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Impact Evaluation of Special Session Domestic Violence: Enhanced Advocacy and Interventions

Final Report Summary

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Introduction. Despite more than twenty-five years of attention to domestic violence by advocates, intervention program specialists, researchers, and policy-makers, and dramatic increases in resources provided for criminal justice and community-based services, gaps remain in our knowledge about which types of interventions offer the most effective strategies to hold offenders accountable and enhance victim safety. It is especially notable that consensus remains elusive about the efficacy of intervention programs for abusive men.

As courts across the country have moved to develop specialized approaches to respond to the complex challenges posed by domestic violence, finding the most effective interventions for men and support for their partners is crucial. Many group interventions developed for abusive men have been modeled on early approaches that were not created for court-ordered clients. Further, many of the existing court-referred programs offer limited skill-building, often ignore appropriate fathering, do not incorporate substance abuse issues throughout the program, and offer limited attention to different cultural and racial identities among group members. Models that address these and other limitations, with curricula that can be adopted effectively by trained facilitators, may hold potential for reducing repeated domestic abuse.

The project reported here evaluated the impact of a newly developed 26-week, 52-session skill building, culturally competent, psycho-educational curriculum-based intervention for male domestic violence offenders with female victims (EVOLVE). It is explicitly culturally heterogeneous, addresses issues of fathering and the impact of violence on children, integrates substance abuse education throughout the program, and includes a multi-session section on sexuality and sexual violence. EVOLVE was implemented beginning in 2000 in the context of three urban courts that have specialized domestic violence court sessions characterized by consistent judicial oversight with rapid response to violations, extensive specialized victim advocacy resources, and a graduated range

of sanctions. In particular, the evaluation sought to determine: the impact of men's participation in EVOLVE on rates of subsequent physical and emotional abuse; the impact of men's participation in EVOLVE on their partners' safety, safety planning, experience of court and well-being; the rates of program completion compared to the more general 26-week program in place in other court sites in the state, particularly across racial and ethnic groups; and how the victim advocates' role was affected by this new resource.

Methodology. This evaluation was based on a sample of 420 men who attended at least one session of EVOLVE, and a sample of 124 men who attended at least one session at the comparison site. The comparison site, also a large urban court, had court features similar to those at the EVOLVE site, and had high rates of involvement of men of color, which was similar to rates found at the EVOLVE sites at the time the evaluation was proposed, but used a more traditional 26-week intervention that met just once each week. EVOLVE was designed to be used with men who had been arrested for domestic violence at least once before, or who had been charged with felonious assault. It was anticipated that the men who had been arrested for domestic violence in the past would have typically participated in the 10-week group intervention program offered in all courts in the state on a pre-trial basis. The same assumptions applied to use of the program at the comparison site, as well.

Data were collected in interviews at program intake and at three, six, and 12 months after intake. Information was also obtained from program files and from police records for criminal history and new arrests that led to conviction.

The initial interviews with the men included, first, a background questionnaire that covered demographics, family status, parents' behavior (drug or alcohol problems, physical abuse of each other or respondent, employment status or crime problems), and their hopes or plans for their

relationship with the victim. Standardized measures included the 25-item Michigan Alcohol Screening Test the 175-item Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (MCMI)-III, the physical assault and sexual coercion scales of the revised Conflict Tactics Scale, and version of the 21-item Profile of Psychological Abuse, including the Fear of Abuse sub-scale. The standardized measures (except for the MCMI-III) were repeated in subsequent interviews, along with varying open-ended questions.

In addition, open-ended interviews were conducted with all of the specialized family violence victim advocates at the EVOLVE and comparison court sites. These interviews focused on the advocates' experiences with partners of men in EVOLVE or the comparison intervention, the implementation of these interventions, and the advocates' perceptions of the groups' impact on the court, the advocates' role, the men, and on their victims. Although the original design also called for interviews with the men's victims, changes in court policy and protocol regarding victim contact made access prohibitively difficult.

Key Findings. The men in both EVOLVE and the comparison group successfully completed the groups at higher rates than is commonly found: 63.5 percent completed all 52 sessions of EVOLVE, and 65.2 percent completed 24 of the 26 sessions of the comparison group. Latinos were the most successful group in EVOLVE, with 71.8 percent completing all of the sessions, compared to 55.9 percent of African Americans and 66.3 percent of Caucasians.. Latinos in EVOLVE completed at higher rates than those in the comparison group, but the African American men in EVOLVE were less successful. Nonetheless, compared to other studies, the completion rates are high—especially for intense, long-term groups for men with high rates of prior abuse and other criminal activity.

