</p> <p>Does not use humour inappropriately</p> <p>Engages in homework tasks</p>	<p>Application</p> <p>Talks about attempts to use strategies to avoid violence</p> <p>Acts to keep partner and children safe</p> <p>Does homework tasks and/or attempts to apply what was covered in recent sessions</p> <p>Discusses options with others in the group and/or the facilitators</p> <p>Is open on how to improve the application of strategies, and to new strategies</p>

¹⁷² Ibid, p. 253

A similar approach adopted by a program provider some years ago in Queensland has been described as follows:

FF *[The approach] asks facilitators to first make ratings of the participants' use of minimisation, denial, blame and manipulation using a 10-point scale and then their understanding of main concepts, articulation/use of examples to demonstrate understanding, self-disclosure and position-taking on non-violence.*¹⁷³

These approaches represent some of the earliest attempts to provide a structured means to monitor perpetrator participation throughout a program, and to assess what are considered to be essential aspects of a productive behaviour change journey. The very preliminary framework of proximal indicators outlined in this paper builds upon these early foundations.

¹⁷³ Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2019), *ibid*, p. 52

5. Setting proximal indicators for evaluation purposes

It is widely recognised that outcome evaluation in the FDV field is one of the most difficult and complex amongst all social and human services sectors.¹⁷⁴ As a recent systematic review of FDV Coordinated Community Response systems notes:

FF *Perhaps one of the biggest limitations [in their review of studies] is the wide range of outcomes that have been studied. Overall, outcomes examined within the studies were related to case investigation, the court, offender recidivism, and the victim and children. Even across these outcome categories, the operationalization of outcomes varied. This is a result of the data sources used as part of the studies (e.g., administrative data vs. victim interviews), researchers' choice of measures (e.g., using validated scales vs. questions developed by the researcher for the study), and how the variables were coded (e.g., binary vs. a scale).*¹⁷⁵

Focusing more specifically on evaluation in the perpetrator intervention field, SFV recently noted:

FF *Conceptualising and defining outcomes in men's behaviour change program (MBCP) work is a complex, challenging and contentious issue. Debates about what counts as success in this work stem from various philosophical positions about the nature of family and domestic violence (FDV) perpetration and what's required to stop it, the organisational and funding context, and different sector and workforce imperatives. Numerous reviews and critical reflection pieces concerning the MBCP field in Australia and overseas have emphasised disagreement and uncertainty over what outcomes to measure as a major obstacle against developing a strong evidence-base for the field.*

... in the context of such disagreement and uncertainty, governments, funders and the field itself frequently fall back on basic default measures of outputs and outcomes that arguably provide a limited window into what MBCPs can achieve. These measures – such as program completion and official justice system statistics of recidivism – render invisible core aspects of the nature of FDV, and core aspects of MBCP work.

¹⁷⁴ Akoensi, T., Koehler, J., Lösel, F., & Humphreys, D. (2013). Domestic violence perpetrator programs in Europe, Part II: A systematic review of the state of evidence. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 57(10), 1206-1225; Aldarondo, E. (2009). *Assessing the efficacy of batterer intervention programs in context*. Futures Without Violence, San Francisco: CA; Geldschläger, H., Gines, O., Nax, D., & Ponce, A. (2014). *Outcome measurement in European perpetrator programmes: a survey*. Working paper 1 from the Daphne III IMPACT project. Work with Perpetrators - European Network; Gondolf, E. (2015). The Evidence-Based Practice movement: Contributions, controversies, and recommendations. In R. Scott & S. Kosslyn (Eds.) *Emerging trends in the social and behavioural sciences*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons; Mackay, E., Gibson, A., Lam, H., & Beecham, D. (2015). *Perpetrator interventions in Australia: Part one – Literature review*. State of knowledge paper (ANROWS Landscapes, PP01/2015). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

¹⁷⁵ Johnson, L., & Stylianou, A. (2020). Coordinated Community Responses to domestic violence: A systematic review of the literature. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, online first September 21, 2020.

Our view is that the vacuum perpetuated by the lack of a broad consensus on what counts as success in this work is becoming increasingly problematic ... Understandably, commissioners and funders of MBCPs will want to see that the increased allocation of attention and resources dedicated to this work is achieving results... Without a broad industry and government consensus concerning how to measure effectiveness, and without realistic expectations concerning what these programs can achieve, the potential exists for a backlash against increased funding in the future from stakeholders asking “where’s the evidence?”¹⁷⁶

A recent scoping review and research report focusing on evaluation methodology in the MBCP field¹⁷⁷ drew several pertinent conclusions regarding the measures used:

- Evaluations of MBCPs consistently continue to fall short of evaluation best practice, perpetuating a trend that has been widely documented in the literature.¹⁷⁸
- Practitioners and evaluators often report difficulties in identifying appropriate tools to assess impacts (intermediate outcomes) and long-term outcomes associated with the program.
- Evaluations often rely on process and short-term impact indicators in lieu of the ability to identify measures for longer-term impacts and outcomes. This is also due to limited evaluation budgets and timeframes and the lack of staffing required to follow-up clients and administer such measures.
- Short-term measures focusing on perpetrator self-reports of their behaviours and attitudes are often relied upon, despite their limited reliability as a measure of success.
- Outcome measures that are adopted often fail to focus on factors considered essential to the success of MBCPs; for example, by relying on blunt measures of official law enforcement and justice system recidivism statistics that are inconsistent with an understanding of FDV as patterned coercive control,¹⁷⁹ or by prioritising tools with established psychometric properties that measure variables learning towards a mental health, rather than a social problem, understanding of FDV.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Vlasis, R., & Green, D. (2018). *Developing an outcomes framework for men’s behaviour change programs: A discussion paper*. Perth, Western Australia: Stopping Family Violence. P. 3

¹⁷⁷ Nicholas, A., 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. See pp. 23 – 25.

¹⁷⁸ Geldschläger, H., Gines, O., Nax, D., & Ponce, A. (2014). *Outcome measurement in European perpetrator programmes: a survey*. Working paper 1 from the Daphne III IMPACT project. Barcelona; Gondolf, E. (2012). *The future of batterer programs: Reassessing evidence-based practice*. Boston: Northeastern University Press; Mackay, E., Gibson, A., Lam, H., & Beecham, D. (2015), *ibid*; Polaschek, D. (2016). *Responding to perpetrators of family violence*. Issues Paper 11. New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse; Walby, S., Towers, J., Balderston, S., Corradi, C., Francis, B., Heiskanen, M., . . . Strid, S. (2017). *The concept and measurement of violence against women and men*. Bristol: Policy Press.

¹⁷⁹ For an analysis of the limitations of recidivism as an outcome measure for MBCP evaluation, see pp. 11-12 of Vlasis, R., & Green, D. (2018), *ibid*.

¹⁸⁰ The scoping review was able to identify and provide details of some tools with established psychometric properties that are based on an understanding of FDV as a social problem characterised by coercive control, rather than as a mental health issue characterised by perpetrator psychological deficiencies. However, the review found that the majority of tools with proven reliability and validity used in MBCP evaluations were those that measured perpetrator psychological variables or states.

- MBCP evaluations often fail to attempt to identify unintended negative consequences of the program being evaluated, a major limitation given the growing literature documenting how perpetrators can use their participation in a change-focused program as a weapon against their (ex)partner.¹⁸¹

Of course, there are numerous other evaluation complexities in the MBCP field beyond those mentioned here, not the least of which being how to isolate outcomes influenced by perpetrator interventions when they act as only one part of an overall integrated FDV response system.¹⁸² The reality is that best practice outcome evaluations of change-focused perpetrator interventions – particularly evaluations that do not rely on recidivism statistics – are expensive.

A recent evaluation practice guide was specifically commissioned and published to assist MBCP providers and evaluators to find practical ways to overcome some of these limitations.¹⁸³ This guide is an overview of quality practice in evaluating community services programs, adapted specifically to address the complexities of MBCP evaluation. One of the stated aims of the guide is to equip practitioners with some of the understanding and knowledge required for them to participate in evaluation activity, either alone or in collaboration with independent evaluators.

While the CIJ and SFV hope that the use of this guide will strengthen the quality of MBCP evaluation practice in Australia, funding and resource limitations will continue to be a constraining factor. Many evaluations will continue, therefore, to rely partly or wholly on intermediate, rather than long-term outcome measures. Given this reality, it is crucial that intermediate measures are found that do not rely on perpetrator self-reports; this adds more weight to the need to develop a framework of proximal indicators or signposts of behaviour change.

Use of proximal indicators to extend process evaluation

Different types and scales of evaluation activity are suited to different purposes. In some situations, it is most desirable for an evaluation to have a short- and medium-term focus. For example, when a provider seeks to conduct a rapid, internal evaluation to identify how to strengthen a program during its next iteration; or when a very new and innovative program is first being trialled, to determine whether the program is being implemented as planned and how it can be improved based on early implementation experience.

In situations such as these where the focus is mostly on process evaluation, attempting to evaluate outcomes (or even medium-term impacts) can be premature. Adding an element of impact evaluation through the incorporation of proximal or signpost indicators, however, can extend the process evaluation towards a preliminary consideration of impact.

¹⁸¹ See pp. 67-69 of Campbell, E., & Green, D. (2019). *Foundations for family and domestic violence perpetrator intervention systems*. RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice and Stopping Family Violence.

¹⁸² For a succinct summary of these complexities, see pp. 40-47 of Vlasis, R., Ridley, S., Green, D., & Chung, D. (2017). *Family and domestic violence perpetrator programs: Issues paper of current and emerging trends, developments and expectations*. Perth, Australia: Stopping Family Violence.

¹⁸³ Nicholas, A., Ovenden, G., & Vlasis, R. (2020). *The Evaluation guide: A guide for evaluating behaviour change programs for men who use domestic and family violence* (ANROWS Insights, 02/2020). Sydney: ANROWS.

The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for rapid evaluation methodology in the gender-based violence field, given the substantial impacts that the pandemic has had on women's and children's experience of FDV.¹⁸⁴ Perpetrator intervention programs have had to make rapid adjustments, not only in their mode of delivery during periods of physical distancing restrictions and lockdown, but also to identify and manage escalated risk associated with the conditions of the pandemic and increased isolation of many victim-survivors.¹⁸⁵

These significant and rapid adjustments raised a number of questions concerning the efficacy of adapted programs and adapted program delivery, such as:

- Which perpetrators are suited to which types of adapted programs and program delivery?
- How effective are videoconference group-work sessions compared to those conducted in-person?
- What might be the unintended negative impacts of the adaptations made? What might be the benefits?
- Given the need to limit the length of some adapted interventions in order to respond to growing wait-lists of perpetrators (due to interruptions to normal program scheduling), what indicators would practitioners draw upon to know if a reduced intervention has had enough 'dosage' with respect to a given perpetrator?

While there has been at least one study focusing on how Australian, US and UK perpetrator intervention programs have adapted their work during the COVID-19 pandemic,¹⁸⁶ this research was not designed to answer evaluation and perpetrator monitoring questions such as those outlined above. Unsurprisingly, given the unexpected and rapid adjustments required and the strain on resources, the CIJ and SFV are not aware of any evaluation activity conducted in Australia in response to questions such as these. In this context, the development of a framework of proximal or signpost indicators might assist the field to conduct rapid evaluations should these or other unexpected adjustments be required again at a future point.

¹⁸⁴ Campbell, A. (2020). An increasing risk of family violence during the Covid-19 pandemic: Strengthening community collaborations to save lives. *Forensic Science International: Forensic Reports*. online first December 2020; Kennedy, E. (2020). 'The worst year': Domestic violence soars in Australia during COVID-19. *The Guardian* online, 1 December 2020; Usher, K., Bhullar, N., Durkin, J., Gyamfi, N., & Jackson, D. (2021). Family violence and COVID-19: Increased vulnerability and reduced options for support. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, 29(4), 549-552.

¹⁸⁵ See, for example <https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/covid-19>; Pauncz, A., Vall, B., & Belotic, S. (2021). *COVID-19 Revision of Practice Toolkit*. Work with Perpetrators – European Network; Scaia, M., & Heath, J. (2020). *DRAFT Adaptation of the European network guidelines for Working Responsibly with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic for consideration by United States perpetrator programs*. Global Rights for Women.

¹⁸⁶ Bellini, R., & Westmarland, N. (2021). A problem solved is a problem created: the opportunities and challenges associated with an online domestic violence perpetrator programme. *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, 5(3), 499-515.

6. Desirable features and considerations of a proximal indicators framework

To inform the development of this paper, the CIJ and SFV analysed previous and existing attempts to establish variables that could be considered proximal or signpost indicators in a behaviour change process, focusing on work conducted in Victoria, NSW, NZ and the U.S. The analysis is quite technical in parts, and is located as Appendix A in this paper.

Building upon the insights gained from this analysis, and taking into account the various needs and rationales for a framework of proximal indicators outlined previously, this chapter considers some of the potentially desirable features of such a framework. The CIJ and SFV present these features to stimulate discussion in the field about what the framework could look like, rather than proposing them as definitive.

Nature of the framework

It is clear that the framework needs to be more than a simple list of indicators or signposts, more than a ‘tick box’ of which signposts a user of violence has demonstrated at any particular point in the program. A simple list, or even a multi-layered set of lists, would not be sufficient to enable the framework to be used across different contexts, and for the indicators to be interpreted consistently.

In drafting this paper, the CIJ and SFV considered whether to propose the development of a ‘framework’ or a ‘tool’: we recommend that both are required. In other words, a framework within which one or more tools sit that can be used directly by practitioners.

In this sense, a framework could consist of four ‘layers’. At the centre of the framework could be the tools themselves. *Tool instructions* could be the second layer, required to guide the safe and appropriate use of the tools. Tool instructions could include, among other things:

- descriptions of each of the elements and constituent indicators;
- how the elements are rated and scored (if a scoring system is adopted);
- examples, for each indicator, of the types of evidence to judge whether a user of violence is demonstrating it, including types of evidence from different sources (for example, through nuanced analysis of his verbalisations/discourse in program sessions, or information obtained from victim-survivors);
- preliminary instructions concerning how to interpret the ratings;
- more general instructions and clarifications concerning the tool and its use; and
- cautions against using the tool in inappropriate and/or unsafe ways.

Tool instructions need to be succinct but not to the extent of being squeezed into the margins of a paper version of the tool(s). In electronic versions, a variety of creative layout means can be used to embed particular instructions at relevant places (for example, through mouse hover or pop-up boxes).

The tool instructions could be nested within more detailed *practice guidance*. In this layer, the framework could focus on a variety of considerations and issues that go beyond tool guidance, to support the effective use of the tool across different contexts. The practice guidance could focus, for example, on:

- more detail, for each indicator, to support judgment about whether a user of violence is demonstrating it, covering nuanced and complex considerations;
- more detail on how to interpret results, including of particular patterns of ratings and ‘scores’, in terms of:
 - ongoing assessments of risk,
 - where the user of violence is at in the behaviour change process, and
 - how to tailor the intervention program to the user of violence;
- how practitioners could translate analyses derived from the use of the tool into succinct and easily understood statements within exit reports or as part of other feedback to referrers;
- how to use the tool to support ongoing monitoring of perpetrators throughout their participation in a change-focused program;
- limitations of and parameters for the use of the tool; and
- the identification of, and how to mitigate against, inadvertent negative consequences arising from the use of the tool.

The fourth and final layer, encompassing the whole framework, could support practitioners to apply an intersectionality lens in the use of the tool(s). This layer would be a critical part of the framework, as are considerations of intersectionality in all FDV work:

FF *Most FDV perpetration is an expression of gender-based power, and many perpetrators choose violence as part of enacting (male) entitlement and privilege. Yet perpetrators and victim-survivors also experience oppression in the context of other forms of power-over. These include colonisation and Indigenous oppression; racism; classism; able-ism; xenophobia/vilification of refugees; and bi/homophobia, transphobia, gender conformism, and heteronormativity. Understanding and practising intersectionality must, therefore, be a critical part of all perpetrator interventions.*¹⁸⁷

How the indicators could be structured

Based on the analysis of previous and existing approaches outlined in Appendix A, the CIJ and SFV propose the following basic structure for the indicators themselves. This structure is presented tentatively as starting points for wider discussion; the eventual structure incorporated within a pilot-ready framework could look quite different to this.

The framework could commence with a set of headline *elements* of a behaviour change process, specific examples of which are suggested in the following chapter. Each of these elements could

¹⁸⁷ Vlasis, R., Campbell, E., & Green, D. (2019). *Foundations for family and domestic violence perpetrator intervention systems*. RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice and Stopping Family Violence. See foundation nine, pp. 70-76.

consist of a headline statement or description approximately one to two lines in length, and also with a brief heading or short-cut label. For example:

[element heading] **Felt, active empathy**

[element headline statement/description] **Listens, understands and cares about the experiences, perspectives and uniqueness/individuality of intimate partners and each family member**

The wording of the headline statement, as with the indicators in the next level below, could consist of clear descriptions of what the perpetrator would need to *demonstrate* to show that he is genuinely stepping into, or making genuine progress with, that aspect of the change process.

The CIJ and SFV propose that each headline element be delineated into a set of constituent indicators – a second layer of the tool – that unpack what it means for a user of violence to demonstrate that element. An example is provided below:

[element heading] **Violence-interruption strategies**

[element headline statement/description] **Learns and applies strategies to interrupt use of physical, emotional/psychological and other forms of violence, intimidation and acts that create fear**

[indicators of the element]

- Identifies the situations in which he is at most risk of using violence, and adopts self-management plans to manage risk in these situations
- Identifies his own particular patterns related to his use of violence, and their associated physiological states, emotions, thoughts and behaviours
- Identifies existing strategies that he has used to prevent violent behaviour
- Learns new violence-interruption strategies
- Applies violence-interruption strategies in appropriate ways rather than as controlling or manipulation tactics
- Applies violence-interruption strategies in ways that do not require him to withdraw from or avoid listening to and understanding victim-survivor experiences and perspectives
- Is alert to indirect and/or direct feedback (for example, how the victim-survivor is experiencing the violence-interrupting strategy) to improve or modify strategies
- Identifies beliefs that hinder the application of violence-interruption strategies.

The above indicators of this headline element are for demonstration purposes only: As will be seen in the following chapter, this paper makes no attempt to delineate the indicators under each of the elements suggested as starting points for further discussion. Furthermore, with the odd exception, eight indicators related to a single element might be too many – in general, four to six might be more apt.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ This particular element, focused specifically on CBT-influenced violence-interruption strategies, lends itself to a relatively large number of indicators.

The CIJ and SFV also suggest a third layer that provides instructions concerning the types of evidence that would show that a user of violence has demonstrated the indicator. The types of evidence for each indicator would need to span two main sources: evidence derived from observing the perpetrator's participation in the program, including his observed verbalisations, narratives and behaviours; and evidence from other sources, most notably from victim-survivors who have been experiencing his violence.

This second source of information would, in most situations, be the most important and reliable source of evidence. As outlined previously, however, there are many situations in which practitioners do not have information from the man's (ex)partner or other sources.

This third layer would be an important part of the tool instructions. More detailed, nuanced and complex considerations of the evidence for demonstrating particular indicators would also be covered in the practice guidance surrounding the tool instructions. As with the delineation of specific indicators under each of the headline elements, the CIJ and SFV make no attempt in this paper to detail the types of evidence that could demonstrate each of the indicators. To do so would be presumptuous, given the primary need for a consultation and co-design process regarding the headline elements and the contours of the framework itself.

Core and supplementary/expanded elements

The CIJ and SFV suggest that the framework be built around a core set of elements (and constituent indicators) that can apply to all, or almost all, perpetrators, irrespective of the nature or context of their use of FDV. It is highly important, however, that the framework incorporates additional sets of supplementary elements and indicators for particular cohorts of perpetrators.

Additional or expanded sets of elements and indicators could be developed for perpetrators who are:

- struggling with complex needs arising from substance use, mental health, experiences of torture and/or complex/severe trauma, gambling harm, social marginalisation and/or impoverishment, and who require a case coordination or case management approach – either parallel with, or prior to, their participation in a specialist change-focused perpetrator intervention program;
- experiencing significant cognitive and social difficulties and barriers due to cognitive impairment related to acquired brain injury, intellectual disability, Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder or long-term substance abuse.

Of note, the CIJ and SFV recommend that many indicators pertaining to behaviour change considerations for program participants who are fathers and co-parents should be embedded within the core set of elements. We also recommend, however, that the framework should include supplementary elements and indicators created specifically for programs that specialise in working on parenting and parenting related issues with men who are perpetrating FDV. Clearly all change-focused programs need to include some components of assisting perpetrators who are fathers or who have a co-parenting role to understand the impacts of their violent and controlling behaviour on children, as well as to understand that how they treat their children's mother is critical to their children's wellbeing and development. Only some change-focused programs, however, have the power to address – in depth – responsible, responsive and reparative parenting in the context of having used FDV. This is explained in more depth in Chapter Seven.

Considerations in determining specific elements and indicators

A number of factors will need to be considered in the process of drafting and reviewing elements and constituent indicators.

Number of elements

The number of elements will require significant attention in the development of the framework. Approaches based on a small number of elements run the risk of being too simplistic, broad and open to significantly varying interpretations across framework users. At the opposite end, tools based on a long 'shopping list' of elements would be unwieldy and too difficult to use.

Accommodating multiple theories of change

A framework that includes too many elements and indicators will inevitably end up making itself applicable to only a limited range of theoretical orientations to the work. In this sense, a framework that enables a relatively smaller number of elements to be interpreted with some degree of flexibility between users can potentially have more relevance across theoretical orientations. This will be one of the major tensions and trade-offs in the development of elements and indicators – how much to sacrifice the benefits of comprehensiveness and nuance in order to maximise the applicability of the framework across theoretical orientations (and to maximise its ease of use).

Irrespective of the number of elements and indicators incorporated into the framework, however, there will always be a struggle to 'fit everything in'. Indeed, this will never be possible given the complex and multi-faceted nature of MBCP work. Inevitably, some elements or areas of a behaviour change process will need to be prioritised over others, making it difficult to incorporate competing theoretical orientations to the work.

Fortunately, it is highly likely that most practitioners across most theoretical orientations can agree on a reasonable number of elements/indicators to be prioritised. The CIJ and SFV are confident that perhaps around 70% of the elements/indicators of a framework, developed through sufficient consultation and discussion in the field, would be met with broad agreement, if not full consensus. The suggested starting points for elements outlined in Chapter Seven have been written to stay, as much as possible, within what the CIJ and SFV believe is this territory of broad agreement. Some, however, will fall at least partially outside this territory, and might be aligned with some theoretical orientations more than others.

Furthermore, it is not only the choice of elements/indicators to include that is of issue here – the language used to describe them can also be contentious. The choice of language to describe the headline statement of a particular element, and to delineate its constituent indicators, says much about underlying assumptions concerning the mechanisms of FDV perpetration and of behaviour change.

For example, the field is characterised by concerted debates around the use of terms such as 'emotional regulation' and 'self-soothing'. Outside of specific contexts such as Aboriginal family violence and the experience of refugee perpetrators, language associated with trauma-informed practice is hotly debated within the field and, like its use more broadly, can inadvertently frame issues within a mental health, rather than a social justice, context.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, it can be difficult to

¹⁸⁹ Birnbaum, S. (2019). Confronting the social determinants of health: Has the language of trauma informed care become a defense mechanism? *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 40(6), 476-481; Funston, L. (2019). *In the business of trauma: An intersectional-materialist feminist analysis of 'trauma informed' women's refugees and crisis*

choose language and terms for particular indicators without adopting a position on the extent to which MBCP work is therapeutic ‘versus’ an exercise in liberatory and participatory education.¹⁹⁰

Inevitably, the development of a proximal indicators or signposts framework will reproduce some of the debates in the field around contested issues such as these. In this context, a completely unified approach might not be possible nor even desirable. Perhaps what is most important is for a framework to be transparent regarding what theoretical assumptions underpin it, including what attempts it is making to find a ‘middle ground’ or to be as inclusive as possible of different positions. The CIJ and SFV have attempted to do so, at least to some extent, by outlining some of the theoretical underpinnings upon which the considerations in this paper are based in an Chapter Two of this paper.

Elements and indicators of primary, secondary and tertiary desistance

Earlier this paper outlined desistance theory as an important consideration in striving towards sustainable behaviour change. The CIJ and SFV believe that a framework of proximal indicators should attempt to span primary, secondary and tertiary desistance, rather than only focusing on what MBCP practitioners commonly refer to as ‘first order change.’ Admittedly, ‘second order change’ and tertiary desistance goals are likely to be met by a smaller proportion of perpetrators than those making genuine gains towards first order change. This does not mean, however, that the framework should ignore these deeper and more socially embedded aspects of a sustainable change process.

Related to this are considerations of to what extent the framework could, or should, focus on proximal or signpost indicators of a journey towards the widespread and consistent adoption of respectful behaviours, as distinct from a sole focus on the cessation of violent and controlling behaviours. Of course, the two are related but the former is not simply the inverse of the latter. Respect for a partner’s sexual autonomy, for example, involves more than the cessation of sexualised violence and the consistent adoption of the FRIES model of consent.¹⁹¹

Developers of the framework will need to make a choice concerning to what extent the language of any headline element, and of its constituent indicators, focuses on a desirable positive, as distinct from the cessation of a negative. Some elements will ‘naturally’ lean towards more of one and less of the other, or will be able to be described through indicators that span a combination of both.

Behavioural patterns and perpetrator accountability

A framework of proximal or signpost indicators would need to consider steppingstones towards the cessation of coercive and controlling behaviours, rather than being limited to singular or more overt physically and emotionally abusive behaviours. How to do this without making the framework too complex to use will require careful consideration.

accommodation services in Sydney and Vancouver. PhD: University of Sydney; Goodman R. (2015) A liberatory approach to trauma counseling: Decolonizing our trauma-informed practices. In Goodman R. and Gorski P. (eds) *Decolonizing “multicultural” counseling through social justice. International and Cultural Psychology*. Springer: New York, NY, pp. 55-72.

¹⁹⁰ Vlasis, R. (2014). *Domestic violence perpetrator programs: Education, therapy, support, accountability ‘or’ struggle?* Melbourne: No to Violence Male Family Violence Prevention Association.

¹⁹¹ See <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/relationships/sexual-consent>

This will be a crucial issue, given how a user of violence might be at different stages with respect to different tactics of violent and controlling behaviour at the one point in time. For example, at a particular point a perpetrator might be demonstrating several elements with respect to steps towards ceasing his physically violence behaviour, while not yet demonstrating any in relation to financial or sexualised violence.

Adopting a rating or tool notation system that enables these types of nuanced analyses across different aspects of a perpetrator's behavioural patterns – in ways that do not make the framework cumbersome – will be crucial in order to reflect the patterned, rather than incident-based, nature of FDV. In the CIJ's and SFV's view, the use of a framework must work in a complementary fashion with other tools and processes designed to map the perpetrator's behavioural patterns and the impact of these patterns on adult and child victim-survivors and family functioning.

In this way, the framework and its embedded tools can assist with operationalising accountability for each user of violence in terms of the degree to which he is stepping into aspects of a change journey required for him to acknowledge his behaviours and the harm caused, as well as to change his behaviours in specific ways so as to be accountable to these specific harms. As outlined in Appendix A, the framework will need to be fit-for-purpose in terms of helping practitioners to discern whether the user of violence is stepping into a journey of accountability – a journey of:

- acknowledging a meaningful proportion of his patterns of violent and controlling behaviour;
- understanding the harm these patterns have caused and of the continuing and residual impacts (even after he starts making changes to the patterns); and of
- what he specifically needs to do – across multiple aspects of his behaviour and across multiple domains of being a partner and co-parent – to repair as much of the harm he has caused (physically, psychologically, economically and to the family's social and support networks) as possible, and to take sensitive, thoughtful and proactive action to help restore a safe, dignified and free environment for his family members.

In many respects, this is largely about how to keep victim-survivor experiences and needs at the centre of the framework – or at least, how to enable the framework to consider these experiences and needs – on a perpetrator-by-perpetrator basis. Each victim-survivor and their family will have different needs, based on differences in each perpetrator's behavioural patterns; on the specific aspects of the harm caused (to each family member and to family functioning as a whole); and on what the user of violence can do that might help to restore/build safety and to repair, to some extent, some of the harm caused.

While a framework of proximal or signpost indicators of a behaviour change process is not in itself a perpetrator mapping tool, it needs to be compatible so as to point towards what the user of violence needs to do to become accountable to the experiences of those he has harmed.

Proximal indicators vs behaviour change 'end-points'

Implied across the approaches reviewed in Appendix A is the challenge of combining indicators which represent mature, behaviour change goals with those that have a more proximal focus in terms of a user of violence starting to step into aspects of a behaviour change journey. Unfortunately, the conflation of the two within the one framework is likely to be unavoidable, at least to some extent.

A central theme of this paper concerns how proximal indications that a user of violence is stepping into aspects of a behaviour change journey might not automatically translate into actual behaviour change – or at least not change that *as yet* makes a difference. While there has been an almost

complete lack of research investigating the correlation between proximal indicators and behaviour change outcomes (and indeed, a lack of research even delineating proximal indicators), one of the very few studies of this kind reviewed in Appendix A produced results which appear to support this time lag.

An element such as *felt, active empathy* would not be expected to be demonstrated by MBCP participants at the early (or even middle) stages of a behaviour change program. Indeed, this raises what is likely to be a constant tension in the development of the framework – the difficulty in drawing a line between an element focusing on the degree to which a user of violence is on a genuine and potentially productive behaviour change journey, versus an element about the degree to which he has ‘arrived’ at one of the desired ‘end points’ of the journey.¹⁹² While the framework is designed to focus on the former, there is no clear point where a proximal indicator ends and the achievement of an actual behaviour change outcome begins.

On the one hand, it could be tempting to pare back a framework of proximal indicators to include only a handful of key elements that are crucial for the beginnings of a man’s engagement with a behaviour change process. In this way, the framework could reduce conflation with indicators more likely to be demonstrated at later points in the change process that are as much actual behaviour change goals as they are proximal indicators of these goals. This would support the simplicity of the framework, confining it to the broad question ‘Is the user of violence making a genuine start, taking the first few (preliminary) steps, along a behaviour change process?’

The CIJ and SFV suggest, however, that limiting the framework in this way would represent a missed opportunity. A significant number of perpetrators might reach ‘first or second base’ on a behaviour change journey, but do not progress beyond that, becoming stuck in relation to other elements. Limiting the framework to a few early-stage elements would significantly constrain its use in this respect.

Furthermore, confining the framework in this way would constrain its usefulness even if the focus is only on early-stage elements. An important part of the practice guidance that would be embedded within the framework would be to support practitioners to make analyses of *patterns* of ratings across elements. How a user of violence is ‘scored’ in relation to an early-stage element could be interpreted differently, with different implications for reporting and for an ongoing assessment of risk, depending on the extent to which he demonstrates indications of other elements.

This importance of analysing patterns reflects that the behaviour change journey does not occur in the same, predictable sequence for each user of violence. Certainly, some elements are more likely to be demonstrated earlier than others, in the sense that stepping into change element X might be required before the user of violence can understand or even be motivated to do the work required to step into change element Y. However, many change elements interact with each other in complex ways. For example, a user of violence who begins to show indicators of, and genuinely grapples with, *felt, active empathy* is likely to make further headway in indicators related to the elements of acknowledging his violent and abusive behaviour, and understanding of its impacts.

In this sense, no element can be termed merely as ‘early stage’. The behaviour change process is not a ‘laddered’ approach, whereas certain elements are sufficiently demonstrated and ‘ticked off’ before the user of violence ‘steps up’ to the next set of elements. Rather, it is more accurate to view the elements as overlapping, perhaps in terms of a matrix.

¹⁹² Inverted commas are used to denote how behaviour change is an ongoing journey without definite ‘end points’ at which a program participant ‘arrives’.

Arguably, those elements that are characteristically the feature of the early or early-mid stages of a behaviour change process never really get ‘ticked off’. Rather, a successful behaviour change journey involves continued maturation in relation to these elements, influenced by how the perpetrator steps into other elements along the path. Furthermore, as highlighted in the previous sub-section, a perpetrator might demonstrate ‘early stage’ elements with respect to some aspects of his violent and controlling behaviour within the first month or two of his behaviour change journey, but not provide any indications of the same with respect to other aspects until (much) later.

Scaling and rating system

There are at least two considerations in relation to the scaling or rating system that could be used in the framework: how to tailor the system for each separate element, and whether the framework tools should enable the calculation of overall or component scores.

Differentiated rating guidance for each element

Many of the approaches outlined in Appendix A adopt a rating system that provides differential guidance for each element or indicator. While a consistent number of rating points was used for some approaches (for example, five each in the Indicators of Engagement and the Change Star tools), each rating point for each element/indicator came with its own bespoke description of what a perpetrator would be saying, doing and/or demonstrating to be positioned at that point.

Specific guidance to assist framework/tool users to place where a perpetrator is at with respect to any given element/indicator, differentiated for each element/indicator, is an indisputable requirement. How this specific and differentiated guidance is structured, however, depends on the rating system adopted by the tool.

Considerations in developing a rating system

On the surface, developing a rating system for the framework tools might not seem to be a difficult endeavour. For example, each element could be associated with a Likert scale with the points, for example, of “No evidence of demonstrating the indicator”, “Limited evidence”, “Some evidence”, “Significant evidence” and “Strong evidence”. However, several considerations are likely to make this more complex than how it might first seem.

Sensitivity to perpetrator dangerousness and entrapment motives

First, a rating of “no evidence” can be a very broad category with respect to some elements, and might not be an apt description of the danger that a user of violence represents. This is highlighted, for example, by where to place a perpetrator with respect to elements or indicators focusing on his understanding of the harm caused by his behaviours, if he has a very strong understanding of the harm that he has caused but chooses to inflict this harm due to beliefs that his (ex)partner ‘deserves’ to be punished? The risk posed by this user of violence might not be the same as one who is much less aware of the totality of impact to victim-survivors.

The choice of the word ‘totality’ is deliberate here. Most violent and controlling behaviour is intentional and is chosen by perpetrators for particular reasons, for example to shape their partner’s behaviour according to their will. In this sense, perpetrators are generally aware of a portion of the impacts of their behaviour (even though they might require scaffolded MBCP processes for them to begin to articulate them). This behaviour is specifically chosen to produce these impacts – for example, to make their partner too afraid to do something that the perpetrator does not want them to do.

Perpetrators differ significantly, however, in terms of their awareness of the wider range of impacts of their behaviour, such as the impacts of repeated emotional abuse on their partner's sense of worth as a person or parent. Whereas one perpetrator might not be aware of the cumulative impacts of their emotionally abusive behaviours in this respect, another might be highly aware of these and other broader impacts. The latter perpetrator may be using emotional violence not only to get his way in particular situations and to exert his will, but also, to wear her down over the course of the relationship so that she is easily controlled over the long-term.

In this respect, a rating system might need to incorporate a point, at least with some elements, that goes beyond the rating of no evidence. This is so that the tool is sufficiently sensitive to identify indicators of a perpetrator whose motives to use violence are to comprehensively harm, punish, entrap and/or 'destroy' their (ex)partner.

Similarly, perpetrators who show no evidence of acknowledging a meaningful proportion of their use of violent and controlling behaviour, might not all do so in the same way. Many perpetrators will use significant levels of denial, minimisation and externalised blame in at least the early stages of a behaviour change process. However, a perpetrator with strong misogynist beliefs about women is likely to engage in a different level of denial and partner-blame than one who, while still influenced by sexist beliefs, does not have the same degree of mistrust and suspiciousness about his partner and about women in general. While both perpetrators might show no evidence of acknowledging a meaningful proportion of their use of violence, they are clearly not equivalent.

Rating confidence

A second issue relates to how to construct a rating system that can allow for different opportunities for perpetrators to demonstrate a particular element, or to demonstrate them in particular settings. For example, a user of violence who is living with his family, and where his partner is participating in a partner contact service and feels comfortable to disclose his current behaviour through this contact, will have opportunities to demonstrate his behaviour in a wider range of settings than a user of violence who has no contact with his family.

Undoubtedly, a perpetrator who demonstrates an element through his actual interactions with victim-survivors – as reported through information obtained from his (ex)partner – would receive a higher rating on the element than one who can only demonstrate it in the context of his participation in the program. This does not automatically mean, however, that the latter perpetrator is at an earlier stage of a behaviour change journey. Rather, it might mean that he has not had an opportunity to be tested in the 'real life' context of family interactions.

Related, ratings can be fraught in situations where a user of violence is living with family members, or is residing separately but has frequent interactions with them, but where partner contact is not occurring. In these situations, what might it mean to assign a rating of, say, significant or strong demonstration of an element when it is unknown how the user of violence is demonstrating the element in the most important realm – with his family?

Furthermore, it is unclear how a rating system would accommodate situations where a perpetrator appears to demonstrate an element in the context of his participation in group-work or individual MBCP sessions, but where his (ex)partner reports quite different attitudes and behaviours at home. Of course, in these situations information provided by his (ex)partner would need to be prioritised. In question, however, are the implications of using observations of the perpetrator's participation in the program with respect to *other* elements which information obtained from his (ex)partner does not help to inform. In other words, how reliable observations related to these other elements are likely to be, when there are significant discrepancies between partner-derived information and observations of the perpetrator in the program on two or three key elements.

These considerations raise the issue of how a rating system can take into account the *degree of confidence* of each particular rating. In other words, how a rating system can provide different ‘weights’ or a degree-of-confidence overlay to ratings depending on the information sourced to make that rating.

Variance in opportunities to demonstrate indicators due to responsivity issues

Related to this issue of considering the degree of confidence in any particular rating, including the extent to which a perpetrator has opportunities to demonstrate particular indicators in a real life setting, is that perpetrators might have different ‘opportunities’ to demonstrate indicators even within the context of MBCP group-work sessions. Like any group of people thrown together, some participants are likely to be much more extroverted and will take more space in the group than others. Some participants, including those who belong to a marginalised community, might be quite reserved until (if) they develop a sense of trust in the group. A number of other variables can influence opportunities to demonstrate indicators, such as cognitive impairment, mental health issues, cultural considerations affecting the interpretation of program content, and the presence or absence of class privilege.¹⁹³

Of course, MBCP practitioners are attuned to factors such as these, and attempt to make their programs and practice responsive. Despite these efforts, however, perpetrators do not participate in a program on a level playing field. Some will be in a considerably more privileged position than others to demonstrate indicators of stepping into a behaviour change process, irrespective of the extent to which they actually are. The reality is that, despite calls for change-focused perpetrator programs to be more responsive to perpetrator heterogeneity, most providers do not have the funding, capacity or capability to tailor their program so as to create a level playing field.

This consideration highlights the crucial importance of an intersectionality lens to help practitioners contextualise the use of the framework tools. Otherwise, the ratings that some perpetrators receive with respect to particular elements might reflect their lack of privilege and opportunity, as much as they do the degree to which they are stepping into a behaviour change process.

Weighing up indicators

A further issue is how to weigh up demonstration of the indicators associated with a particular element to derive an overall rating. This includes how to address situations where a perpetrator significantly or strongly demonstrates some indicators associated with a particular element, but not others. While disparities in this sense between indicators within a given element are not likely to be extreme – due to the degree of interdependence between indicators within any given element – the complex nature of behaviour change journeys means that some degree of disparity is likely in some situations.

Differences between violent and controlling behaviours

A related issue is how to make ratings applicable to situations where a user of violence demonstrates an element with respect to some aspects of his violent and controlling behaviour, but not others. For example, when a perpetrator shows strong evidence of acknowledging his use of physical violence and intimidation (including acknowledging it to family members) but still completely denies his use of financial violence.

¹⁹³ Class privilege can work in multiple ways in this respect. For example, some perpetrators with significant class privilege might have more impression management skills to make it *appear* as though they are demonstrating particular indicators.

Tool usability

The CIJ and SFV do not wish to make the process of devising a rating system so complex as to be untenable. Furthermore, as outlined below, we strongly caution against any attempts to produce actuarial tools for this framework that provide an ‘overall score’. The framework’s tools need to be comprehensible and usable, in ways that guide and complement, rather than replace, clinical judgement. Ratings should be designed to support clinical judgement only, and would not be included as part of feedback to referrers.

These considerations have been raised, however, because at the other extreme, it would be easy to devise a tool that incorporated a rating system based only on broad, subjective impressions. For framework tools to support clinical judgement in a reliable way, and to be fit-for-purpose in relation to the three main needs for a framework as outlined in this paper, careful thought will need to be given towards how to construct a rating system that is based on specific and observable demonstrations of the proximal indicators.

Should the framework tools be scorable?

Some of the approaches outlined in Appendix A incorporate a rating scale. The use and nature of these scales differed between the tools, but in each case help to create a consistent visual representation through which the perpetrator’s positioning in relation to each particular element could be compared.

None of the tools reviewed, however, are directly amenable to creating single overall scores. While, theoretically, a single score could be calculated through summing the individual ratings of each element, none of the tools provide any tool instructions to support this. Indeed, while tools such as the Indicators of Engagement and the Change Star adopt a five-point rating system, no numerical values are assigned to these rating points.

Rather, the rating systems adopted were designed to determine the perpetrator’s patterns across the elements/areas of a behaviour change journey, and to assist with comparing ratings for particular elements/areas at different points of the perpetrator’s participation in a change-focused program. Templates are used to enable these patterns to be visually mapped, such as the outcomes star used by the Change Star and the rating template for the Indicators of Engagement tool.

The CIJ and SFV believe that there is considerable merit in adopting an approach that enables patterns to be visually mapped. This could be done by assigning a consistent rating scale to assign the point a user of violence is at with respect to each element. The points of the rating scale could resemble something like:

- Not able / insufficient information to determine if the perpetrator is stepping into the element
- Perpetrator is highly negative, hostile or dismissive of that element of the change process
- Perpetrator is avoidant or ‘pays lip service’ (‘talks the talk’ only for purposes of managing impressions) in relation to the element
- Perpetrator is starting to engage with th3 element
- Perpetrator is engaging with th3 element to a moderate degree
- Perpetrator is engaging concertededly with the element
- Perpetrator is consistently demonstrating the element.

Aside from a ratings/scaling process to enable visual mapping of where a user of violence is at with respect to each element, however, the CIJ and SFV caution against any attempts to assign overall scores. This is for several reasons.

Scoring is not likely to be needed for most purposes of the tool

First, most of the purposes for developing a framework of proximal indicators do not require any of the framework tools to produce an overall score. Providing an overall score to referrers as part of exit reporting or other feedback would be meaningless, as referrers would not know how to interpret it.

As outlined previously, the framework would need to provide guidance for specialist perpetrator intervention program practitioners to convey results of framework tools in a manner that can be easily understood by referrers, and which minimise the likelihood of misinterpretation. Appropriate language to convey results could include:

A fundamental pre-requisite for X to be a safer man for his family members to be around is for him to acknowledge a meaningful proportion of his use of violent and controlling behaviour... X has made limited progress towards this, however, despite having participated in the program for four months ... This is evidenced by X's only disclosures consisting of vague references about... X has demonstrated continued minimisation and denial of his use of violent and controlling behaviour, typically by... X is demonstrating a capacity to listen to other people's perspectives and has, in some ways, started re-interpreting what were initially quite entrenched negative and critical views of his partner in a more understanding and positive light... [additional information provided about what the perpetrator has or has not demonstrated in relation to two or three other priority elements]... However, given that X still largely denies and minimises his use of violent and controlling behaviour, it is likely that any current reduction in the risk he poses to family members is due to him being kept within view of the justice system, and that he is at significant risk of continuing to use FDV once services withdraw.

Assigning and relaying an overall 'score' to the referrer would, if anything, only detract from these types of feedback communications.

There is also no perceived benefit to program providers, in terms of ongoing monitoring and assessment of perpetrators, of deriving specific scores on the tool(s). Making clinical decisions based on overall scores would be highly reductive and even dangerous. This is due to the fact that any given score could mean a multitude of different things, with significantly different implications arising, depending on how that score was derived across the elements and indicators.

The one exception where scorability might be required is regarding the use of the framework for program evaluation purposes. Again, however, this does not automatically necessitate the assignment of an overall score for the tool. Rather, scores can be assigned for each separate element, or for clusters of elements, rather than scoring the tool as a whole.

Overall scores could be meaningless

Second, assigning a numerical score to a perpetrator's pattern of ratings across elements and indicators is likely to be meaningless. Certainly, a very low score resulting from a user of violence not achieving 'first base' with respect to any of the elements is fairly straightforward to interpret. For any score other than very low or very high, however, there can be literally dozens of different ways that a particular score could be derived, based on substantially different patterns of ratings across the elements.

In this context, interpreting a score of, say '40' (out of 100), to mean that the user of violence is at a 'moderate point' in terms of the degree to which he is stepping into a behaviour change process is rather meaningless. Does such a score mean, for example, that the user of violence is at a 'moderate point' with respect to each or most of the elements? Or does it mean that he is stepping concertedly into some elements of the change process and concertedly resisting others? If it's the latter, what are the specific patterns of elements that he is stepping into as distinct from resisting? Does it mean that he's stepping into several of the elements with respect to some aspects of his violent and controlling behaviour (for example, his use of physical violence), while still denying or not understanding other aspects (for example, refusing to countenance any of his behaviour as financial or sexual violence)? Overall scores are not able to cast attention to these substantially different patterns.

Overall scores would be difficult to interpret

Following on from this, overall tool scores could be dangerously misinterpreted to draw incorrect conclusions about the risk that the perpetrator poses to victim-survivors. As outlined frequently in this paper, the fact that a perpetrator might be stepping into elements of a behaviour change journey does not mean that risk will automatically reduce. Research correlating proximal indicators and actual behaviour change outcomes – including at points of follow-up several months after program completion – has been extremely rare. Accordingly, the degree of confidence that the field can have in terms of projecting positive behaviour change outcomes from a perpetrator's proximal demonstrations needs to be tentative.¹⁹⁴ A score of '40' could not be taken to mean that risk has reduced 'moderately', nor could a score of '80' that the user of violence is well on his way towards changing his behaviour and that his family are safer. There is a real danger, however, that scores could be interpreted this way.

As also emphasised throughout this paper, referrers and other stakeholders interpreting these scores might fail to take into account any time lag between a perpetrator's demonstration of the elements and actual behaviour change. Previously noted, there is no fine line between when a proximal signpost of behaviour change ends and actual 'end-point' behaviour change begins.

As per the purpose of the framework, however, the constituent tools would be designed to measure, to the extent possible, signposts that a user of violence is on a behaviour change journey, as distinct from 'end-point' behaviour change. As such, an overall score of '80' would not necessarily mean that risk has significantly reduced *now*. Such a score would point to the potential for risk to decrease over a coming time period but might not translate into risk reduction at the current point of time.

The need to incorporate negative indicators (and how this can make scoring difficult)

Elements will need to contain some degree of what could be termed 'negative indicators'. Evidence of these indicators would point quite strongly to a user of violence being at a very preliminary place in a behaviour change process with respect to the element in question.

These negative indicators would cover perpetrator behaviours and verbalisations that, for example:

- appear to deliberately sabotage the group-work process;
- involve attempts to use his participation in the program as a weapon against his (ex)partner – for example, lying to his partner that the facilitators 'said' that she is responsible for his

¹⁹⁴ As also outlined frequently in this paper, however, the reverse is not the case. Practitioners and program providers can make confident assertions about the meaning of a perpetrator *not* demonstrating the elements. If he is not reaching first base on m/any of the indicators, framework users can assert with some confidence that he is not on a path towards reducing the risk he poses to current and/or future victim-survivors.

behaviour, distorting, misrepresenting or using program content out of context to accentuate his gaslighting tactics, actively using the fact of his participation in the program as ‘mileage’ to ‘prove’ that he is the more ‘capable parent’, etc.;

- are part of substantial efforts to discredit or pathologise his (ex)partner;
- appear to indicate strong commitment to, and defensiveness about, highly misogynist or criminogenic beliefs (for example, that justify revenge-seeking).

The presence of negative indicators such as these would carry great weight in any attempt to ‘score’ the extent to which the user of violence is stepping into a productive behaviour change process. Their presence would say as much, if not more, than ratings made for the user of violence across other more ‘positive’ indicators.

This issue raises the question of the use of the tool for high-risk, high-harm perpetrators, particularly those with strong motives underpinning their violent and controlling behaviour to seek revenge or to socially entrap the victim-survivor. Given that behaviour change goals are often not part of an intervention approach with these perpetrators – at least not in the short to medium term – it is uncertain whether a framework of proximal indicators would have much usefulness for this cohort.

Scores can mean different things in different contexts

Related to the above, a number of contextual variables would influence how a particular score is interpreted, and how scores across perpetrators are compared. For example, one perpetrator may be six weeks into his participation in a change-focused program and score ‘30’ in a framework tool. Another perpetrator, who is three-quarters of the way through participation in the program, may score ‘45’. Based on the numerical scores alone, referrers and stakeholders might consider the second perpetrator to be at a more advanced state in the behaviour change journey. However, one would expect a perpetrator who is near completion of an MBCP to be considerably further along a change journey than one who has recently commenced. In this context, a moderate score of ‘45’ presents a more concerning picture than a lower score by a relatively new perpetrator in the program.

Contextualisation would clearly be a critical part of interpreting framework tool results irrespective of whether the tool is scored. Assigning overall scores, however, runs a greater risk of de-contextualised conclusions being drawn by those to whom the score is being communicated.

Scorability would necessitate psychometric reliability and validation studies

The adoption of an overall scoring system would necessitate expensive studies to establish the psychometric properties of framework tools. A tool that supports (structured) professional and clinical judgement, as distinct from one of an actuarial nature, does not require the same kind of psychometric testing. This is because there is no attempt to (i) assign scores, nor to (ii) attach particular meanings to particular scores and to use scores to predict the statistical likelihood of certain outcomes.

Interpreting ‘positive’ indications

A significant issue with the development of any framework of proximal or signpost indicators is interpretation when a perpetrator appears to be demonstrating most of the indicators in a positive way.

Interpretation is much easier when a user of violence is not demonstrating the (vast) majority of indicators, particularly those related to elements that are crucial to the early stages of a behaviour change process. For example, if a user of violence is completely denying most of his use of violent and controlling behaviour; continues to adopt a strong ‘victim stance’¹⁹⁵ and blame his partner for those aspects of his behaviour to which he is willing to admit; and does not appear to be willing to understand the impacts of his behaviour on his family (or believes that his ex-partner deserves these impacts) then it is highly unlikely that he is, at this stage at least, stepping into a process of change.

It is harder to draw conclusions as definitive as this, however, when it appears that a user of violence is demonstrating many or most of the indicators across most of the elements. This is particularly the case when the only or main source of information to make such determinations arise from observations of the user of violence during the course of his participation in the change-focused program – that is, when there is no relevant information available through (ex)partner observations of his current behaviour. This is a common dilemma of the work, given the degree to which some perpetrators are relatively skilled at ‘talking the talk’ without either being truly committed to what they are saying in group-work or individual sessions, or who tell practitioners what they think they want to hear to get through to the completion point of the program as quickly as possible.

It is therefore important that the framework provides sufficiently detailed practice guidance for practitioners to discern when evidence that appears on a surface level to suggest demonstration of an indicator is actually not genuine evidence. This guidance would be written based on existing practice wisdom, in terms of the signs that practitioners look for when observing participants in MBCP work to determine if contributions are being made only for the purposes of managing impressions, and/or if the contributions lack any real depth. Many practitioners are skilled, for example, in identifying when a user of violence is intellectualising content areas of a program’s curriculum without actually embodying the content or operationalising it to their own circumstances.

Even with such practice guidance, however, interpreting and reporting ‘positive’ results in terms of the degree to which the user of violence is stepping into the elements of a behaviour change process, will always be more difficult than interpreting and reporting negative profiles. Anxiety will remain about whether positive results actually do reflect a genuine commitment and effort by the user of violence to work towards change.

A significant limitation here is that determining whether a user of violence is simply ‘telling practitioners what they want to hear’ sometimes requires in-depth engagement and explorations that might not be possible within the constraints of group-work sessions. Engaging a user of violence in invitational questions such as “What might that look like...”, “How would you approach that situation...?”, and “What might you need to consider when applying...?” can be time-consuming and not always possible in a group of 10-14 men, at least not in relation to each participant.

¹⁹⁵ The term ‘victim stance’ is used by the MBCP field to denote the patterns of thinking and narratives that perpetrators use to make themselves out to be the ‘victim’ of the victim-survivor’s ‘unfair’, ‘unreasonable’ or ‘unjust’ behaviour (as he perceives it) towards him. Perpetrators use victim stance thinking as justification for violent and controlling behaviour.

Determining the scope and limits of framework users

This paper has outlined three rationales or needs for a framework of proximal indicators of a behaviour change process, being to assist perpetrator change-focused program providers to construct exit reports and other reporting to referrers; to monitor and assess the quality of each perpetrator's participation in the program and where they are at in a behaviour change process; and to evaluate programs.

For all three purposes, the main users of the framework will be change-focused program practitioners themselves, who would be making the ratings and the interpretations and analyses based on them. Communications arising from the use of the framework would be made to referrers and to other stakeholders, but they would not be actually using the framework (and might not even be aware of it). However, at least three other potential direct or indirect users and interfaces with the framework need to be considered.

Use by independent evaluators

While one of the main reasons for the development of a framework of proximal indicators is to assist program providers to conduct internal evaluations and program reviews, a framework would also be of considerable use in larger-scale, independent evaluations. Furthermore, as outlined in the concluding chapter of this paper, ideally the framework would be subject to future research investigating the correlation between indicator scores and actual behaviour change.

In these situations, indicator ratings would still most likely be made by program practitioners, rather than the independent evaluators or researchers; however, the framework would need to make sense to evaluators and generate data that they can use in quantitative analyses.

Communicating analyses based on the framework to referrers

One of the strengths of the Safe and Together framework of behaviour change signposts and outcomes is that its simplicity – consisting of only three broad variables – enables its direct use by agencies with only part or limited specialisation in FDV. The framework was developed for child welfare (child protection and intensive family support) services and MBCP providers to work together in the ongoing

monitoring and assessment of the extent to which a father using FDV is on a meaningful path towards changing his harmful behavioural patterns.

As emphasised previously, however, there are likely to be significant limitations to a framework that does not have sufficient specificity and nuance. Accordingly, the CIJ and SFV recommend that the framework is developed to be of direct use by practitioners with full, or near full, specialisation in engaging FDV perpetrators.

The ways in which specialist change-focused program providers interpret and communicate data to mandated referrers and other relevant agencies will be crucial. As previously emphasised, there could be significant dangers in specialist practitioners providing 'scorecards' or actual ratings of the indicators to referrers. These could be significantly misinterpreted, and used to draw unwarranted and decontextualised conclusions based on the referrer's misunderstanding of what the indicators mean.

The CIJ and SFV therefore recommend that the development of the framework is accompanied by a guide concerning how specialist practitioners can translate analyses into relatively simple and clear wording when reporting back to referrers. In other words, while the framework will require a level of

sophistication and nuance to enable its use for internal ongoing monitoring and assessment of perpetrators, the way in which it is used in the compilation of exit reports and other feedback to referrers would need to be considerably more constrained.

Reducing the complexity for these purposes would not require a second, parallel set of indicators. Rather, practitioners can be guided in the types of simple, clear and authoritative language to use in reporting and feeding back to referrers in ways that will not be misunderstood, and in ways that draw clear implications in terms of the risk the user of violence poses to adult and child victim-survivors. Indeed, the CIJ and SFV believe that such guidance would be warmly welcome in the field, given the paucity of training and professional development opportunities that MBCP practitioners have in improving the quality and consistency of their documentation, report-writing and communicating feedback to referrers.

How 'client friendly' should the framework be?

As outlined in our analysis of existing approaches in Appendix A, the Change Star is unique in the extent to which it is client-friendly, and in how it was designed to be used both by perpetrators and by their practitioners through a collaborative and ongoing goal-setting and case review process. The deliberate intention is for perpetrator engagement with the tool itself to support their understanding of what is required in a behaviour change journey, as well as their self-assessment and reflections on where they are at on a path towards change. It was also designed both for clients and for practitioners to use in a way that scaffolds practitioner feedback to the client of where he is along a path, and for this joint use of the tool to enhance their collaborative working relationship.

This presents a dilemma for the development of the framework proposed in this paper. The more comprehensive and sophisticated the framework, the less it can incorporate an interface for use by clients themselves. Furthermore, the orientation of a framework or tool towards joint use by perpetrators and practitioners requires it to focus not only on proximal indicators, but also on actual intermediate behaviour change outcomes.

The CIJ and SFV believe that there is considerable merit in developing one or more tools associated with the framework that are specifically designed to have this type of interactive interface between practitioners and their clients. This should not be the initial focus of the development of the framework, however, but instead could be an extension once the set of framework tools and guides designed mainly for practitioner use have been developed and trialled.

7. Preliminary suggestions of elements: Starting points for consultation and discussion

This chapter provides some very preliminary examples of elements that could be adopted in the type of framework outlined in Chapter Six.

The CIJ and SFV stress that these are proposed only as starting points, based on the current state of knowledge and considerations outlined in previous chapters, for extensive further discussion and subsequent consultation and codesign within the field.

It is also important to note that these elements are not based on empirical evidence. A recent review of over 5,000 FDV perpetrator program evaluations found only six that contained sufficient information and detail to address questions concerning the mechanisms, and the contextual factors, under which programs are effective. In other words, while the vast majority of evaluations attempted to answer if the program(s) evaluated was effective, very few addressed issues of how, or through what mechanisms.¹⁹⁶ Research of the type reviewed in Appendix A investigating the correlation between program participant proximal indicators and behaviour change outcomes is extremely rare.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, there is a strong imperative for realist evaluation methodologies to be applied to program evaluation in this field.¹⁹⁸

That said, a small, but growing body of qualitative research focuses on program completers' own perspectives regarding what elements or aspects of the program led to self-reported changes in their behaviour.¹⁹⁹ These studies cannot be relied upon, however, as the main source of empirical guidance from which to derive proximal indicators of the behaviour change process. Rather, they point to what elements, processes or areas of content program participants found valuable in terms of assisting them on their behaviour change journey, as distinct from determining proximal indicators that relate to successful behaviour change outcomes.

¹⁹⁶ Velonis, A., Mahabir, F., Maddox, R., & O'Campo P. (2020). Still looking for mechanisms: A realist review of batterer intervention programs. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 21(4), 741-753.

¹⁹⁷ Semiatin, J., Murphy, C., & Elliott, J. (2013). Observed behaviour during group treatment for partner-violent men: Acceptance of responsibility and promotion of change. *Psychology of Violence*, 3(2), 126-139.

¹⁹⁸ Realist evaluation methodologies focus specifically on investigating why, for whom, and under what conditions an intervention works, and by doing so explore the mechanisms of change leading to successful outcomes within specific contexts, as well as what factors promote or hinder these mechanisms. See, for example: Gilmore, B., McAuliffe, E., Power, J., & Vallieres, F. (2019). Data analysis and synthesis within a realist evaluation: Towards more transparent methodological approaches. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, published online, July 13, 2019.

¹⁹⁹ Morrison, P., Burke, J., Cluss, P., Hawker, L., Miller, E., George, D., Bicehouse, T., Fleming, R., Wright, K., & Chang, J. (2018). The influence of batterer intervention programs on male perpetrators of intimate partner violence: Reports of change in beliefs and behaviors. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 57(5), 311-329; McGinn, T., McColgan, M., & Taylor, B. (2020). Male IPV perpetrator's perspectives on intervention and change: A systematic synthesis of qualitative studies. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 21(1), 97-112; Silvergleid, C., & Mankowski, E. (2006). How batterer intervention programs work: Participant and facilitator accounts of processes of change. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 21(1), 139-159.

The elements drafted in this chapter are therefore based on some 35 years of MBCP theory and practice wisdom, and on the conceptual and theoretical assumptions outlined earlier in this paper. A direct and ‘hard’ empirical evidence-base to inform the development of proximal indicators does not appear to be a realistic possibility until quite some distance into the future.

To reiterate, the CIJ and SFV present these for the purpose of providing concrete starting points for discussion in the field. The sixteen elements outlined in this chapter do not comprise a complete set. Readers will readily be able to identify contenders for potential elements that we have not included.

Furthermore, the delineation of the indicators underneath each element is clearly a crucial part of the process. Developers of the framework will face complex decisions regarding whether to bring forward a particular area of a behaviour change process as an element or, alternatively, to imbue this area as multiple indicators across multiple elements. In other words, what might appear to be missing elements can be incorporated as multiple indicators situated under multiple relevant elements, as an alternative way to prioritise that area of a behaviour change process.

This highlights that even the terminology adopted in this report, let alone the actual elements/indicators, should all be open for consideration and debate. In the process of considering whether to represent an area as a distinct element, or to thread aspects of the area through multiple elements as indicators, it is reasonable to question whether the term ‘indicator’ is apt. In many respects, this second layer could more accurately be described as ‘sub-elements’ – more specific descriptions of particular aspects of the element – than as actual indicators of the element. This is in part because the language of the elements and that of the indicators both adopt verb-based structures such as “Demonstrates...”.

The CIJ and SFV have made no attempt to delineate the specific indicators under each element. Rather, commentary is provided, to a greater or lesser extent for each element, on some of the indicators that *could be* associated with the element.

As outlined previously, differentiating between a proximal indicator or signpost of a behaviour change process, and an associated outcome of that process, is not always a clean endeavour. Some of the elements presented in this chapter might appear to be as much a behaviour change outcome as they are an indicator of stepping into a process that might lead to such an outcome.

Also as outlined previously, adopting a pattern-based, rather than incident-based, understanding of FDV results in the need for elements and indicators to take into account aspects related to coercive control. How overtly this should feature in the wording of the elements is a matter of careful consideration.

Examples of core elements

Sixteen core elements are presented below as starting points for discussion and debate in the field. These are tentatively labelled as:

- acknowledging behaviour
- committing to the change process
- internal motivation
- awareness of patterns
- violence-interruption strategies
- non-violent identity
- reflecting on beliefs
- understanding impacts

- accepting personal consequences
- understanding victim-survivor actions
- accountability
- sexual respect
- felt, active empathy
- safety & accountability planning
- lifestyle and habits
- equality and respect

These are described as follows:

Acknowledging behaviour: Acknowledges a meaningful proportion of violent and controlling behaviours used, across all forms and tactics used, without denial, minimisation, justification or other-blaming.

This element draws upon the first of three Safe and Together Institute proximal indicators highlighted in Appendix A, described as “naming the behaviours”, and is worth quoting at length:

FF *“Naming the behavio[u]rs” means that perpetrators are expected to acknowledge their own abusive behavio[u]rs as part of a process of change. It is difficult to change behavio[u]rs that you can’t or won’t talk about. Outright denial of behavio[u]rs and manipulating the perceptions of others about the intent and nature of behavio[u]rs is a central organizing feature of patterns of coercive control. It is a form of abuse in its own right and means by which a perpetrator manipulates the perceptions of others often preventing family, friends and systems from intervening through lies and deception.*

“Naming the behavio[u]rs” involves the perpetrator describing the specifics of what he did and said to harm his partner, children and others. These admissions need to go beyond physical violence to include threats, intimidation, emotionally abusive statements, and other behavio[u]rs associated with coercive control.

For “naming the behavio[u]rs” to be meaningful, it must have congruence with the scope and severity of his behavio[u]r patterns. For example, a perpetrator who admits he raises his voice occasionally may only be acknowledging a fraction of his behavio[u]r. It would be wrong to label this acknowledgment of yelling meaningful and relevant if his larger pattern included more egregious and dangerous behavio[u]r like physical and sexual assaults, stalking, and threats to harm the children. Token admissions of minor behavio[u]rs are not enough.

For “Naming the behaviors” to have its fullest value [it] needs to occur with family members. Acknowledgment of behaviors in a perpetrator intervention program is an important step but it should not be confused with the importance of “naming the behaviors” with his family or in court and other systems settings. Granting certificates of completion to perpetrators who fail at “naming the behaviors” can be a form of collusion, and a failure of systems to hold perpetrators accountable.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Mandel, D. (2020). *Perpetrator intervention program completion certificates are dangerous*. White paper. Safe and Together Institute. pp. 3-4

Several highly important considerations pertaining to the indicators of this element are raised through the above Safe and Together Institute description. These include the extent of acknowledgement of his behaviours across the breadth of his patterns of coercive control, and to whom he acknowledges his behaviour. In this paper Mandel raises the question of the extent to which this element can be demonstrated if the perpetrator acknowledges his behaviour only within the MBCP group-work setting:

FF *Cessation of physical violence and threatening behavior is critical but cannot be the exclusive measure. If systems are going to be true allies to adult and child survivors, their processes need to incorporate their perspectives around accountability and change. A survivor is likely to feel more relief when a perpetrator's cessation of violence for a period of time is accompanied by "Naming the behavior" and "Claiming the harm" as opposed to the cessation of violence without those other behaviors. For example, for a survivor whose partner has been unwilling to admit to any behavior, a shift to "naming the behavior" may increase her sense of physical and emotional safety and make her feel less crazy and guilty.*

*Writing and research on restorative and therapeutic justice point to the value to survivors of perpetrator[s] acknowledging their behavior and the harm it has caused to others. Children of abusive fathers identify that acknowledgment of past behaviors, commitment to change, and behavioral and attitudinal steps to rebuild trust are what they want from that parent.*²⁰¹

Central to this element would be at least one indicator pertaining to reductions/elimination in the use of blame, minimisation, justification, other-blaming and other 'smokescreens' used to minimise the naming of behaviours. An indicator would also be required focusing on the nature and the extent of the perpetrator's victim stance thinking and narratives.²⁰²

This element is broadly related to the degree to which the user of violence is willing to 'look back' at the full breadth of his violent and controlling behaviours – to bring these behaviours into present view – in order to work towards being a safer and less controlling man into the future. Many perpetrators, of course, do not wish to look back at their behaviour, preferring to try to 'put it behind them' and to 'move on'. When this occurs, the risk of repeating patterns remains high.

This element could be a conceivable location for an indicator(s) focusing on the perpetrator's ability to have a productive relationship with shame. For some perpetrators, one of the factors that inhibits this process of 'bringing the past into the present, to inform the future' is their difficulty in experiencing the shame that results from looking at their own behaviour.

Of note, the CIJ and SFV have deliberately avoided using the term 'taking responsibility' in any of the elements suggested in this paper. While this is understandably a central term in MBCP work, and is reported widely in the MBCP literature, it is an exceedingly broad term that can be operationalised in different ways by different readers.²⁰³

²⁰¹ *ibid*, pp. 6-7

²⁰² The term 'victim stance' is used by the MBCP field to denote the patterns of thinking and narratives that perpetrators use to make themselves out to be the 'victim' of the victim-survivor's 'unfair', 'unreasonable' or 'unjust' behaviour (as he perceives it) towards him. Perpetrators use victim stance thinking as justification for violent and controlling behaviour.

²⁰³ Chung, D., Davis, K., Cordier, R., Campbell, E., Wong, T., Salter, S., Austen, S., O'Leary, P., Brackenridge, J., Vlasis, R., Green, D., Prasilio, A., Young, A., Gore, A., Speyer, S., Mahoney, N., Anderson, S., & Bissett, T. (2020). *Improved accountability: The role of perpetrator intervention systems* (Research report, 20/2020). Sydney: ANROWS (see

Commitment to the change process: Demonstrates a personal commitment towards, and personal ownership of, the attitudinal and behaviour change process.

This element is one of the few amongst this preliminary (and very incomplete) list of sixteen that relate directly to the degree, quality and nature of the efforts and work that a perpetrator puts into the change process. The indicators of this element would need to refer to this work and effort, both within the context of the perpetrator's participation in program sessions, and between program sessions. The latter could include the effort he puts into attempting to apply what he is learning and exploring through the program into practice. Indicators in this respect would need to go far beyond mere attendance at program sessions, and beyond (though might include) the quality of his participation in these sessions.

As outlined in the previous chapter, the indicators and the rating system would need to be sufficiently sensitive to discern different patterns through which a user of violence might show little or no demonstration of the indicators. It is one thing, for example, for a perpetrator to take a perfunctory approach towards the program of 'doing his time' and putting in the minimum amount of effort required for him to 'tick off' what is required for him to complete the program, versus being a disruptive influence and attempting to sabotage the group process.

This would likely be one of the most difficult elements to rate. Perpetrators can attend every or most sessions, and participate well-enough, yet not give much thought to the explorations stimulated during the program in-between group/individual sessions. Indicators pertaining to the extent to which a user of violence is putting work and effort into the change process in-between group sessions can be subtle and sometimes difficult to discern.

An important indicator within this element – one that could also be placed within several other elements – would be the extent to which the perpetrator focuses only on his change process without attempting to divert attention towards any changes that he believes his (ex)partner or other affected family members need to make. An approach of "I'm doing my bit, now how do I bring her to the party to work on what she needs to do differently" is not an uncommon position for participants of MBCPs to take.

Taking this one step further, the tool would need to incorporate indicators pertaining to any attempts that the perpetrator makes to distort or apply program content to make critical judgements of his (ex)partner – or even further, to pressure her to make changes. This relates to an important point raised in the previous chapter – the need for the tool to incorporate 'negative indicators', such as a perpetrator using his participation in the program as a weapon against his (ex)partner.

As with many of the elements and indicators, an intersectionality lens will be crucial during the rating process. As outlined previously, perpetrators who participate in a change-focused program are not on a level playing field with respect to their opportunity to demonstrate indicators relating to the quality of their participation in a behaviour change process. Furthermore, the indicators that they do demonstrate might remain hidden, or be misconstrued (as either positive or negative), due to cultural and other forms of 'blindness' that can arise through practitioners' own forms of privilege.

Internal motivation: Demonstrates internal motivation and ethics to change violent and controlling behaviours, and becomes internally accountable to these ethics.

It is widely recognised that a core area of behaviour change involves a perpetrator's transition from external motivators to participate in a program – for example, to satisfy the conditions of a court order, or attempt to persuade his partner to remain in the relationship – to more internal motivations for change. This transition can be a gradual process for some. Indeed, one of the common frustrations in this work is that it can sometimes be close to the point of program completion before some perpetrators start to become internally motivated.

Indicators which focus on internal motivation would obviously prompt the tool user to consider evidence pertaining to the relative strength of external, versus internal, motivations at the point in which the tool is administered. They would also focus, however, on some of the main steps required for the perpetrator to become internally motivated. For example, early steps in this process (that are often a focus in the early stages of a program) might include the perpetrator's ability to:

- articulate at least one or two goals for participating in the program that are not centred on external motivators;
- explore values that are important to him in how he conducts himself as a partner, family man, man or person;
- explore what these values mean in terms of his strivings or vision to be the best partner, family man, man or person he can be;
- desist from using simplistic and decontextualised appeals to values as a means of criticising his (ex)partner (“she acts so *unfairly* to me”, “she doesn’t tell me anything, she’s *dishonest*”, etc);
- reflect on how his behaviour – or at least those aspects of his violent, controlling and disrespectful behaviour that he is willing to acknowledge at this point in the program – is positioned in relation to these values and to the partner, family man or man that wants to be; and furthermore, to feel unsettled by the dissonance between the two.

One or more negative indicators associated with this element could relate to a perpetrator being or remaining fixated on external motivations (such as ‘getting his partner back’); and, furthermore, of using his participation in the program as a means to pursue those external motivations (for example, being anxious to receive a program completion certificate that he can take to a relevant court).

Awareness of patterns: Understands patterns and chains of thinking, emotions, decisions and actions towards high-impact FDV behaviours, and towards more regular acts of coercive control.

Many MBCPs include a component in their programs that attempts to assist participants to understand these patterns and chains, often influenced by CBT theory. Corrections-focused programs refer to this as ‘offence mapping’. The use of offence mapping in its traditional form is contested in the NGO-provided community-based MBCP field, however, due to its focus on ‘predisposing’, ‘precipitating’ and ‘perpetuating’ factors that can seem at odds with a socio-political understanding of FDV as intentional behaviour.

The traditional approach to offence mapping can also be criticised due to its incident-based focus on FDV, rather than more continuous and sometimes subtle patterns of coercive control. Aspects of coercive control could be brought into this element by incorporating indicators such as:

- Identify the specific forms of day-to-day abuse and coercive control that have been utilised, as well as the underlying outlook and excuses that drove those behaviours.

Indeed, the wording of indicators associated with this element would be highly important to enable room for theoretical approaches beyond CBT. This can be done, to some degree, by partly focusing this element on indicators of a perpetrator being prepared to engage in ‘deep dive’ *articulations, explorations and reflections of particular incidents* of his use of violence and, through this, identifying thoughts, beliefs, choices, intents/motives and impacts (both on victim-survivors / his family and on himself) that relate to his use of violent and controlling behaviour in that incident.

Many, if not most, theoretical orientations to MBCP work include processes to scaffold participant (detailed) explorations of examples/incidents of their use of violence. This is because doing so can open up windows for participant understanding, learning, skill development and change, and also so that the content and concepts of the program become operationalised in the grounded detail of specific incidents and situations, rather than floating at a general intellectual level. The specific aims of these scaffolded explorations of particular incidents of the use of violence, and how this scaffolding occurs, differs between theoretical orientations. There is little doubt, however, that an important signpost of a user of violence being on a behaviour change journey is his demonstration of articulations, explorations and reflections related to specific incidents of his use of violence, and from this being able to discern patterns of thinking, beliefs, intents, choices and actions.

A related important indicator associated with this element would concern the perpetrator’s articulation of, and reflections on, his *intent* behind the use of violent and controlling behaviour. In other words, his willingness to confront the ‘ugly truth’ regarding what he was attempting to achieve through the use of violence (for example, to punish his partner, demean her in his children’s eyes, or make her too frightened to pursue an action that he does not want her to make). This is a highly important aspect of many theoretical approaches to the work, and could be represented by an indicator such as Identify the range and diversity of tactics, and the intent behind their use, to exert power and control in intimate and family relationships.

Violence-interruption strategies: Learns and applies strategies to interrupt use of physical, emotional/psychological and other forms of violence, intimidation and acts that create fear.

Possible indicators for this element were suggested in the previous chapter.

Obviously, this element is highly skills and CBT-focused; the constituent indicators, however, could cover a wide range of issues and considerations.

The second and eighth indicators in the aforementioned list highlight the need for *cross-referencing* between indicators across different elements, or even between indicators and elements under which the indicator does not fall directly. The second indicator is very similar to one of the actual elements suggested in this chapter; whereas the eighth indicator is likely to be very closely related to indicators of another element. Indeed, some indicators might actually be repeated across two or more elements.

The third and fourth indicators provide examples of how the careful construction of indicators can accommodate or point towards multiple theoretical orientations. Programs can differ significantly in the extent to which they focus on building new skills, versus assuming that participants have skills

that they are not willing to use.²⁰⁴ The third and fourth indicators, taken together, attempt to accommodate both positions.

The fifth, sixth and seventh indicators highlight the careful, comprehensive and nuanced mapping of issues that would be required in the development of the framework. The fifth is an example of a negative indicator, in the sense that the existence of evidence that the user of violence is using a technique as a controlling or manipulating tactic would carry significant weight in interpreting the overall tool results. These three indicators exemplify the importance of keeping the experiences of adult and child victim-survivors, and how the user of violence understands and responds to them, at the centre of the framework.

Nonviolent identity: Develops and strengthens aspects of a personal and/or collective identity inconsistent with the use of violent and controlling behaviour.

or

Develops and strengthens aspects of a personal and/or collective identity consistent with nonviolence.

This element is strongly focused on secondary desistance, or on what many MBCP practitioners term ‘second-order change’. It is also significantly influenced by narrative approaches to the work.²⁰⁵

The wording of this element – through the inclusion of a focus on collective identity – is an example of how tool elements and indicators can be written in ways that attempt to minimise the privileging of white, individualistic, Euro-centric cultures.

It is possible that some of the indicators associated with this element would be shared with the *internal motivation* element, in terms of the focus on the identification, articulation and commitment to values and strivings²⁰⁶ that are inconsistent with the continued use of violence. The two elements are far from identical, however, and the difference raises an important consideration in the development of elements – how to cater for heterogeneity between perpetrators.

The internal motivation element is likely to be highly relevant to most, if not all, perpetrators who participate in a change-focused program. The development of an internal motivation to change violent and controlling behaviour is a central part of almost any sustainable behaviour change journey. Not all perpetrators, however, will require significant changes to their identity as part of this journey.

A recent review of desistance research and theory as applied both in general criminological research and with respect to family and domestic violence,²⁰⁷ leads the CIJ and SFV to suggest that this type of element might be differentially relevant across three broad ‘categories’ of perpetrators:

1. Those who do not have long histories of perpetrating FDV; who can somewhat readily identify (though scaffolded explorations facilitated by an MBCP) ethics and values at odds

²⁰⁴ Another example of this concerns a focus on communication skills. Some programs devote up to two group-work sessions focusing specifically on communication skill building, whereas others, for very deliberate reasons, have little direct focus on this at all.

²⁰⁵ For a recent review of narrative approaches to men’s behaviour change work, see Wendt, S., Seymour, K., Buchanan, F., Dolman, C., & Greenland, N. (2019). *Engaging men who use violence: Invitational narrative approaches*. ANROWS research report.

²⁰⁶ Strivings to be the best partner, man, parent, etc. that one can be.

²⁰⁷ Moran, D. (2019). *An exploration of neglected themes in the development of domestic violence perpetrator programmes in the UK*. PhD thesis, University of Stirling.

with their use of violent and controlling behaviour; who have current and strong-enough aspects of their identity potentially consistent with non-violent orientation and respectful relating in family relationships; who do not have misogynist nor significant levels of hostile sexist beliefs and attitudes; and who have at least some degree of social or other influential networks that encourage an identity consistent with non-violent and respectful behaviour.

2. Those who have been using violent and controlling behaviour in intimate relationships / within their families for some time; who might have more entrenched sexist (and even misogynist) beliefs and attitudes; who find it harder to reach into aspects of their identity more consistent with non-violent and respectful relating in intimate and personal relationships; who have networks that, by large, support the continuation of sexist beliefs and patriarchal outlooks (and in some cases, support broader criminological orientation); but who have dormant aspects of their identity consistent with and supportive of non-violence and respectful relating that can be *re-discovered* through careful MBCP work.²⁰⁸
3. Those who seem “entrenched in their attitudes and restricted to living in communities, and associating with personal networks which were largely unsupportive in terms of enabling them to behave and act radically differently as men, or to ‘create themselves and their lives anew’.”²⁰⁹ In other words, this category includes perpetrators who might not have underlying or dormant aspects of a non-violent identity to ‘rediscover’; who have been immersed in patterns of FDV behaviour (and possibly broader networks of offending) throughout much of their life; and in which the personal and social obstacles to breaking away from long-entrenched patterns are significant.²¹⁰

The relevance of this element, and its application, would differ significantly across these three groups, in terms of whether the user of violence has readily identifiable and potentially supported aspects of their identity inconsistent with the continued use of violent and controlling behaviour; has dormant aspects that can be re-discovered and brought into focus in the change process; or whether the project to create sustainable change is much more significant in terms of needing to create these aspects of identity anew.

Reflecting on beliefs: Identifies personally held gender-based violence-supporting beliefs; critically reflects on how they give rise to specific intents to use violent and controlling behaviours, to impacts on themselves and others, and how they (mis)align with personal ethics.

The identification of, and work to transform, beliefs that perpetrators adopt that facilitate and support their use of violent and controlling behaviour is a priority area of the change process common to many theoretical orientations to the work. How these beliefs come into view and are approached differs across these orientations but are a central concern of most approaches. The indicators constructed for this element could attempt, to the best extent possible, to ‘cover the different bases’ of how different theoretical orientations conceptualise the role of working with men’s beliefs as part of the behaviour change process.

²⁰⁸ Invitational narrative practice that scaffolds processes for perpetrators to rediscover ethical strivings towards nonviolence and values of respect, equality and safety, and for identify re-authoring based on these explorations, have of course been a central facet of the influential work of Alan Jenkins; see for example Jenkins, A. (2009). *Becoming ethical: A parallel, political journey with men who have abused*. Lyme Regis, Dorset: Russell House Publishing.

²⁰⁹ Moran, D. (2019), *ibid*, p. 78

²¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 77

For example, indicators such as:

- Identifies and critiques broad societal or specific cultural/community-based patriarchal ideas, practices and power relations that support male privilege, gender inequality and gender-based violence; and
- Relates these ideas and practices to his own beliefs about men, masculinities, women and relationships between men and women

are examples of how Duluth-influenced approaches could be represented by the element. Indicators such as these focus on the perpetrator's awareness of how he uses patriarchal ideas and practices from his cultural context to support his views on women and gender. Whereas an indicator such as:

- Is able to identify, monitor and challenge unhelpful thinking and beliefs

would be more suited to a CBT approach.

The specific wording of this element focuses on the quality of the perpetrator's focus on, and engagement and 'struggle' with, these beliefs, rather than on the actual transformation or change of the beliefs themselves. This is just one of the many, many choices that developers of the framework will face in the wording of the elements. The CIJ and SFV have tentatively adopted this approach with this particular element due to the length of time that it can take for program participants to actually change their beliefs. In the interim, proximal indicators (as distinct from outcome indicators) could point to evidence concerning the degree to which the user of violence is open to identifying and critiquing his beliefs, and to which he actively engages in a reflection process.

Understanding of impacts: Identifies and understands the impacts of violent and controlling behaviours on current/former intimate partners.

This is potentially a wide-spanning element. As the following analysis by Mandel exemplifies in what he terms *claiming the harm*, this element could potentially incorporate a wide range of indicators, and/or cross-over or intersect with several other elements:

FF *"Claiming the harm" refers to the perpetrators' willingness and ability to identify how his behaviors have negatively changed the lives of others and himself... It is possible for perpetrators to admit to behaviors but deny that they are harmful. To successfully change, the perpetrator needs to reflect on the consequences of his behavior and listen to what his family members want to tell him about how they have been hurt. Professionals interested in promoting real change also need to listen to family members' voices about how they have been harmed. Defining real change related to patterns of coercive control needs to be tied to an understanding of how the perpetrators' behaviors have undercut the day to day functioning of their partner and children.*

"Claiming the harm" also captures another key element of the process of change: how important it is for the perpetrator to own the problem including identifying the decisions and choices associated with the abuse. "Claiming the harm" means moving away from excuses and blame directed at others for the perpetrator's own choices.

Where perpetrators have caused significant damage to people and relationships, it may take weeks, months or years for him to understand the depth of the pain he has caused fully, and even more time to fully change the behaviors associated with that knowledge. When trust has been destroyed, it may never come back. If a

*perpetrator expects others to stay in a relationship or give up anger because he has admitted to his behaviors or has acknowledged their pain, this becomes another form of control... The perpetrator needs to approach the change process with the humility [that] comes with knowing that it is a long term process, that the past cannot be changed, his family members cannot be coerced to forgive or forget, and the only thing that he can control is he how chooses to act now and in the future.*²¹¹

Of course, some of the indicators inferred above might be better placed in other elements. Nevertheless, this description shows the detail required to map and cross-reference indicators with respect to wide-spanning elements such as these. This process is made difficult by the high levels of interconnectedness between the elements. While interconnected and interdependent, however, these different elements still have a sufficient level of uniqueness to make it fraught to combine and collapse them into a much smaller number without losing a substantial amount of nuance and specificity.

As highlighted in the next section of this chapter, the CIJ and SFV propose that indicators relating specifically to change-focused program participants who are fathers and who have a co-parenting role (of some sorts) be embedded within the core elements of the framework, rather than taking the form of a supplementary set. Obviously, these indicators would not be relevant for program participants who are not fathers. This element is one of those that would feature a strong focus on a perpetrator's awareness and understanding of the impacts of his behaviour on his children.

These child-focused indicators could in themselves potentially cover a wide range of issues. Careful attention would need to be paid to prioritising indicators that represent achievable incremental changes within the context of standard MBCP provision. For example, a standard MBCP is unlikely to make much ground in working towards program participants becoming significantly more child-centred in their parenting practices. Rather, a FDV-informed specialist responsible fathering program such as Caring Dads is often required to produce outcomes such as these. Indeed, specialist FDV-informed fathering programs would require their own separate set of elements and indicators distinct from (though overlapping with) the core set of elements and indicators for standard change-focused programs.

In this respect, an example of a child-focused indicator that could fall under an *understanding of impacts* element as part of the core set could be:

- Identifies and understands the impacts of violent and controlling behaviours on each affected child and young person, and on family functioning as a whole.

Another priority indicator that focuses on an issue central (or that should be central) to standard change-focused program work could be:

- Understands the importance, to his children, of the relationship between the non-perpetrating parent and their children, and the impact of his behaviour on this relationship.

Of course, the mere fact of showing signs of this understanding is not in itself sufficient. Some perpetrators are well aware of these impacts and engage in intentional behaviour to produce them. Indicators such as these would need to connect to related indicators underneath other elements that focus on proximal signposts of what the perpetrator does as a result of this understanding.

²¹¹ Mandel, D. (2020), *ibid*, pp. 4-5

The presence of negative indicators in this respect would carry significant weight. For example, if a user of violence continues to pursue tactics through the family law jurisdiction that impacts negatively on his (ex)partner's access to their children, this would make observations in the group-work setting of him understanding the importance of the mother-child bond even more alarming. Understanding the importance of this relationship, and choosing to continue to sabotage it, is in some ways worse than not understanding the importance of the relationship in the first place.

Accepting personal consequences: Accepts personal consequences arising from use of family and domestic violence.

This element could contain indicators that adopt a particularly broad concept of what is meant by 'consequences'. One or more indicators could focus on the extent to which the perpetrator accepts the responses of police, courts and other justice system agents in relation to his use of FDV – consequences that have been imposed on him. Other indicators, however, could focus on the extent to which he accepts personal consequences such as the end of his relationship, or reduced access to his children.

The acceptance of personal consequences can also include an understanding of how he might need to make some changes to behaviours that he would never have had to make had he not used violent and controlling behaviour. For example, to work towards his family members having more space for action in their lives, and for his partner to have anything near equality of decision-making power in the relationship, the perpetrator might need to 'step back' in ways that he would never have needed to if some degree of equality was present from the start. He might need to 'hold back' on particular behaviours that are not inherently violent or abusive, but which nevertheless have a negative impact on family members due to the cumulative effects of his use of violence (for example, he might need to adjust how he parents if one or more of his children are traumatised by his use of violence).

An element such as this sets a reasonably high bar in terms of the behaviour change process. Accepting justice system actions and understanding the need for, let alone accepting, personal consequences such as the examples provided above is unlikely to arise during the early stages of a perpetrator's participation in a program.

This type of element also raises the complexities of how to design elements and indicators that are based on the ways that perpetrators can *demonstrate an understanding*. In one model used in student education contexts, understanding is demonstrated through a Six Facet process involving: explanation, interpretation, application, perspective-taking, empathy and the development of self-knowledge in relation to the issue.²¹² Each of these facets involve a progressively deeper level of understanding. This is because an understanding demonstrated only via explanation is potentially much more superficial than one that involves the student interpreting his understanding to their life and their surroundings and applying the understanding in real life situations.

This highlights the wide-spanning nature through which Mandel defines "claiming the harm" as described previously in this chapter. Mandel's focus on this element spans many of the facets involved in demonstrating an understanding, beyond explaining and even interpreting.

In relation to the *Accepting personal consequences* element, an example of a deeper demonstration of understanding associated with this element would be a perpetrator who shows commitment to making changes to his behaviour without expectation of how others will respond (for example,

²¹² See <https://thepeakperformancecenter.com/educational-learning/thinking/blooms-taxonomy/learning-taxonomies/six-facets-understanding/> and Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

without expectation of praise, or that his partner will ever be able to trust him again). Another example would be a perpetrator who exerts no pressure on a separated partner to return to him.

The multi-faceted nature of what is required to prove that a user of violence has demonstrated an understanding strikes at the core of the nuance involved in interpreting evidence derived solely from observations of him in the group-work process. The tool instructions and practice guidance associated with the framework tools will be critical in this sense. In relation to indicators that focus on an area of understanding, practitioners using the tool will need to be supported to search for evidence of a user of violence demonstrating the understanding that goes beyond explaining.

These instructions and guidance would also need to assist practitioners to identify behaviours or negative indicators that seem to contradict, at a deeper level of understanding, more superficial evidence of the perpetrator's understanding. The example highlighted previously of a user of violence continuing to pursue his former partner through the family law jurisdiction is a case in point. In other words, his demonstration of the understanding at the level of explaining (and even interpreting) counts for little if he fails to be guided by the perspectives of, and empathy for, those affected by his use of violence, and engages in action that belies the understanding.

Understanding victim-survivor actions: Understands the decisions, actions and responses by intimate partners and family members in the light of the impacts of experiencing FDV, including victim-survivor resistance to violence and coercive control.

This element has a significant degree of overlap with the *Accepting personal consequences* and *Understanding impacts* elements; possibly too much overlap to be a separate element distinct from these two, rather than as an indicator(s) that is featured in both. Again, the mapping of elements and indicators would be a highly complex process, given the degree of overlap and interdependence as well as distinctive uniqueness amongst them.

Perpetrators often have very strong victim stance and other narratives regarding the ways in which they perceive they have been 'wronged' by their (ex)partner. Developing different perspectives on the victim-survivor's behaviour, and coming from a space of understanding their actions in the light of his patterns of behaviours and the impacts of these patterns, is a central part of a behaviour change journey. To become safer men for family members to be around, many perpetrators need to make profound changes in how they interpret their (ex)partner's behaviour.

Accountability: Demonstrates accountability in relation to the harm caused by the use of violent and controlling behaviour, such as through taking sensitive action to, where possible, repair some of this harm.

This element strikes at the heart of conceptualising perpetrator accountability in terms of taking responsible and reparative actions in relation to the harm caused to each adult and child victim-survivor impacted by the perpetrator's actions, and to family functioning as a whole. The focus in this element is on *demonstrating* accountability, on the actions taken by the user of violence in this respect. These include actions to attempt to repair some of the harm caused to children; to the bond between the children and the other parent; and to the harm caused to the other parent's parenting capacity.

This element also brings into focus what is meant by an apology, and how issuing an apology is often not an indicator of demonstrating accountability:

FF *Apologies are often offered without any associated real accounting of behaviors, e.g., "I'm sorry for things I did that might have hurt you" or any real*

efforts at change. Apologies can also be offered as an attempt to manipulate someone into dropping their anger or coming back to a relationship. The value of apologies needs to be defined by the person who is on the receiving end, not the person making the apology. It also cannot be disconnected from broader change efforts. It can be useful to compare the statements “I was wrong for the way I acted towards you” versus “I’m sorry for how I acted.” “I’m sorry” can carry a lot more wiggle room around responsibility and ownership of the behavior and its impact. “I was wrong” can be a much more powerful and impactful statement with less room for excuses, justifications and blame. It also can be useful to understand that someone who is “Claiming the Harm” will ask their survivors, “I want to hear from you how what I did hurt you” and offer to do what the survivor needs to help repair the damage.²¹³

Demonstrating accountability to the harm caused could rightly be considered a behaviour change outcome, rather than a proximal indicator of a user of violence stepping into an area of a behaviour change process. It often takes many months of intervention, if not longer, for a user of violence to begin to demonstrate accountability in relation to the specific harm he has caused. Again, it is worth quoting Mandel at length for some insights into what is involved here:

FF *“Making real change” related to coercive control means that the perpetrator changes his behavior in a way that increases the safety, self-determination and satisfaction or quality of life of his partner and their children. These changes must be defined from the perspective of the family members he has harmed. The victims of the perpetrator have the right to decide what his changes mean to them, what changes are significant and meaningful, and what those changes mean for their relationship with the perpetrator. It is up to the adult and child survivors to define what, if any, kind of relationship they want with the perpetrator.*

Domestic violence perpetrators’ behaviors impact each person within a family differently. His abusive behaviors changed the day-to-day life of his family across numerous domains including physical and emotional safety and daily activities like school, work and play. The family’s ecology may also have changed as a result of his abuse including employment, relationships to family and friends, access to education and housing. Each person who has been impacted by the perpetrator will have their own needs and desires related to his behavior.

... Real change means survivors have more autonomy and choices, resulting in them spending less time worrying about what the perpetrator will do. The household environment is more stable and nurturing for the children. For example, when a perpetrator engages in real change, a survivor can drop the children off with him for a visit without worrying about their safety and well-being. Or a child’s bad report card can be shared with the perpetrator without the survivor being worried about being attacked and blamed for the child’s poor performance. She can speak her mind about issues and associate with whomever she chooses, whether it’s friends, families or a new partner, without fear of punishment or abusive consequences. Her vulnerabilities, like mental health issues, are not used against her.

... “Making real change” also often involves accepting the limits of the perpetrator’s ability to repair hurt. The perpetrator needs to approach the change

²¹³ Mandel, D. (2020), *ibid*, pp. 4-5

*process with the humility [that] comes with knowing that it is a long term process...*²¹⁴

Sexual respect: Understands and is committed to the sexual autonomy of intimate partners.

The CIJ and SFV do not have a view on whether to give the issue of sexualised violence an element to itself, or to weave it through as indicators under relevant other elements. We strongly believe, however, that signposts relating specifically to a perpetrator stepping into a process of changing patterns of sexualised violence or sexual coercion towards behaviours of sexual respect are essential to include and to make prominent in the framework.

An element and associated indicators dedicated specifically to sexual respect is likely to have a strong sense of being related to outcomes, rather than as signposts of the extent to which the user of violence is stepping into a process that will produce these outcomes. Determining reliable and meaningful early/proximal signpost indicators might be difficult in this context.

Felt, active empathy: Listens, understands and cares about the experiences, perspectives and uniqueness/individuality of intimate partners and each family member.

This element focuses on both the cognitive and emotional aspects of empathy for those who have been affected by his use of violence beyond his cognitive understanding of their experiences, perspectives and needs. This element is not so much about the perpetrator's capacity to experience empathy, as this capacity is well-established in the majority of perpetrators. Rather, it focuses on the *active* display of empathy in relation to victim-survivors and of appropriate responses in the light of that empathy.

As outlined later in this chapter, the CIJ and SFV decided not to have a separate set of elements related to children's experiences and needs but, rather, to thread these through relevant elements as indicators. As such, at least one or two of the indicators underneath this element should adopt a specific focus on empathy for children.

Potentially, this element could also include an indicator focusing not only on empathy for the perpetrator's family members affected by his use of violence, but also a 'broader' empathy (at least in terms of cognitive empathy) related to the impacts on women and children more generally as a result of society-wide gender-based privilege.

Safety and accountability planning: Demonstrates active ownership of and commitment towards enacting a personalised Safety and Accountability Plan.

Safety and accountability planning refers to individualised processes whereby a user of violence is supported, over the course of an intervention, to progressively develop and strengthen a personalised plan for working towards primary, secondary and tertiary desistance goals.²¹⁵ Safety and accountability planning is a more involved process than what has traditionally been termed 'exit planning', in that it is a scaffolded process that begins early in the perpetrator's participation in the program, and is progressively built upon and consolidated at various points later in the program, including during the exit phase. A perpetrator's active involvement in the development of his plan –

²¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 5-6

²¹⁵ For further information, see pp. 54-59 of Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. J. (2019). *Evaluation readiness, program quality and outcomes in men's behaviour change programs* (Research report, 01/2019). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

as distinct from a passive, non-committal approach – can be an important signpost of how likely it is that he will be taking an active approach towards continuing a behaviour change journey after he leaves the program, or at least towards minimising the likelihood of relapse.

Lifestyle and habits: Demonstrates a commitment to lifestyle, life habits, behavioural choices and connections/networks that help build and maintain safety for current and/or future family members.

This element would be more or less applicable to each user of violence, depending on the extent to which issues such as substance use, mental health issues and other lifestyle issues (for example, problem gambling) are associated with the nature and severity of risk he poses to family members. As such, this element would include one or more indicators related to each of these common issues related to the behavioural patterns of perpetrators.

As mentioned earlier, however, the CIJ and SFV propose that a supplementary set of elements and indicators could be created for those perpetrators experiencing high levels of complex needs that significantly impact upon their ability to participate in a change-focused program. This supplementary set of elements and indicators would be created specifically for short- and long-term specialist men's FDV case management with these perpetrators.

This element would also include one or more indicators related to the actions that the user of violence takes (or does not take) in relation to his social and support networks to strengthen his connections with other networks and people of influence that will help him to keep on track in his journey of behaviour change. A program participant could show evidence of these types of indicators, for example, through the active use of tools such as the Choose to Change toolkit.²¹⁶

Equality and respect: Demonstrates behaviours, attitudes and beliefs congruent with equality and respect in personal relationships.

This element would represent as much, if not more, of an outcome than a proximal indicator.

Furthermore, it would be difficult to determine reliable evidence of this outside of reports arising through partner contact: The fact that a user of violence can identify examples of respectful behaviour does not automatically mean that he actually engages in that behaviour.

The CIJ and SFV believe, however, that it could be important for the framework to incorporate an element such as this directly focusing on positive behaviours. The difficulty might come in devising proximal indicators that point to the user of violence showing the potential to adopt these behaviours, rather than indicators that are actual outcome measures in themselves.

Indicators for program participants who are fathers

The impacts of FDV on children, including the cumulative harm caused, are substantial and well documented in the research.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ See <https://safeandtogetherinstitute.com/evidence-resources/free-resources/resources-for-family-friends/#mens>

²¹⁷ For a recent review, see Taylor, A. (2019). *Impact of the experience of domestic and family violence on children – what does the literature have to say?* Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research.

There is also growing evidence that many perpetrators engage in coercive controlling tactics that directly target children in addition to their mother, and that children, like their mothers, attempt to resist violence and coercive control.²¹⁸

While FDV perpetrator programs should not prioritise these impacts over the harm that FDV causes to women, and should see these harms as linked, children's experiences and needs should be assessed and considered in their own right. This means that a focus on these experiences and needs, as well as what this means for perpetrator journeys of behaviour change, should be embedded within core elements, such as those suggested in the previous section. As outlined in that section, elements related to acknowledgement of harm or active, felt empathy, for example, would include indicators sensitive to the impact of the perpetrator's behaviour on child and family functioning.

It is highly important to note, however, that behaviour change outcomes pertaining to FDV perpetrators as fathers and co-parents need to be proportionate to the amount of 'airtime' given to these issues in the context of a change-focused program. Most MBCPs include content and explorations focusing on the impact of FDV behaviour on children and, to a lesser extent, on how the way in which the user of violence relates to the other parent of his children is a crucial parenting choice.

Very few standard MBCPs, however, have space within their curriculum to focus, in sufficient depth, on outcomes associated with fathers becoming more child-focused in their parenting, or with helping fathers to understand how their parenting choices need to take into account their children's experiences of trauma. Generally, only programs that specialise in these issues (such as the 17-session Caring Dads program) can be expected to make much headway with respect to these outcomes. As such, setting proximal indicators related to a perpetrating father becoming a significantly more child-centred parent is likely to be unrealistic in the context of standard MBCPs.

It is important to note, however, that men's participation in MBCP work is often strongly linked (at least in part) to their 'father' identity, and many pathways are engaged with perpetrators because of the impact they are having on children. As such, the development of the tool must consider ways to report the 'signposts' around the impact on children (in addition to women), in ways that are proportionate to the capacity of the programs to deliver change.

Programs that focus specifically on responsible, restorative, reparative and child-centred fathering in the context of FDV perpetration – such as Caring Dads – might therefore require their own specific set of elements and indicators related to, but separate from, the set of core elements and indicators presented earlier in this chapter.

It is also important to emphasise that work with fathers addressing the harm they cause to child and family functioning through their use of FDV requires coordinated family focused approaches of which an MBCP, Caring Dads or other change-focused intervention is only one part.²¹⁹ Many of these fathers have ongoing contact with children either through the context of intact families or through a post-separation co-parenting role. As such, the involvement of – and collaboration between – child

²¹⁸ Callaghan, J., Alexander, J., Sixsmith, J., & Fellin L. (2018). Beyond "witnessing": Children's experiences of coercive control in domestic violence and abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 33(1), 1551-1581; Haselschwerdt, M., Hlavaty, K., Carlson, C., Schneider, M., Maddox, L., & Skipper, M. (2019). Heterogeneity within domestic violence exposure: Young adults' retrospective experiences. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 34, 1512-1538; Katz, E. (2016). Beyond the physical incident model: How children living with domestic violence are harmed by and resist regimes of coercive control. *Child Abuse Review*, 25, 46-59; Øverlien, C. (2013). The children of patriarchal terrorism. *Journal of Family Violence*, 28, 277-287.

²¹⁹ Gatfield, E., O'Leary, P., & Meyer, S. (2021). A multitheoretical perspective for addressing domestic and family violence: Supporting fathers to parent without har. *Journal of Social Work*, online first.

protection, intensive family support, specialist FDV and other services is required to monitor the man's behaviour in relation to proximal indicators of whether and the extent to which he is, or is not, stepping into a journey towards becoming a safer parent and co-parent.

Relevant research when considering indicators for FDV perpetrators who are fathers

The final sub-section of this chapter will briefly highlight some of the relevant literature and research available to assist in the development of indicators relating specifically to FDV perpetrators who are fathers and co-parents.

Salient research by Lamb in Victoria used 1-1 interviews and focus groups with children and young people aged nine to nineteen to explore their experiences of FDV from their fathers; their thoughts on what their fathers would need to do to be accountable for their behaviour; and what reparation for the damage they have caused might look like.²²⁰ This is rare research exploring the experiences, needs and wishes of children and young people experiencing FDV directly from the children and young people themselves.

The children in this study reported that their fathers:

- were disengaged, critical and emotionally abusive;
- tried to control most aspects of their lives;
- were such a poor role model that many of the children and young people were very fearful of entering into relationships or becoming a parent when they were older, as they were very worried that they would end up being abusive;²²¹
- were highly self-absorbed, putting their own needs first; and
- exposed their children to other men who were unsafe to be around, such as extended family members or friends who caused the children fear.

In a review of the relevant literature, Lamb highlighted:

FF *The evidence available suggests that fathers who use violence predominantly adopt aggressive approaches to parenting and discipline and blame children for provoking their anger while failing to provide an emotionally supportive environment for their children.*²²²

Recent international reviews of studies²²³ found that, as a whole, men who perpetrate FDV generally utilise adverse parenting practices that magnify the impact and cumulative harm caused by their use of FDV. These include:

²²⁰ Lamb, K. (2017). *Seen and heard: embedding the voices of children and young people who have experienced family violence in programs for fathers*. PhD thesis. University of Melbourne.

²²¹ Distressingly, there were instances of children having made firm resolutions never to have children themselves for this reason. This research points to the need for practitioners, policy workers and those with public opinion influence to be careful with messages about the intergenerational cycle of abuse, due to the effects this might have on children's pessimism about the future.

²²² Lamb, K. (2017), *ibid*, p. 37

²²³ Chung, D., Humphreys, C., Campbell, A., Diemer, K., Gallant, D., Spiteri-Staines, A. (2020). *Fathering programs in the context of domestic and family violence*. CFCA Paper 56. Child Family Community Australia. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies; Scott, K. (2021). *Fathering in the context of domestic violence and abuse*. In J. Devaney, C. Bradbury-Jones, R. Macy, C. Øverlien, & S. Holt (Eds). *The Routledge International Handbook of Domestic*

- a pervasive sense of entitlement, possessiveness and ownership regarding their children;
- providing adverse emotional care and lack of involvement in children's everyday lives;
- use of emotional violence;
- use of harsh disciplining;
- developmentally inappropriate expectations and attributions of their children, expecting them to be able to do things generally not possible and appropriate for children their age;
- significant unpredictability, alternating between terrorising their children and displaying affection and tenderness;
- non-cooperative parenting, through undermining the care of their children, their relationship with their mother, and undermining their mother's parental authority and parental decisions;
- physical neglect, often through gatekeeping and denying health-based services for their children, putting up a façade in public of being a good father, displaying their best parental behaviour in public to generate a reputation of being a 'good Dad'.

A large and growing body of research shows that perpetrators often use FDV tactics to sabotage their partner's or former partner's relationship with their children, and to undermine her felt worth and capacity as a parent.²²⁴ This is a crucial area of assessing risk for children, and of understanding the perpetrator's patterns of coercive control and the way he organises family functioning around his 'needs' and will.

The Victorian practice guide *Assessing children and young people experiencing family violence* states:

FF *Many perpetrators of family violence use tactics involving children, in order to directly or indirectly targeting women in their mothering role. A wide-ranging literature review on women's parenting in the context of family violence found that perpetrators commonly use tactics, such as:*

- *making their child witness the violence or otherwise involving them in the violence, as a means of deliberately adding to women's distress and trauma*
- *attacking women's confidence in their capacity or effectiveness as mothers*
- *undermining women's actual and felt relationships with their children*
- *dominating women's attention and time so that they have little to spend with their children*

Violence and Abuse. London: Routledge; Thompson-Walsh, C., Scott, K., Lishak, V., & Dyson, A. (2021). How domestically violence fathers impact children's social-emotional development: Fathers' psychological functioning, parenting, and coparenting. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 112, online first.

²²⁴ Fish, E., McKenzie, M., & MacDonald, H. (2009). *Bad mothers and invisible fathers: Parenting in the context of domestic violence*. Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria; Heward-Belle, S. (2015). The diverse fathering practices of men who perpetrate domestic violence. *Australian Social Work*, 69(3); Lapierre, S., Cote, I., Lambert, A., Buetti, D., Lavergne, C., Damandt, D., & Couturier, V. (2017). Difficult but close relationships: Perspectives on their relationships with their mothers in the context of domestic violence. *Violence Against Women*, 24(9), 1023-1038.

- *making women physically or psychologically unavailable to parent*
- *harassing women via child contact and financially exhausting them by pursuing repeated family court appearances*
- *repeatedly denigrating women's character and worth as a mother—to her and/or to her child*
- *undermining women's felt and actual parental authority (for example, by constantly overruling them in front of the child)*
- *using the family law and child protection systems against women (for example, by threatening to expose them as 'bad mothers' or to report them to child protection)*

Other research has found that perpetrators of family violence often retaliate against the non-abusive parent for her efforts to protect the child. If, as a consequence, she ceases her protective behaviours over time, the child might come to believe that she no longer cares about them and/or that the violence is their fault.

It is common for perpetrators of family violence to involve children directly in violence, for example, by demanding they monitor and report on their mother's movements or disclose where she is. Sometimes perpetrators of violence encourage children – explicitly or implicitly – to participate in verbal or physical abuse of their mother.

Some fathers target direct abuse at particular children within the family, in order to create alliances against the mother. Other ways of creating divisions within the family include the use of favouritism and manipulation to escalate sibling conflict or familial tensions.

Many of these tactics have deep and longstanding effects on mother-child relationships. They can undermine trust so that the child does not confide in or seek support from their mother. They might result in the child having a distorted view of their mother (for example, as irrational, unloving, incapable or evil). For young children, they might prevent or hinder the establishment of a primary attachment ...²²⁵

Perpetrator tactics can also include sabotaging or gatekeeping the mother's connections with important cultural connections, faith-based networks, community supports, and health-based and social services. As these connections and services can form an important part of a child's developmental ecology, these tactics can have a significant impact on children.

Some perpetrators realise that the use of these tactics can be enhanced by society's double standards when it comes to expectations on mothers and fathers. A mother whose capacity to parent is reduced by the perpetrator's tactics – and who might, as a result, engage in some neglectful parenting practices, not attend parent-teacher interviews nor become involved in their children's school – is likely to be seen as an inadequate mother, with little or no attention paid to the father's parenting practices or to how he is undermining her parenting. He might even proactively use, or threaten to use, the child protection system to put further pressure and judgement on her.

²²⁵ Victorian Department of Human Services (2013). *Assessing children and young people experiencing family violence: A practice guide for family violence practitioners*. Melbourne: Victorian Government. pp. 15-16

Of relevance here is recent qualitative research²²⁶ with approximately 100 fathers across three Australian states, who were all current or recent participants in FDV perpetrator programs. This study found that, on average, these fathers rated themselves as reasonably effective parents, and rated that they cooperate well with the mother of their children. Follow-up qualitative research with a sample of ten of these fathers found that they saw themselves as affectionate to their children; involved with their children's lives; good communicators with their children; and that their children understood them. These findings corroborate widespread practitioner-based observations that FDV perpetrator program participants frequently do not understand the effects of their violent and controlling behaviour on their child and believe themselves to be good fathers.

FF ... qualitative studies (Bancroft, Silverman, & Ritchie, 2012; Harne, 2011) with fathers who use violence suggests that they often display a lack of awareness of the importance of prioritizing their child's needs or any understanding of the child's point of view. Research also suggests that fathers who use violence often blame very young children as an excuse for their abusive behaviour, because they were detracting from their own needs (Harne, 2011).²²⁷

Very little research exists focusing on children's views of how they would like their violent father to change. Lamb's qualitative research referred to above highlighted that the sixteen children and young people in the study found it hard to take seriously the possibility that their father could change. When patiently pressed to consider what positive change would look like, however, three themes emerged, being that they wanted their father to:

- Acknowledge the past, see the harm that they have done, and accept consequences to their actions. While some of their children expressed that these consequences should be imprisonment, others focused on the need for their father to understand and accept that they would act 'weirdly' around him, not because they were misbehaving, but because of his use of violence.
- Do much more than offer an apology, and commit to change by working on his behaviour through a FDV perpetrator program, including on their attitudes and behaviour towards women and children.
- Slowly rebuild trust in the relationship through:
 - numerous, small, daily practices of involvement with them, such as becoming more involved with their school;
 - treating their mother much better, and realising that every seemingly 'small' tactic of coercive control – such as sending a critical text – can understandably throw their mother out emotionally to such an extent that it reduces her capacity to parent for that day, thereby having a direct impact on them;
 - giving them space for their opinions rather than attempting to control their beliefs.

²²⁶ Diemer, K. & Bornemisza, A. (2017). *Listening to program facilitators and men who attend programs: men's use of violence and impact on children*. Presentation at Fathering Challenges Final Stakeholder Workshop, 16/11/2017.

²²⁷ Lamb, K. (2017), *ibid*, pp. 33-34

8. Concluding thoughts

This final chapter of the paper:

- points to some considerations in the use of a framework of proximal or signpost indicators;
- comments on the development of a framework in relation to First Nations contexts; and
- briefly suggests future steps in the framework's development.

Considerations in the use of a framework

Earlier chapters in this paper have highlighted a number of issues in the use of a framework of signpost indicators. This section will not repeat these but will extend previous discussion in relation to three considerations.

Understanding the limits of what can be concluded from the indicators

As outlined earlier, it is more straightforward to interpret ratings from a signposts tool when a user of violence is clearly not demonstrating the proximal indicators, than when he appears to be. Although the framework would provide detailed practice guidance to assist practitioners to identify when a user of violence is 'faking' demonstration of an indicator(s) for the purposes of managing impressions, the question of when to trust positive observations is a perennial challenge in the field.

It is therefore crucial that practitioners do not automatically assume that a user of violence who appears to demonstrate a high proportion of the signposts is on a productive path that will automatically lead to sustained behaviour change. Demonstrating signs of being on a journey towards change is not the same as demonstrating actual change, nor that the change is sustainable.

At the same time, the CIJ and SFV do not suggest that program providers shy away from reporting anything positive about a user of violence who is demonstrating a significant proportion of the signposts. As highlighted earlier, one of the main purposes of the framework would be to assist mandated referrers in their decision-making regarding their involvement in a family or case, such as whether to relax conditions limiting the perpetrator's access to children who have been affected by his use of FDV, or alternatively, to strengthen (or apply to a Children's Court to strengthen) these conditions. If program providers exercise such a degree of caution that nothing positive about a perpetrator's engagement in a change process is ever reported, the specialist perpetrator intervention field's ability to be of use in this respect will be highly constrained.

The CIJ and SFV acknowledge that providing positive feedback about a user of violence, within the limits and with the necessary degree of tentativeness as indicated above, can raise anxiety for program providers. Examples of program completers who appear to have taken genuine and concerted steps towards changing their behaviour, but who are identified at a later point as having not actually done so to any sustainable degree, are replete throughout the field.

Refusing to provide feedback due to the accompanying anxiety – and genuine risk that the perpetrator’s demonstration of indicators inaccurately predicts his actual behaviours – could nonetheless be seen as abandoning a responsibility to assist partner agencies within an integrated response to make these types of decisions with the benefit of input from a specialist lens.

Of critical note here is the need for referrers to understand the limits to the conclusions which can be drawn from positive feedback. Unfortunately, caseload and other pressures impacting referrers, either to limit the extent of their involvement with FDV perpetrators, or to take a highly administrative or transactional approach to such involvement, can easily lead them to conclude more from what is intended in feedback. Whereas a program provider might be at pains to communicate to a referrer, for example:

“... X therefore appears to be making concerted attempts to take responsibility for his behaviour and to work towards changes in his behaviour that would enable him to be a safer father for his children... We recommend that conditions restricting his access to [insert children’s names] be relaxed... and that [name of child protection authority] and [name of MBCP provider] continue to monitor the case and re-assess over the following three months whether X makes the required changes to his behaviour under conditions where he is living back with his partner and children... During this time, [name of MBCP provider] would conduct weekly individual sessions with X, which he could be asked by [name of child protection authority] to attend...”

The child protection referrer might unfortunately be tempted to read “X has done everything we can ask of him, therefore we will remove the child access conditions and close the case.”

Given that MBCPs and other change-focused program providers frequently work with men during circumstances where their access to and engagement with adult and child victim-survivors is limited by court orders or by other statutory measures, the determination of whether a user of violence has actually changed his behaviour cannot occur until such time that this access resumes (if it indeed resumes, depending on his family’s wishes). Unfortunately, service system involvement with perpetrators often ceases before such resumption in access occurs, given that follow-up and monitoring by the system generally does not occur after the user of violence is reunited with his children, or after a protection order expires and he returns to live with his family.

Undoubtedly, the positive demonstration of signpost indicators upon program completion, during a period in which a perpetrator has had limited or no access to those affected by his use of FDV, will not always translate into significant behaviour change once such access resumes. This is to be expected, due to the incremental and complex nature of behaviour change, and does not represent a failure of MBCPs, nor negate the usefulness of a framework of signpost indicators. Rather, the system has a responsibility to keep perpetrators within view during those times when, predictably, some will return to using FDV.

In this sense, program providers might feel more comfortable reporting the positive signs that a user of violence is demonstrating if the system, as a whole, interprets this feedback correctly. Positive feedback in this context might mean that, depending on his family’s wishes, the timing might be right to test whether the perpetrator’s demonstration of signposts actually translates into behaviour changes. This could occur through enabling less restricted access to his partner and children and monitoring how his behaviour pans out in the ensuing months. Positive feedback does not mean, however, that the perpetrator has ‘changed’ and that the system can take its eyes off him.

On the flipside, while interpretations are more straightforward where a user of violence demonstrates very few, if any, signposts of stepping into a behaviour change journey, even here there can be limits to what can be concluded. This need not automatically mean that the user of violence will *never* enter into a genuine change process, even if at the current time he is determined just to turn up to the program sessions in order to ‘do his time’.

Contextualising use of the tools in each situation

The above discussion regarding the nature and limits of the conclusions that can be drawn from the use of the tool raises another important theme in its use – contextualising the interpretation of tool results in each situation.

As outlined in Chapter Six, identical results in relation to two perpetrators could be interpreted very differently if, for example, one of the perpetrators has only just commenced participation in the change-focused program, whereas the other has almost completed it. Clearly, the implications of how a user of violence has ‘scored’ on a framework tool would depend on the point he is at in the program during the administration of the tool.

In similar fashion, the interpretation of results stemming from the tool would also need to be contextualised by characteristics of the perpetrator’s participation in any prior change-focused programs that he started or completed. This could be assessed, for example, in terms of the pattern of proximal indicators he demonstrated, or did not demonstrate, associated with his participation in the prior program, as well as how this pattern related to his subsequent behaviour once he completed that program.

Knowing the relationship between the demonstration of particular indicators and subsequent behaviour at a previous point can potentially assist in drawing implications when the tool is being administered in the program in which he is currently participating. Furthermore, knowing what indicators he did and did not demonstrate during a previous intervention can assist in case planning with respect to the current intervention, such as whether he is becoming stuck at similar or different points.

As outlined previously, despite the best efforts of program providers to address issues that might make a user of violence less responsive to their program, participants do not enter into a program on a level playing field. The presence or absence of white, class, cis-gender, able-bodied, educational and other forms of privilege can significantly impact upon a perpetrator’s ability to participate in a change-focused program, and consequently their ability to demonstrate elements and indicators. An intersectionality lens would be crucial to assist practitioners to use the framework and associated tools in ways that are sensitive to these significant power imbalances.

An intersectionality lens or overlay to the framework would include a strong focus on scaffolding practitioner reflections on how their own privilege might impact upon their ability to identify and accurately interpret indicators with respect to perpetrators who lack particular forms of privilege. Certainly, some indicators are likely to be more universal than others, with the signs of their absence or demonstration somewhat similar across various cohorts of perpetrators. Nevertheless, the ‘hidden’ assumptions that practitioners can make based on their own location across various sites of relational power can impact upon their use of the tools with some perpetrator cohorts.

Adding to, rather than, displacing a focus on risk and perpetrator patterns

A third consideration is the inadvertent potential of the use of framework tools to focus attention on perpetrator behaviour change at the expense of other outcomes arising through MBCPs and specialist perpetrator interventions.

There is an existing tendency within the MBCP field – and by stakeholders who interface with MBCPs – to centralise and prioritise those components of the program that focus directly on working with perpetrators to change their behaviour. In doing so, other (inter-connected) components that focus on the assessment and management of risk, perpetrator monitoring, and victim-survivor contact and support can be de-prioritised or considered of secondary importance.²²⁸ The development and use of a framework and tools focusing on proximal indicators of the behaviour change process might only add to this imbalance.

The likelihood of this inadvertent negative consequence can be minimised through the way in which program providers interpret the results of the tool, as well as how results are reported to referrers. Of relevance here is the earlier discussion in this paper on the difference between reporting back to referrers on the basis of risk, as distinct from the man's 'progress'.²²⁹ Accordingly, analyses drawn from the results of the tool should in general, if not always, be linked to what they say about the risk that the user of violence poses to victim-survivors, as well as how this current risk landscape differs from that of an earlier point (such as when the perpetrator commenced participation in the program).

In this context, analyses of results stemming from the use of the tool can be used – and combined with other sources of information – to answer questions such as:

“To what extent does the perpetrator pose a risk of continuing to use FDV – and of continuing to use particular FDV tactics – despite current service system responses designed to limit his opportunity and inclination to use violence?”

“What is the likelihood that the perpetrator will return to using FDV once those service system responses are relaxed or removed?”

“To what extent is this man a high-risk, high-harm perpetrator, who is likely to pose a risk to future victim-survivors in future family configurations, and who therefore needs to be prioritised in terms of monitoring by the perpetrator intervention system?”

²²⁸ Chung, D., Anderson, S., Green, D., & Vlasis, R. (2020). *Prioritising women's safety in Australian perpetrator interventions: The purpose and practices of partner contact* (Research report, 08/2020). Sydney: ANROWS; Vlasis, R. (2014). *Ten challenges and opportunities for domestic violence perpetrator program work*. Melbourne: No to Violence Male Family Violence Prevention Association.

²²⁹ Shephard-Bayly, D. (2010). Working with men who use violence: the problem of reporting 'progress'. *Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse Newsletter*, 39, 6-8.

Locating the framework through an intersectionality lens

It is critical that participating agencies, practitioners and policy workers who contribute towards the development of the framework locate themselves in terms of their degree of privilege, or lack thereof, across relevant sites of power and marginalisation. Of course, privilege can create multiple blind spots that can render the framework more useful with white hetero-cis clients than in other contexts.

Specialised responses led by First Nations, refugee and multicultural, and LGBTIQ+ organisations and services have accelerated over the past decade towards people who are causing FDV harm in their communities. To a greater or lesser extent, some space for these organisations and community representatives to exert some influence in FDV policy and practice development has opened, though by no means to the extent of a 'level playing field'. While a framework of signpost indicators developed by predominantly white, hetero-cis agencies and professionals might have some use beyond this specific context, the space to determine what these signposts might be for these communities, and how a corresponding framework could be utilised, must not be colonised.

Proximal indicators in an Indigenous program context

The three authors of this paper are non-Indigenous. While all have experience working alongside Aboriginal practice leaders and advocates, and are learning greatly about ways to improve our own advocacy, practice leadership and advocacy as a result, we obviously cannot write about what will work best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Aboriginal family violence programs and initiatives need to be developed and controlled by Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal community controlled organisations, responding to local Indigenous understanding of what is required to reduce family violence in particular communities.²³⁰ Furthermore, the decolonisation of Indigenous family violence policy and practice requires those organisations with white privilege – such as the SFV and CIJ – to avoid applying their understandings of, and assumptions about, FDV and the experiences of victim-survivors as policy or practice templates that make the diverse worldviews and experiences of Indigenous nations invisible.

FF *Indigenous research methods set out from Indigenous people's lived experiences, rather than from those frames of knowledge about Indigenous people gleaned from non-Indigenous research. This necessitates acknowledging the heterogeneity of Aboriginal worldviews, "informed by the specific country that they are from as well as their individual and collective experiences" (Kwaymullina, Kwaymullina, & Butterly, 2013)²³¹*

... Indigenous communities and their aspirations do not always figure in how policy on the ground is enacted. There is often a significant disconnect between the family and domestic violence policy "space" and Indigenous "place"; the two do not always overlap. Our methodology, therefore, was developed not with the

²³⁰ Blagg, H., Williams, E., Cummings, E., Hovane, V., Torres, M., & Woodley, K. N. (2018). *Innovative models in addressing violence against Indigenous women: Final report* (ANROWS Horizons, 01/2018). Sydney: ANROWS; Closing the Gap Clearinghouse (AIHW & AIFS) 2016. *Family violence prevention programs in Indigenous communities*. Resource sheet no. 37. Produced by the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: AIHW & Melbourne: AIFS; Hovane, V. (2015). Our stories to tell: Aboriginal perspectives on domestic and family violence. *ANROWS Footprints*, 1, 13-17; Langton, M., Smith, K., Eastman, T., O'Neill, L., Cheesman, E., & Rose, M. (2020). *Family violence policies, legislation and services: Improving access and suitability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men* (Research report, 26/2020). Sydney: ANROWS.

²³¹ Blagg, H. et al. (2018), *ibid*, p. 19

*intention of evaluating how mainstream policies work, or not, on the ground in order to fine-tune them, but by questioning the extent to which the very notion of “the ground” itself is contested between mainstream and Indigenous agency. From a mainstream domestic violence perspective, “the ground” is understood largely as a dysfunctional space, a space of risk assessment and danger, and the locus for various targeted “interventions” against a discrete problem defined as “domestic violence”. Indigenous people may not recognise this “space” at all, or may hold a more nuanced and variegated appreciation of it as a habitus of belonging, strength, and resilience as well as risk, chaos, and conflict.*²³²

Aboriginal family violence programs focus on a set of outcomes that overlap with, but are not identical to, those established for ‘mainstream’ programs. Unlike the more siloed nature of MBCPs and other formal service system perpetrator intervention programs, Aboriginal family violence programs are not separated out into the distinct categories of tertiary response or primary prevention that – in the mainstream – often involve different and quite distinct funding sources and streams, implementing organisations and workforces. Community collaboration and engagement is an essential part of any Aboriginal program that focuses on a ‘tertiary response’. Furthermore, Aboriginal family violence programs generally involve a substantial component on healing, or might work in collaboration with (other) Aboriginal community controlled organisations, that focus on healing intergenerational trauma due to dislocation and dispossession from country and the Stolen Generations, as a precursor to or concurrent with MBCP components.²³³

Several of these programs involve a strong focus on program participants’ connection with culture, country and their place in community as Indigenous men within the spiritual worldviews of their communities and nations. While individual notions of ‘the man you want to be’ can be a means of helping mainstream MBCP program participants to explore the disjuncture between their violent behaviour and who and how they would like to be as men and as fathers, motivation in the context of Aboriginal community-led programs can arise through program participants reconnecting with how their behaviour violates who they are as Indigenous people in relation to country and their roles and responsibilities in community. Indeed, some Indigenous programs operate within a strong community accountability context to this extent, where the involvement of Elders or the wider community is essential towards making the program work.

The flexible use of case management components and program outreach is an important part of many of these programs. Aboriginal family violence perpetrator programs are leading the way in Australia in wrapping violence-focused program activities within a broader context of working with men to take more responsibility for their lives in general. Substance abuse, dislocation and individual and systemic traumas hamper many Aboriginal men’s abilities to participate in a change-focused program and focus on their violent behaviour. In this context, preparation for men to enter into the ‘formal’ group-work components of the program can be lengthy in some circumstances, as is the degree of follow-up contact with men after they have completed group-work. Unlike many mainstream programs, many community-led program providers see themselves as responsible for providing opportunities to journey with program participants over the length of time it takes towards

²³² *ibid*, p. 21

²³³ Gallant, D., Andrews, S., Humphreys, C., Diemer, K., Ellis, D., Burton, J., Harrison, W., Briggs, R., Black, C., Bamblett, A., Torres-Carne, S. & McIvor, R. (2017). Aboriginal men’s programs tackling family violence: A scoping review. *The Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, 20(2), 48-68.

participants being able to adopt new ways of being, heal, and reconnect with family and community as non-violent men.²³⁴

In this context, a framework and accompanying tool(s) of proximal indicators and signposts, developed by non-Indigenous practice leaders and policy analysts, is unlikely to be fit-for-purpose for First Nations contexts. Undoubtedly, some of the elements and indicators that form part of such a framework will be more or less relevant for Aboriginal family violence programs. It is unlikely, however, that a mainstream framework will be able to be 'moulded' or adapted for use in Aboriginal contexts. Rather, it could be used to inform some of the starting points for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to determine what works best for them in terms of signposts of a behaviour change and healing process.

Where to from here

This paper is offered as a starting point only – to help provide impetus towards the development of a framework of proximal or signpost indicators of a behaviour change process. Clearly, the development of the framework requires active participation from across the FDV perpetrator intervention field as a whole.

Discussions across the field could culminate in a range of decisions concerning the structure and features of a potential framework, and then in the drafting of the framework elements and indicators that comprise the framework tools. These decisions could then inform the initial drafting of the tool(s) and at least an initial layer of tool instructions.

Pilot testing of the tool(s) could then be critical to identify ways in which the tool – including the tool items and tool instructions – need to be modified and strengthened. It is quite likely that two rounds of pilot-testing would be required, to shape up the tool in an iterative process.

Once the tool and tool instructions are 'finalised' through the pilot-testing process, the final two framework layers of practice guidance and contextualisation with respect to issues and considerations of intersectionality could be written.

Finally, as outlined earlier, research that correlates ratings of proximal indicators with actual behaviour change outcomes is rare. Such research is challenging and resource intensive, but the very few studies of this kind that do exist prove that it can be done. Finding the research funds to do so would be an important part of determining the usefulness and validity of the framework tools.

²³⁴ Gallant et al. (2017), *ibid*; Mosby, E., & Thomsen, G. (2014). Gatharr Weyebe Banabe Program: Seeking behaviour change in Indigenous family violence. *Ending Men's Violence Against Women and Children: The No To Violence Journal*, Spring 2014, 7-28.

Appendix A: Existing approaches towards setting proximal indicators

Chapters One to Five of this paper established the rationale and need for the development of a framework of signpost or proximal indicators of a productive behaviour change journey. Appendix A outlines areas of work conducted to date that are relevant to the development of such a framework. These approaches span work conducted in Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand, the United States and Europe.

In the CIJ and SFV's view, none of these existing approaches in themselves are sufficient to act as a framework of proximal indicators for change-focused perpetrator interventions. They each have features worth considering, however, in the development of a framework. As such, they were influential in the delineation of desirable features and considerations of a proximal indicators framework that were outlined in detail in Chapter Six of this paper.

Analysis of men's discourse during group-work sessions


An earlier chapter of this paper outlined approaches towards monitoring perpetrator participation throughout the course of group-based MBCPs via the use by facilitators of a post-session rating tool. While not commonly used, these approaches are based on delineating a small number of aspects of the quality of a man's participation in the session, including his engagement with the content, that are hypothesised to be correlated with later behaviour change outcomes.

A characteristic of these approaches is the small number of indicators involved, and that the same indicators are applied to rate perpetrator participation for each session. The adoption of a large number of indicators can make it impractical for facilitators to apply ratings for each participant immediately after the group session. Certainly, one of the reasons why this approach is not used more often is that, even with only a few indicators, the process is time-intensive given the other issues that facilitators need to discuss during post-session debriefing.

Unfortunately, it appears that next to no studies have been conducted correlating practitioner ratings of this kind with intermediate or longer-term outcomes. In a rare example, one study conducted analyses focusing on a range of referral, perpetrator characteristic and intermediate outcome variables amongst 62 perpetrators sourced across 14 Australian MBCPs (spanning multiple jurisdictions).²³⁵ Two of these variables included singular ratings by program practitioners of the perpetrator's understanding of program content, and his application of program content. Practitioner ratings of perpetrator application of program content, and to a lesser extent of understanding of program content, were significantly associated with (ex)partner ratings of their degree of felt safety assessed through partner contact. While these are promising results concerning the ability of practitioner ratings on proximal indicators to predict intermediate outcomes, the sample size was small and the proximal indicators broad.

Relevant to this approach, a recent ANROWS report into improving the quality of Australian FDV perpetrator interventions notes the promise of a discourse analysis approach towards defining and measuring proximal indicators:

²³⁵ See chapter eight of: Chung, D., Upton-Davis, K., Cordier, R., Campbell, E., Wong, T., Salter, M. ... Bissett, T. (2020). *Improved accountability: The role of perpetrator intervention systems* (Research report, 20/2020). Sydney: ANROWS.

 *Semiatin, Murphy, and Elliott (2013) have reported the findings of one study that appears relevant. In this study, “spontaneous verbalisations” [unscripted and unrehearsed comments by MBCP participants] of a sample of 82 partner violent men receiving community-based treatment, were assessed. The coding focused on the assumption of personal responsibility for abusive acts, confirmation and support of others’ change talk and statements regarding the value of treatment. The findings suggested that men who initiated more pro-therapeutic behaviour during the latter sessions of group treatment engaged in less psychological and physical violence during the 6 months following intervention than men who displayed fewer pro-therapeutic behaviours. Protherapeutic group behaviours also positively correlated with client self-reported motivation to change prior to and during treatment, compliance with cognitive-behavioural homework assignments, and therapist-rated working alliance. These approaches in our view, hold considerable promise both in terms of the conceptual development of proximal outcomes potentially correlated to reductions in the use of violence and in how to assess change.*²³⁶

Three measures were defined for the rating system, outlined as follows:²³⁷

Denial/acknowledgement of behaviour/responsibility: The extent to which a participant’s verbalisations

- a) acknowledged his abusive behaviour;
- b) acknowledged that this behaviour was harmful;
- c) asserted that this behaviour was the result of his own making;
- d) assumed personal responsibility for the behaviour, rather than making external attributions; and
- e) conveyed internal motivations to change his behaviour, rather than focusing on external motivations or pressures.

Client role behaviour: The degree to which the interpersonal behaviour of the participant focused on a change-oriented mindset, focusing on four types of behaviour:

- 1. Positive confrontation - efforts to change another participant's denial, minimisation, other-blame and/or justifications for their use of violence, or to otherwise challenge their avoidance of the need for change.
- 2. Negative confrontation – efforts to change another participant’s acceptance of responsibility and desire to change, such as to suggest that the participant’s use of violence was due to external factors rather than his own choice.
- 3. Positive confirmation – efforts to affirm the verbalisations or approaches of another participant(s) to accept responsibility for their behaviour.
- 4. Negative confirmation – efforts to collude with another participant(s)’ avoidance of responsibility for their violent and controlling behaviour, such as to back-up other’s expressions that their behaviour was due to external forces or that their partner should be the one who needs to change.

²³⁶ Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2019). *Evaluation readiness, program quality and outcomes in men’s behaviour change programs* (Research report, 01/2019). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS, p. 51

²³⁷ Semiatin, J., Murphy, C., & Elliott, J. (2013). Observed behaviour during group treatment for partner-violent men: Acceptance of responsibility and promotion of change. *Psychology of Violence*, 3(2), 126-139.

Group value: Verbalisations focusing on the value of participating in the group/program, and in participating in a change process in general.

Of note, treatment outcomes were measured via victim-survivor reports at baseline, post-treatment and six-month follow up, rather than relying on perpetrator self-reports.²³⁸ Also of note are the specific patterns of timing of the correlation between measures of the proximal indicators and of violent behaviour. Proximal indicator measures (that is, pro-therapeutic behaviours) did not correlate with participant use of psychological and physical violence as measured at the end of treatment. However, pro-therapeutic behaviours measured specifically at the later stages of the program (but not at the early or medium stages) were correlated with significant reductions in psychological and physical violence specifically at six-months follow-up.

These findings have face validity in that most perpetrators at the early and even middle stages of a program are not likely to score high on proximal indicators such as these. As such, the diversity between participants on these measures is likely to be less than at the later stages of a program. These findings also support the argument made earlier in this paper of the time lag between the demonstration of positive signpost behaviours such as these and actual reductions in violent behaviour. That is, that the demonstration of signpost attitudes and behaviours such as these does not necessarily translate quickly into less violent and more respectful behaviour. Rather, they indicate the possibility (even a likelihood) that the user of violence is on a productive change journey that might translate into significant behaviour change in the future.

The verbalisation coding and rating process used in the study was quite intense, involving six sessions coded by multiple coders (trained undergraduate research assistants) at the early, middle and later phases of the program. Coders used a five-point scale to rate client verbalisations on each of the three dimensions, at each five-minute interval. Ratings across the five-minute intervals, for each participant for each of the three dimensions, were averaged. Obviously, such an intense coding procedure will be impractical for use in the field.

This is unfortunately a rare study of its kind – the authors conducted the research due to the “very little empirical evidence to discern whether observed client behavior[s] that appear to reflect motivation to change and a positive attitude toward treatment are, in fact, predictive of more favorable post-treatment outcomes for partner violent men.”²³⁹ The intention was therefore very specific to these research goals, rather than to produce a procedure and set of tools to rate perpetrator verbalisations that could be used widely in program delivery contexts.

The study does point to the promise, however, of utilising very specific observations of perpetrator verbalisations as part of a framework of proximal indicators. The ratings in this study were based on a high volume of nuanced observations made at frequent intervals of perpetrator verbalisations – as distinct from general observations or overall impressions. The challenge is how to make a framework that relies on nuanced, specific and multiple observations at frequent intervals practical, given that in general service provision there is no luxury of having independent research assistants to code perpetrator verbalisations, nor of facilitators spending hours to make ratings via review of video- or audio-recordings of group sessions.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ *ibid*

²³⁹ *ibid*, p. 127

²⁴⁰ While many program providers welcome observers (for example, student or trainee practitioners, or representatives from partner agencies of an integrated response) to sit in on MBCP sessions, it would be inappropriate for observers to make detailed ratings such as these of group participants.

Transtheoretical Stages of Change model

Over the past fifteen years there has been growing interest in the application of Prochaska and DiClemente's Transtheoretical Stages of Change model to FDV interventions, including its incorporation in initial assessment and ongoing monitoring processes.²⁴¹

The model posits that people move through a predictable series of stages when attempting to modify health-related behaviours – pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance – and that, common to many health behaviours, particular tasks are required to assist people to move from one particular stage to the next.²⁴²

The use of motivational enhancement interventions based on this model has been shown to assist with treatment compliance for some FDV perpetrators, though there is little evidence of this translating into behaviour change outcomes.²⁴³ Practitioner classification of perpetrators according to their position on the Stages of Change continuum has been found in some studies to have some predictive power in terms of treatment attrition,²⁴⁴ though a more recent study employing a validated Stages of Change tool found no correlation with program attendance or completion.²⁴⁵

While applicable to health behaviours such as tobacco use, alcohol consumption and physical exercise, the Stages of Change model has notable limitations in its ability to guide monitoring and ongoing assessment of FDV perpetrator behaviour change. First, the five stages of the model are too broad to serve as guides for the development of a framework of proximal indicators or signposts. The factors that affect perpetrator readiness to participate in a service, and readiness to change, are often cyclical and non-linear. Events such as developments in legal or court proceedings, the term of a corrections order coming to an end, or the user of violence finally realising that his partner has decided to end the relationship, can result in significant motivational jumps, including in a backwards direction away from change.²⁴⁶ To say that a user of violence has arrived or progressed to a particular stage can therefore be misleading; there are doubts therefore about whether the Stages of Change model can encompass the contradictory nature of behaviour change in the FDV context.

Second, due to FDV being a patterned, rather than singular behaviour, a user of violence might be at different stages at the one time with respect to different aspects of his behaviour. It is not uncommon, for example, for participants in the latter half or last third of an MBCP to be at a preparation or action stage with respect to changing their use of physical violence and intimidation,

²⁴¹ Eckhardt, C., & Utschig, A. (2007). Assessing readiness to change among perpetrators of intimate partner violence: Analysis of two self-report measures. *Journal of Family Violence*, 22, 319; Maiuro, R., & Murphy, C. (Eds) (2009). *Motivational interviewing and stages of change in intimate partner violence*. Springer Publishing Company.

²⁴² See <http://www.prochange.com/transtheoretical-model-of-behavior-change> for a description of this model.

²⁴³ Crane, C., & Eckhardt, C. (2013). Evaluation of a single-session brief motivational enhancement intervention for partner abusive men. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 60(2), 180-187; To date, studies focusing on the introduction of motivational enhancement components to standard FDV perpetrator programs show a positive effect on perpetrator engagement and session attendance; however, they have not been effective in reducing violent behaviour. For recent reviews of studies focusing on motivational interviewing and FDV perpetrator program work, see: Santirso, F., Gilchrist, G., Lila, M., & Gracia, E. (2020). Motivational strategies in interventions for intimate partner violence offenders: A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Psychosocial Intervention*, 29(3), 175 - 190.; Soleymani, S., Britt, E., & Wallace-Bell, M. (2018). Motivational interviewing for enhancing engagement in Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) treatment: A review of the literature. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 40, 119–127.

²⁴⁴ Scott, K. (2004). Stages of change as a predictor of attrition among men in a batterer treatment program. *Journal of Family Violence*, 19(1), 37-47.

²⁴⁵ Mach, J., Cantos, A., Weber, E., & Kosson, D. (2020). The impact of perpetrator characteristics on the completion of a Partner Abuse Intervention Program. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 35(23-24), 5228-5254.

²⁴⁶ Ronan, G., Gerhart, J., Bannister, D., & Udell, C. (2010). Relevance of a stage of change analysis for violence reduction training. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 21(5), 761-772.

yet might be completely unaware or defensive about other aspects of their behaviour (such as social and financial violence tactics). Often, they remain pre-contemplative regarding their use of sexualised violence until well into the program. Or they might be applying violence interruption strategies to limit their use of violence in some situations (on the surface appearing to be at an action stage), yet remain committed to particular beliefs that maintain their potential to use violence in other situations.

This is not to say that the Stages of Change model has no relevance to monitoring and assessment, nor to the development of a framework of proximal indicators. Rather, we suggest that its use in a sweeping way to differentiate perpetrators into separate cohorts or groups can be misleading.

The use of this model to monitor perpetrators requires attention to which aspect of the perpetrator's behaviour, or which part of the change journey, it is being applied. Rather than attempting to classify a user of violence wholesale into a singular stage at any given point of time, the CIJ and SFV believe that it is more accurate to consider separately which stages of change a perpetrator has reached with respect to various aspects of the change process. For example, it is more useful to consider separately which stage a user of violence might be in terms of:

- developing an internal motivation(s) to change; or
- a particular pattern or tactic of violence (for example, his use of social violence when experiencing agitated jealousy); or
- a particular motive or intent to use violence; or
- a specific belief or constellation of beliefs he draws upon to feel justified to use violent and controlling behaviour; or
- focusing on the experiences of his family members, their perspectives and needs; or
- any one of a number of other aspects of the perpetrator's change journey.

The Stages of Change model is not incorporated into the very preliminary contours of the framework of proximal indicators presented in this paper. This is, in part, because of the number of indicators posited at that point in the paper, and the proposed structure within which these indicators sit. The framework proposed in this paper adopts the approach of defining headline indicators at the top level, and a second and more detailed layer of specific indicators underneath that operationalises what a perpetrator would need to demonstrate with respect to each headline indicator. For a perpetrator to have stepped into a change journey with respect to any particular indicator, he would need to be at least at the preparation (if not the action) stage with respect to the aspect of the change journey to which the indicator refers.

In other words, the proposed framework contained in this paper does not attempt to place perpetrators, who have not yet demonstrated that they have stepped into a particular aspect of the change journey, in terms of where along the path they are towards stepping into that particular aspect. For a user of violence who has not, for example, demonstrated disclosure of a meaningful proportion of his use of violent and controlling behaviour, the proposed framework does not provide a means to classify which stage the perpetrator has reached in relation to this steppingstone (that is, whether he is pre-contemplative, contemplative or in preparation towards meaningful disclosure).

In this respect, the CIJ and SFV note the limitations of the Stages of Change model in terms of making broad classifications, even at the level of headline indicators. For example, if a perpetrator has not yet stepped into disclosing a meaningful proportion of his violent and controlling behaviour, as mentioned above, this could be because he is making genuine and significant disclosures with

respect to some tactics of violence but avidly denies and dismisses others. Alternatively, it could be that he is making some tentative steps towards being open to disclosing a reasonable proportion of his use of violence, but that he continues to waver back to predominant denial and minimisation. It is not easy to classify either user of violence, or to say that one is at a more ‘advanced’ stage than the other.

It is likely, however, that the Stages of Change model fits better with some indicators than others. In other words, that it could be a useful addition to the framework for some indicators. As such, the CIJ and SFV do not discount its use.

Batterer Intervention Proximal Program Outcomes Survey

Approximately ten years ago, Eric Mankowski and colleagues from Portland State University developed a perpetrator self-report tool specifically designed to measure proximal indicators. This has recently been described as follows:

FF *Mankowski, Silvergleid, Patrick, and Wilson (personal communication, 1 November 2017) have argued that the underlying logic of MBCPs is that greater achievement of the program’s proximal goals will lead to subsequent reductions in the distal outcome of reduced [domestic and family violence]. Their review of the (albeit limited) literature on the processes of change in MBCPs (Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006) informed the development of a new measure that purports to indicate the degree to which program participants have achieved the proximal program outcomes of the intervention. This tool, the Batterer Intervention Proximal Program Outcomes Survey (BIPPOS), measures four constructs commonly targeted by MBCPs and referred to in the literature as contributors to (or causes of) [domestic and family violence] These are: 1. accepting personal responsibility for IPV and overcoming denial; 2. reducing power and control beliefs and motives in intimate partner relationships; 3. understanding the effects of abuse on victims/survivors (and on the self); and 4. managing or controlling anger.*

FF *A fifth construct, reducing feelings of dependency on the partner, was subsequently added because of the frequent references in the literature to men’s exaggerated feelings of dependency on their partners and the effects these feelings have on efforts to control or harm partners, particularly at the most dangerous time when their partners are leaving the relationship... Although there is more research required to establish the psychometric properties of the BIPPOS, there is preliminary empirical evidence that improvements in scores on these proximal program goals do predict reduced physical and psychological abuse, with this also predicting lower levels of self-reported domestic violence.²⁴⁷*

Research into the BIPPOS, however, appears to have stalled over the past few years, or at least further literature has yet to arise. The structure of the BIPPOS as a self-report questionnaire also limits the frequency with which it can be used in a practice setting, being most suited to being administered at perhaps only two points (at the beginning and end) of the program. The reliance on perpetrator self-reports, as distinct from practitioner ratings characteristic of most other approaches reviewed here, is also a potential limitation. Given the promising early findings as reported above, however, any subsequent developments in this tool should be watched with interest.

²⁴⁷ Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2019). *Evaluation readiness, program quality and outcomes in men’s behaviour change programs* (Research report, 01/2019). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS. p. 50

Safe and Together signposts

As outlined in this paper and elsewhere, referrers and other service system stakeholders continue to adopt the dangerous practice of placing a heavy reliance on program participation and completion as markers of a successful outcome of referring a user of violence to an MBCP.²⁴⁸ David Mandel, founder of the Safe and Together model, has added to this wider critique and explained why the provision of completion certificates to perpetrators upon program completion is similarly dangerous practice. To this end, Mandel has recently proposed three broad indicators upon which MBCP providers and child welfare systems can base decisions regarding an FDV perpetrator's progress towards change:²⁴⁹

- Has the perpetrator admitted to a meaningful portion of what he has done? ('Naming the behaviours'),
- Is the perpetrator able to talk about the impact of his abusive behaviours on himself and others? ('Claiming the harm'), and
- What relevant changes has the perpetrator made in his behaviour pattern? ('Making real changes')²⁵⁰

Mandel's paper is an essential read to guide child protection and intensive family support referrers, as well as MBCP providers, to take a more considered view than simply relying on program completion as 'evidence' that the user of violence has changed his patterns of causing harm. The paper provides a detailed analysis of each indicator, with the categorisation intentionally simple given that the audience for the paper is as much (if not more) for child protection and intensive family supports services than specialist perpetrator intervention services. Mandel's paper aims to encourage child welfare services to work collaboratively with specialist FDV services to make an ongoing assessment of where the user of violence is situated with respect to each indicator.

For the purposes of the CIJ and SFV's paper, however, categorisations need to be more nuanced than that outlined by Mandel. While the first two indicators would be widely seen as highly important to a productive behaviour change process, the third is much less of an indicator, referring to actual mid- or end-point behaviour changes rather than steppingstones on a journey *towards* change. Indeed, Mandel's description even of "naming the behaviours" and "claiming the harm" point to these more as behaviour change outcomes, rather than as indicators of the same. As outlined earlier in the current paper, it might not be until after a perpetrator has completed the program that changes in his behavioural patterns can be assessed.

Indicators of Engagement tool

The NSW *Towards Safe Families* practice guide is, at the time of this paper's writing, Australia's only comprehensive guide for MBCP work. The guide has incorporated a tool to assist program providers to review the quality and level of engagement of each user of violence at any particular point in the program. While the tool was not developed to focus on proximal indicators of the behaviour change

²⁴⁸ Centre for Innovative Justice (2018). *Beyond 'getting him to a program': Towards best practice for perpetrator accountability in the Specialist Family Violence Court context*. Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University; Vlasis, R., & Green, D. (2018). *Developing an outcomes framework for men's behaviour change programs: A discussion paper*. Perth, Western Australia: Stopping Family Violence.

²⁴⁹ Mandel, D. (2020). *Perpetrator intervention program completion certificates are dangerous*. White paper. Safe and Together Institute.

²⁵⁰ *ibid*

process itself – but rather, indicators of the quality of genuine engagement with the program and program content – it nevertheless provides relevant factors to consider for the purposes of this paper.

The tool – reproduced in its entirety in Appendix B – focuses on nineteen variables of engagement across three categories (capacity,²⁵¹ motivation and context). Variables out of this set of nineteen that are potentially relevant as signposts of behaviour change include:

- understanding of, and attitudes towards, risk concerns (the extent to which the perpetrator understands the concerns that the program has about the risk he poses to affected family members);
- degree of responsibility he takes for his harmful behaviour;
- remorse for his harmful behaviour;
- empathy for the experiences of those who he has harmed;
- insight (focusing on both capacity and desire to self-reflect);
- cognitions (in particular, the frequency of what the tool describes as ‘distortions’ in beliefs, attributions, perceptions and expectations of others);
- attitude to program goals; and
- internal motivations to change.

Each variable is rated according to a five-point scale – and while each scale operates on a general continuum, from ‘not engaging’ to ‘may be engaging’, they are tailored for each variable. For example, the five points of the scale for the remorse variable are defined as follows:

derives satisfaction from harming others	no remorse or shame	limited expression of remorse and shame	reasonable expression of remorse and shame	expresses proportionate remorse and shame
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While the delineation of the actual variables themselves do not add much that is new, the differentiated and specific descriptions used to guide the rating of each variable is notable. Without such specificity, practitioners can assume or read different things into the headline description of a variable or indicator, limiting the reliability of its use.

Indicators arising from behaviour change ‘competencies’

A relatively nuanced approach relevant to the determination of proximal or signpost indicators arises from attempts to construct a set of behaviour change ‘elements’ or ‘competencies’ to guide program curriculum development and review.

FF *Since the evolution of MBCPs in the US in the late 1970s, and in Australia in the mid-1980s, program developers have constructed group work curricula based on their perspectives and assumptions of what changes need to be achieved through the program. In the main, program designers are used to thinking of areas of*

²⁵¹ ‘Capacity’ does not appear an apt heading for the variables in this category, as the category focuses on variables that are more fluid and changeable than what the term ‘capacity’ connotes.

*change as “topics” that need to be covered in the curriculum or program manual; in other words, they are thought of as outputs. A different approach, however, is to consider these changes as competencies or elements that, through the course of participation in the program (and in life outside group work sessions), the perpetrator would need to demonstrate in order to show that he is on a path towards sustained behaviour change.*²⁵²

These approaches have been reported in the literature in at least two contexts, in NSW and Colorado respectively. In the *Towards Safe Families* manual, No to Violence and Red Tree Consulting utilised the term ‘elements of praxis’²⁵³ and described this as follows:

FF *Praxis is the application of learning (its plural is 'praxes'). It is a combination of skills, knowledge, attitudes, values and abilities. In the context of a man ceasing his use of violence, there are many different elements of praxis, each of which might be demonstrated in many different ways. Figure 2 provides some of the many possible elements of praxis and indicators of each.*

²⁵² Day, A., Vlasis, R., Chung, D., & Green, D. (2019), *ibid*

²⁵³ The term ‘elements of praxis’ has not gained traction in the MBCP field, understandably due to its academic feel. However, the CIJ and SFV are aware of this approach adopted in the *Towards Safe Families* manual having influenced, at least indirectly, curriculum review or development for a small number of Australian MBCP providers.

Element of praxis	Indicators [of the element]
Accepts full responsibility for his use of violent behaviour	<p>Names and provides examples of all the forms of violence, power and control that he has used</p> <p>Does not blame other people, his past, substances or other factors for his use of violence</p> <p>Talks about his use of violence as a choice</p>
Accepts the consequences of using violence	<p>Pleads guilty to domestic and family violence-related criminal charges that have been laid against him</p> <p>Does not appeal or otherwise challenge justice responses</p> <p>Complies with ADVOs</p> <p>Does not use intimidatory or otherwise violent behaviour if his (ex)partner decides to leave the relationship temporarily or permanently</p> <p>Understands how his (ex)partner and others affected by his violence might continue to relate to him with hyper-vigilance and mistrust even after he stops his use of violence</p>
Understands the value of living non-violently	<p>Names the ways that his violence has affected his (ex)partner, his children, his relationships and himself</p> <p>Names the ways that living non-violently will make positive differences to his (ex)partner, his children, his relationships and himself</p>
Demonstrates sustained capacity for empathy with women and children	<p>Listens without defensiveness and strongly takes into account views about his behaviour expressed by those affected by his violence</p> <p>Identifies ways that he has demonstrated violence-condoning attitudes and beliefs such as male entitlement and self-righteousness</p>
Uses non-violent approaches	<p>Identifies the situations in which he is at most risk of using violence and uses self-management plans to manage risk in these situations</p> <p>Identifies his own particular patterns related to his use of violence, and their associated physiological states, emotions, thoughts and behaviours</p>



Shaping curriculum around elements of praxis helps providers to:

- *select curriculum topics and activities that work towards assisting men to achieve the elements, and to structure the program;*
- *identify possible measures of change (noting that achieving all of the elements of praxis suggested in the matrix above does not automatically mean that risk has reduced significantly or at all);*
- *systematically review individual men during the program;*
- *structure internal documentation of review findings;*
- *communicate to other stakeholders what the program is attempting to change in order to work towards enhanced safety and wellbeing for women and children.*

Indicators of praxis need to be observable to others. In the case of men's behaviour change, they must be evident to men's (ex)partners and children ... observing a man in the group, judging his participation and what he contributes, looking at his homework tasks and observing him in role plays are limited in the information they yield about whether he is demonstrating an element of praxis.

Achieving elements of praxis is no guarantee of long-term behavioural or attitudinal change. This is because the application of an element of praxis might:

- be inconsistent, demonstrated in some contexts and not others (for example, in the group session but not at home, when sober but not when intoxicated)*
- fade after a man has stopped attending the program*
- not be supported by influential figures or subcultures in a man's life.²⁵⁴*

An important characteristic of the *Towards Safe Families* approach concerns the adoption of a two-level approach: the elements at the top or headline level, and a series of specific indicators underneath that provide examples of how each element would be demonstrated. The manual does not provide a complete set of elements and indicators but, rather, only some examples to guide each program provider to develop their own complete set, consistent with the theory of change and philosophical underpinnings of their particular program.

Colorado approach

As outlined in the practice guide, the *Towards Safe Families* approach was adopted in part to re-orient curriculum development away from scheduling a 'shopping list' of session topics, and towards structuring content around the constituent elements of a behaviour change process. A similar and more developed approach in Colorado arose out of the same intention, as well as to provide specific indicators through which to tailor intervention length and goals for each user of violence.

The Colorado Domestic Violence Offender Management Board (CDVOMB) has developed and refined a set of core and additional 'competencies' in this respect. These competencies are listed in Appendix C.²⁵⁵

The use of the term 'competency' has advantages and disadvantages in terms of its implications for men's behaviour change work. Importantly, the term infers the need for perpetrators to *demonstrate* the competency in action as part of the change process. A weakness of the term, however, is the inference that perpetrators change by learning new skills and abilities when, to a large extent, FDV perpetration is about the choice not to use *existing* skills which stem from entitlement-based and victim stance thinking. Indeed, the term 'competency' has a highly behavioural feel, and is not so suited to behaviour change aspects associated with thinking, attitudes and emotion.

Core and additional competencies have a central role in the Colorado perpetrator intervention program standards. Offender progress in demonstrating the competencies is tracked through what are termed 'Individual Treatment Plans', with the most regular and intense tracking occurring with perpetrators assessed to be in the highest category of risk and need (Level C). Perpetrators are not

²⁵⁴ NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice (2012). *Towards safe families: A practice guide for men's domestic behaviour change programs*. State of New South Wales. Written by No to Violence and Red Tree Consulting. pp. 139-140.

²⁵⁵ For further details of these competencies, see pages 39-44 of the Colorado minimum standards available at <https://dcj.colorado.gov/boards-commissions/domestic-violence-offender-management-board>

deemed to have completed an intervention program until, theoretically at least, they have demonstrated each of the core and applicable additional competencies.

This approach to perpetrator intervention program work is based on the assumption that the behaviour change process ‘takes as long as it takes’ for each user of violence. There is no minimum or set program length in the Colorado standards, with the length of intervention determined individually for each user of violence depending on how long each takes to achieve the set of competencies.

‘Clinically’ assessing when a perpetrator has demonstrated the full or near-full set of competencies has proven difficult, however. According to the Colorado standards, program practitioners should meet regularly with the victim advocate providing support to affected family members and with the probation officer²⁵⁶ involved to pool together multiple sources of information relating to the perpetrator’s progress in relation to the competencies. A process evaluation of program provider applications of this approach, however, found that competency assessments can be a very uncertain and fraught process, with the decision often being made on the basis of subjective practitioner opinion.²⁵⁷

In the CIJ’s and SFV’s view, the particular sets of core and additional competencies adopted by the CDVOMB are not as strong as they could be. The competencies seem to cross several layers of specificity, and do not appear particularly well organised – though admittedly, they are based on a highly pragmatic and concrete approach to assist with monitoring treatment progress. Some focus on non-central dynamic risk factors,²⁵⁸ as distinct from elements more essential to the behaviour change process.

Nevertheless, despite challenges inherent in terminology such as ‘elements of praxis’ and ‘competencies’, these approaches offer significant promise in guiding the development of a framework of proximal behaviour change indicators, and are highly influential to the very preliminary approach suggested in this paper. The delineation of competencies or elements of behaviour change can also, as mentioned previously, be highly useful in the process of developing or reviewing MBCP curriculum.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ As with most FDV perpetrator programs in the U.S. the main source of referrals into Colorado programs arise through the criminal justice system.

²⁵⁷ Hansen, J. (2016). *Standards for treatment with court ordered domestic violence offenders: A process evaluation*. Colorado Domestic Violence Offender Management Board.

²⁵⁸ Non-central dynamic risk factors are those – such as substance use/abuse, mental health, insecure housing and problem gambling – that, while are not underlying drivers of FDV, can contribute towards the severity and frequency of some forms of FDV. For further discussion, see p. 67-68 of Vlasis, R., Ridley, S., Green, D., & Chung, D. (2017). *Family and domestic violence perpetrator programs: Issues paper of current and emerging trends, developments and expectations*. Perth: Stopping Family Violence.

²⁵⁹ Although not the subject of this paper, a set of fit-for-purpose competencies can also be used to audit MBCP curriculum. Each session – as written up in the facilitator manual – can be audited in terms of (i) which elements or competencies the session primarily focuses on; and (ii) which competencies are given a secondary focus (in terms of either introducing or seeding content/themes/processes related to the competency, or through reinforcing or extending explorations related to a competency that was a primary focus of earlier sessions).

This auditing process can help to identify ways in which a curriculum might fall short in terms of the ‘airtime’ given to particular competencies, or how the sequencing or flow of different competencies across the curriculum – including how they are ‘ordered’ (in terms of when they first become a primary focus of a session), seeded, extended and reinforced at multiple points – can be improved. This approach to auditing can additionally determine, for each session, whether there are sufficient scaffolded opportunities for program participants to operationalise the content and themes related to the primary (and where relevant, secondary) competencies covered in the session, to their own particular circumstances and behaviour. The auditing can go further by considering whether the engagement modalities (visual, auditory, reading/writing and kinaesthetic) are appropriately balanced in the session.

Change Star

A final approach that is useful to highlight involves the use of the Outcomes Star methodology to develop a tool focusing on proximal change measures for participants in MBCPs and other FDV perpetrator intervention programs. Titled the Change Star,²⁶⁰ the tool was recently developed through a consultation and research process with an expert advisory group of program practitioners, and was trialled with practitioners in two perpetrator intervention programs in Brisbane and the UK.

The tool, while most likely to be scored by practitioners, is designed to be used collaboratively and transparently with perpetrators. It uses plain and accessible language to assist a user of violence to reflect on where he is at with respect to each of the stars, and what is required for him to progress. As such, the tool is designed to be used with perpetrators as a case planning and case review tool.

The tool focuses on six components or areas of a behaviour change process:

1. **Taking responsibility** for violence and abuse, and understanding the impacts and consequences.
2. **Thinking and attitudes:** Views on your partner or women in general, social attitudes, past influences.
3. **Safe actions and reactions:** Recognising strong feelings, the impact of alcohol or drugs, strategies and safe choices.
4. **Communication:** Open communication, negotiating differences, resulting conflict healthily, intimacy and sex.
5. **Being a good father:** Preventing harm to children, being a good father or role model, co-parenting.
6. **Your well-being:** Emotional well-being, dealing with stress, healthy lifestyle, self-care, managing mental health.

While these areas are a mix of proximal indicators and actual behaviour change outcomes, some features of the tool are noteworthy in terms of the development of a framework focusing specifically on the former. The tool appears to draw upon a modified version of the Stages of Change, defining five points within each of the above six areas:

- **Stuck:** The man does not realise that anything is wrong, is not taking any responsibility for his behaviour, and might feel victimised by police, the courts or by his partner.
- **Engaging:** The man becomes open to other views, begins to engage with the program, and might recognise that things aren't working for him. At this stage he might begin to question some of his assumptions and begin to consider the need for change. This questioning, however, is not sufficient for him to shift his beliefs or to start to take any significant responsibility for his behaviour.
- **Acknowledging:** A turning point where the man begins to acknowledge some of his behaviour, and starts to feel motivated to change his behaviour (but might not know how).

²⁶⁰ Burns, S., MacKeith, J., & Greaves, S. (2020). Change Star: *The Outcomes Star for behaviour change for men*. Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise Ltd. Hove, UK. See <https://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/using-the-star/see-the-stars/change-star/>

He still struggles to understand the experiences and feelings of his partner and family members affected by his use of violence.

- **Learning new ways** of thinking and behaving, and learning the connection between his behaviour and the harm that it has caused. In this stage the user of violence becomes more internally motivated to change, and is increasingly finding more safe ways to situations that he finds difficult.
- **Being respectful:** Here the man takes responsibility for his past actions, and ceases his use of violent and controlling behaviour. His actions are respectful, and he successfully puts into practice what he has learnt in the program. He is now safe to be around, although there is no guarantee that these changes will be sustained.

While readers might agree or disagree with the specifics of how these points are defined, and with what these descriptions say about underpinning assumptions about FDV and the change process, a key take-away for the purposes of the CIJ and SFV's paper is the attempt to define points or stages of the behaviour change process in a consistent sequence. While the MBCP Indicators of Engagement tool outlined earlier in this Appendix also adopts a five-point scale characteristic of a sequence from low to committed engagement with the program and program content, the Change Star takes a more descriptive approach to the change journey.

Furthermore, like the Indicators of Engagement tool, the Change Star operationalises each of the five points within each of the six areas differently. For example, within the safe actions and reactions area, these five points are defined as follows:

Stuck – I can't help reacting in violent ways when I'm angry, frustrated, afraid or upset.

Engaging – I'm starting to listen and talk about how I react when I'm angry, frustrated, afraid or upset.

Acknowledging – I recognise that the way I react when angry, frustrated, afraid or upset needs to change.

Learning new ways – I'm learning new, safe ways to respond to strong feelings and trying to put them into practice.

Being respectful – I'm managing to make safe choices even when I have strong feelings.

The tool provides further detail underneath each of the five points of the behaviour change process for each of the six areas. Each area by stage-of-change point is provided with three to five dot points to assist both practitioners and clients to assess which point they are at with respect to a given area.

As mentioned above, the tool is designed to be used by the practitioner and the client collaboratively. To this effect, the instructions (written specifically for the client, not the practitioner) include:

To complete the Star, look at each of the six scales one by one and talk it over with a worker. Together you can agree where you are in each area. Then mark the number on the Star Chart and connect the points to a snapshot of your life and the areas that are working well and the ones that are more challenging.

This will help you and the worker to agree on what areas to work on together. From there you can start thinking about the actions you want to take and the support that would help you to carry them out.

*... You and the worker will come back to the star at regular intervals. You can look at the scales again, agree where you are, and plot a new shape on the Star Chart. Over time, this will help you to see visually where you have come from and how you have changed.*²⁶¹

While, again, some of the specifics and philosophies of the Change Star will appeal to some readers and practitioners more than others, there are some notable features to consider from this approach. It raises the issue of the desirability and drawbacks of attempting to denote ratings concerning any particular proximal indicator across a sequence or continuum along a change journey. The deliberate construction of the tool to guide self-reflection and collaboration with the practitioner, and to demystify the change process and be fully transparent with the perpetrator regarding points along the way in a change journey, is rather unique.

The tool also raises the difficult question of where a particular steppingstone along a journey towards behaviour change ends before it morphs into an actual behaviour change outcome – rather than simply as an indicator of a journey towards that outcome.

²⁶¹ *ibid*, pp. 2-3

Appendix B: MBCP Indicators of Engagement tool

VARIABLES	APPARENTLY NOT ENGAGING ← → MAY BE ENGAGING				
CAPACITY					
UNDERSTANDING OF RISK CONCERNS	has no understanding of the concerns	has little understanding of the concerns	has some understanding of the concerns	largely understands the concerns and the purpose of the program	fully understands the concerns and the purpose of the program
RESPONSIBILITY	blames other factors for his harmful behaviour	minimises responsibility for harmful behaviour	accepts principle of responsibility for own behaviour	mainly accepts responsibility for his harmful behaviour	accepts responsibility for his harmful behaviour
REMORSE	derives satisfaction from harming others	no remorse or shame	limited expression of remorse and shame	reasonable expression of remorse and shame	expresses proportionate remorse and shame
EMPATHY	no understanding or sensitivity to the likely impact of his violence on others	little understanding or sensitivity to the likely impact of his violence on others	some understanding and sensitivity to the likely impact	reasonable empathy for those affected by his violence	empathic and fully attuned to the needs of those affected by his violence
INSIGHT	no capacity or desire to self-reflect	little capacity or desire to self-reflect	some capacity and desire to self-reflect	reasonable capacity and desire to self-reflect	demonstrates high capacity and desire to self-reflect
COGNITIONS	Frequent and severe distorted beliefs, expectations or thoughts	distortions of perception, attribution, interpretations etc	occasional distortions	some minor distortions	has no obvious distortions
EMOTIONAL/IMPULSE REGULATION	highly reactive to aversive feelings	reactive to aversive feelings	some capacity to contain aversive feelings	reasonable capacity to contain aversive feelings	high capacity to contain aversive feelings
MOTIVATION					
ATTITUDE TO RISK CONCERNS	totally rebuts all concerns	largely rebuts the concerns	partially accepts the concerns	mostly accepts the concerns	fully accepts the concerns
ATTITUDE TO PROGRAM GOALS	refusal to address program goals	not interested in addressing some of the program goals	ambivalent but willing to comply with program goals	motivated to address most program goals	strong desire to address all program goals
INTERNAL MOTIVATION TO CHANGE	no internal motivation	minimal internal motivation	variable internal motivation, ambivalent	mostly internally motivated	highly internally motivated
EXTERNAL MOTIVATION	no concern for consequences of non-compliance	little concern for consequences	concern for consequences varies	often concerned by consequences	very concerned by consequences
RELATIONSHIP WITH PROGRAM STAFF	confrontational, hostile, adversarial stance	will not collaborate (or is overly compliant)	some collaboration with or compliance with program staff	mostly collaborates	collaborates fully
ATTENDANCE	less than 50 per cent attendance	irregular attendance	occasional unacceptable absence	no unacceptable absences	full attendance and regular punctuality
ASSIGNMENTS	unwilling or unable to complete homework	little homework completed	some homework completed	regular homework undertaken	regular homework and demonstrates effort
SUBSTANCE USE	frequently arrives for sessions under the influence	has occasionally arrived for session under the influence	not under the influence but adverse effects from recent use	no adverse effects from recent substance use	no known substance misuse
CONTEXT					
LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES (JOB/HOUSING/HEALTH/FA MILY)	life circumstances are making it difficult to engage at all	life circumstances are making it somewhat difficult to engage	life circumstances seem not to be impacting on engagement	life circumstances seem to be supporting engagement	life circumstances are supporting engagement
ACCESS ISSUES (TRANSPORT/CHILDCARE/ PROGRAM'S CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS)	access issues are making it difficult to engage at all	access issues are making it somewhat difficult to engage	access issues seem not to be impacting on engagement	access issues seem to be supporting engagement	access issues are supporting engagement
STRESS LEVELS	acute subjective and/or objective stress	high stress levels	occasional unhelpful stress	manageable stress	absence of unhelpful stress
SUPPORT	discouragement from family, friends or others	no family, social or other support	support is unreliable or mixed	reasonable support and encouragement	good support, encouragement and regular feedback

Explanatory notes:²⁶²

1. Men who do not understand how their behaviour is of concern are more likely to be dangerous and less able to engage in the change process (note that a lack of understanding may point to learning difficulties in some situations).
2. Level of acceptance of responsibility is a key determinant of a man's readiness to change.
3. What is the depth and quality of the man's remorse, if any? To what extent is it other-centred focusing on a genuine concern for the harm caused to others, versus self-centred and focusing on the man's own fears and needs?
4. What is the man's level of empathy for the effects of his violence and the needs of others? To what extent is this felt rather than only intellectually understood?
5. Does he exhibit insight? If not, does he have the capacity and willingness to develop it?
6. Does he present his victim's behaviour in an unrealistic/distorted way? Does he see others as manipulating him and involved in conspiracies against him? Men with high levels of cognitive distortion are likely to engage less.
7. This area concerns the man's ability to tolerate the strong feelings that may be elicited by being challenged or by having to confront vulnerable parts of himself that he would rather ignore, without reacting aggressively to staff or other program participants.
8. As well as understanding how his behaviour raises concern (see item one), the degree to which the man shares this concern is an indicator of his engagement or motivation to change.
9. To what extent is the man committed to all the goals and requirements of the program?
10. This item assesses the degree to which the man is able to understand the benefits for himself of changing his behaviour and the degree to which he is committed to the program as a way to achieve this. For example, how able is he to name his own values and ethics? Can he see that his use of violence is inconsistent with these values and ethics?
11. The man's level of concern for the external consequences (regarding the future of his relationships, possibility of legal system sanctions, etc) if he continues using violence.
12. Does he have enough goodwill towards the service and its staff to benefit from the program?
13. Record of keeping appointments and attending group sessions.
14. This concerns the man's willingness and capacity to undertake home assignments to support the work he does during the program (for example, control logs, feedback forms).
15. Does the level of his substance use mean that his ability to derive benefit from the program might be impaired? (Note: where the man is attending a drug/alcohol service is he sustaining a commitment to moderate or eliminate his use of substances, or does he need more time to settle into this treatment before program commencement? Also, where a man is in recent 'recovery' regarding his substance use, the chance of relapse into renewed use of the substance may be increased with the emotional challenges he may have to face during the program).
16. Life circumstances cover a whole range of factors such as work patterns, health, homelessness, employment, etc. For example, if someone is working shifts and is unable to change this, they will repeatedly be unavailable for program sessions.
17. This covers the ability for the man to physically get to and from the service (for example, special needs that cannot be catered for, transport, and childcare responsibilities).
18. While the range and intensities of stress that the man experiences does not cause domestic and family violence, it might affect his participation in the program.
19. What level of support or discouragement is the man experiencing from influential others to accept responsibility and change his behaviour?

²⁶² NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice. (2012). *Towards safe families: A men's domestic violence behaviour change practice guide*. Sydney, Australia: State of New South Wales. Written by No to Violence and Red Tree Consulting. pp. 259-260.

Appendix C: Colorado core and additional competencies

Core competencies are defined as follows:²⁶³

- A. Offender commits to the elimination of abusive behaviour:
 - 1. Eliminates the use of physical intimidation, psychological cruelty, or coercion toward one's partner or children.
 - 2. Begins developing a comprehensive Personal Change Plan that is approved by the MTT [Multi-Treatment Team] and signed by the offender.
- B. Offender demonstrates change by working on the comprehensive Personal Change Plan
 - 1. Begins implementing portions of the Personal Change Plan.
 - 2. Accepts that working on abuse related issues and monitoring them is an ongoing process.
 - 3. Begins designing an Aftercare Plan
 - 4. Completes an Aftercare Plan and is prepared to implement this plan after discharge from treatment.
- C. Offender completes a comprehensive Personal Change Plan
 - 1. Reflects the level of treatment and has been reviewed and approved by the MTT.
 - 2. Driven by the offender's risk and level of treatment
- D. Offender development of empathy
 - 1. Recognizes and verbalizes the effects of one's actions on one's partner/victim.
 - 2. Recognizes and verbalizes the effects on children and other secondary and tertiary victims such as neighbors, family, friends, and professionals.
 - 3. Offers helpful, compassionate response to others without turning attention back on self.
- E. Offender accepts full responsibility for the offense and abusive history
 - 1. Discloses the history of physical and psychological abuse towards the offender's victim(s) and children.
 - 2. Overcomes the denial and minimization that accompany abusive behavior.
 - 3. Makes increasing disclosures overtime.
 - 4. Accepts responsibility for the impact of one's abusive behavior on secondary, tertiary victims, and the community.
 - 5. Recognizes that abusive behavior is unacceptable. The offender has agreed that the abusive behavior is wrong and will not be repeated. This involves relinquishing excuses and any other justifications that blame the victim; including the claim that the victim provoked the offender.

²⁶³ See pp. 39-44 of the Colorado Domestic Violence Offender Management Board minimum standards at <https://dcj.colorado.gov/boards-commissions/domestic-violence-offender-management-board>

F. Offender identifies and progressively reduces pattern of power and control behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes of entitlement.

1. Recognizes that the violence was made possible by a larger context of the offender's behaviors and attitudes.
2. Identifies the specific forms of day-to-day abuse and control, such as isolation that have been utilized, as well as the underlying outlook and excuses that drove those behaviors
3. Demonstrate behaviors, attitudes and beliefs congruent with equality and respect in personal relationships.

G. Offender Accountability: Offender accountability is defined as accepting responsibility for one's abusive behaviors, including accepting the consequences of those behaviors, actively working to repair the harm, and preventing future abusive behavior. Accountability goes beyond taking ownership; it is taking corrective actions to foster safety and health for the victim. The offender demonstrates behavioral changes to alleviate the impact of offender's abusive words and/or actions regardless of the influence of anyone else's words or actions.

H. Offender acceptance that one's behavior has, and should have, consequences

1. Identifies the consequences of one's own behavior and challenges distorted thinking and understands that consequences are a result of one's actions or choices. The offender makes decisions based on recognition of potential consequences.
2. Recognizes that the abusive behavior was a choice, intentional and goal-oriented.

I. Offender participation and cooperation in treatment

1. Participates openly in treatment (e.g. processing personal feelings, providing constructive feedback, identifying one's own abusive patterns, completing homework assignments, presenting letter of accountability).
2. Demonstrates responsibility by attending treatment as required by the Treatment Plan.

J. Offender ability to define types of domestic violence

1. Defines coercion, controlling behavior and all types of domestic violence (e.g. psychological, emotional, sexual, physical, animal abuse, property, financial, isolation).
2. Identifies in detail the specific types of domestic violence engaged in, and the destructive impact of that behavior on the offender's partner and children
3. Demonstrates cognitive understanding of the types of domestic violence as evidenced by giving examples and accurately label situations
4. Defines continuum of behavior from healthy to abusive.

K. Offender understanding, identification, and management of one's personal pattern of violence.

1. Acknowledges past/present violent/controlling/abusive behavior
2. Explores motivations
3. Understands learned pattern of violence and can explain it to others
4. Disrupts pattern of violence prior to occurrence of behaviour

L. Offender understanding of intergenerational effects of violence

1. Identifies and recognizes past victimization, its origin, its type and impact
2. Recognizes the impact of witnessed violence
3. Acknowledges that one's upbringing has influenced current behaviors
4. Develops and implements a plan to distance oneself from violent traditional tendencies, as well as cultural roles.

M. Offender understanding and use of appropriate communication skills

1. Demonstrates non-abusive communication skills that include how to respond respectfully to the offender's partner's grievances and how to initiate and treat one's partner as an equal.
2. Demonstrates an understanding of the difference between assertive, passive, passive aggressive, and aggressive communication, and makes appropriate choices in expressing emotions.
3. Demonstrates appropriate active listening skills.

N. Offender understanding and use of "time-outs"²⁶⁴

1. Recognizes the need for "time-outs" and/or other appropriate self-management skills.
2. Understands and practices all components of the time-out.
3. Demonstrates and is open to feedback regarding the use of time-outs in therapy.

O. Offender recognition of financial abuse and management of financial responsibility

1. Consistently meets financial responsibilities such as treatment fees, child support, maintenance, court fees, and restitution.
2. Maintains legitimate employment, unless verifiably or medically unable to work.

P. Offender eliminates all forms of violence and abuse

1. The offender does not engage in further acts of abuse and commits no new domestic violence offenses or violent offenses against persons or animals.

Q. Offender prohibited from purchasing, possessing, or using firearms or ammunition.

R. Offender identification and challenge of cognitive distortions that plays a role in the offender's violence.

1. Offender demonstrates an understanding of distorted view of self, others, and relationships (e.g., gender role stereotyping, misattribution of power and responsibility, sexual entitlement).

²⁶⁴ This is a highly specific technique that appears ill-suited to being considered a competency in and of itself; the CIJ and SFV believe that competencies should not be this specific (the successful and appropriate use of time out in real life situations would, however, be an indicator of a broader competency, such as "Offender uses strategies appropriately to interrupt build-ups towards the use of violence")

Additional competencies are those that apply for particular perpetrators depending on the situation, and include but are not limited to:

A. Offender understanding and demonstration of responsible parenting

1. Consistently fulfills all applicable parenting responsibilities such as cooperating with the child/children's other parent regarding issues related to parenting, following established parenting plan, and appropriately using parenting time including the safety and care of the child/children.
2. Demonstrates an understanding that abuse during pregnancy may present a higher risk to the victim and unborn child. The offender demonstrates sensitivity to the victim's needs (physical, emotional, psychological, medical, financial, sexual, social) during pregnancy.
3. Demonstrates appropriate interaction with the children and partner in a co-parenting or step-parenting situation

B. Offender identification of chronic abusive beliefs and thought patterns that support his/ her ongoing abusive behavior.²⁶⁵

C. Offender identification of pro-social and/or community support and demonstration of the ability to utilize the support in an appropriate manner. Based on the offender's need and risk, the Approved Provider may require the offender to identify appropriate individuals who can offer positive, prosocial support, such as an individual from a 12-Step Program, or community or faith-based organization. The identified support person cannot be the victim or current partner of the offender. Based on treatment needs (e.g., social isolation and lack of prosocial support) and ongoing Treatment Plan Reviews, the Approved Provider may require the offender to share details of the offending behavior and Personal Change Plan with a support person, and verify having done so

D. Offender's consistent compliance with any psychiatric and medical recommendations for medication that may enhance the offender's ability to benefit from treatment and/or reduce the offender's risk of re-offence.

E. Offender's consistent compliance with any alcohol or substance abuse evaluation and treatment that may enhance the offender's ability to benefit from treatment and/or reduce the offender's risk of re-offence.

²⁶⁵ In the CIJ's and SFV's view, it is surprising that this is not considered a core competency.