Completers had significantly lower rates of recidivism than those who were negatively discharged, as measured by arrests both for new offenses of any type and for new domestic violence arrests that led to conviction. This pattern was found within racial/ethnic groups, as well.

The general results of this evaluation are encouraging for domestic violence interventions with abusive men, and show higher rates of completion and success than most other studies with high percentages of men of color. It is less clear whether the EVOLVE model is stronger than the less intensive model (which had incorporated some of the new curricular elements from EVOLVE over time), however. A more detailed summary of the study's findings follows, and concludes with a review of implications.

Descriptions of the Men. As shown in Exhibit 1, the men in the two groups were very similar demographically: about 2 out of 5 were age 30 or younger, a majority were high school graduates, nearly 4 of 5 were fathers, about two-thirds were either married to or living with the woman they abused at the time of the arrest incident, over 40 percent had been involved with this woman for six years or more, a majority were employed, and 4 of 5 spoke English as their primary language. The primary difference between the groups was that a higher percentage of the men in the comparison group were Latino, and a smaller percentage were Caucasian than the men in EVOLVE. In addition, the men in EVOLVE were less likely than the others to have witnessed fights between the people who cared for them while they were growing up, but were more likely to have been hurt physically in those fights.

Over half of the men in both groups were rated as high risk or alcoholic on the MAST, and about 4 of 5 reported they had at least tried "street" drugs. Despite their difficult backgrounds and high rates of alcohol and drug involvement, the men did not score in the "pathological" range on the scales measured by the MCMI-III. The highest rate of "pathology" was found for anxiety, with 23

percent. In general, the men in the two groups were similar clinically: Only four showed differences that reached statistical significance. These were the depression and major depression scales (twice as high for the comparison group); the antisocial scale (nearly three times higher for the men in EVOLVE) and the avoidance scale (combined scores suggesting pathology or clinical symptoms were about a third higher for men in the comparison group). Notably, the men in EVOLVE were more likely than those in the comparison group to show response patterns that invalidated their scores (which were removed from the analysis).

Men in neither group reported serious physical violence historically in their relationships at high rates, and differences between the two groups did not reach significance. Both groups were more inclined to acknowledge several types of violence during the incident that led to their arrest. The same pattern was found for reports of past psychological or emotional abuse. In both groups of men, over half admitted to telling their partner that she was “crazy or stupid,” and that was the most frequent form of emotional abuse they acknowledged. The only specific item that showed statistically significant differences was “I make her feel as if she is ‘walking on eggshells’ when I am around her”—men in EVOLVE were twice as likely as the others to say this happened.

Despite these denials of violence and abuse from many of the men in both groups, they had significant criminal histories, as shown in Exhibit 2. Nearly 90 percent of the men in both groups had prior criminal convictions (over 30 percent had more than six), and 75 percent had at least one past conviction for domestic violence (38 percent had two or more). The figures for domestic violence convictions are particularly telling, since first arrests for misdemeanors are most commonly dismissed after pre-trial interventions, and may occur for additional family violence arrests, as well.

Group Completion. The men completed the two types of group at very similar rates: 63.5 percent successfully completed EVOLVE and 65.2 percent completed the comparison group. Latinos were the most successful, with 71.8 percent completing all of the sessions; 68 percent completed the comparison group. However, the African American men were least successful in EVOLVE, with just 55.9 percent completing it successfully (compared to a 65.3 percent completion rate in the comparison group). In each type of group Caucasians completed at rates in between (although the numbers of Caucasian men in the comparison group were small, so that their relative rates should be interpreted with caution). Were it not for these comparisons, completion of 52 sessions over a period of 26 weeks by over half of men with histories of domestic violence and convictions for other crimes from any racial/ethnic background would be recognized as successful, based on other studies.

Successful completion of EVOLVE was also significantly associated with “low risk” scores on the MAST, employment at intake, scores in the “normal” range on the avoidance, depression, masochism, drug dependence, and antisocial scales of the MCMI-III; successful completion of both groups was significantly associated with scores in the normal range on the borderline, anxiety, and schizotypal scales. Significant differences were also found within racial/ethnic groups, but only for African American men in EVOLVE: those who had scores in the “pathological” range were more likely than those in the normal range in the avoidance, depression, antisocial and anxiety scales to be negatively discharged.

Recidivism. The men who successfully completed the groups also had lower rates of recidivism, as measured by arrests that led to convictions following the start of the program, and looking *only at the men who started their group at least a year before recidivism data were collected* (and therefore had at least 6 months of opportunity following the end of program involvement).

Of the men in this timeframe in EVOLVE, 83.4 percent of those who completed the program successfully had no subsequent arrests leading to conviction, compared to 58.3 percent of those who were negatively discharged (this is statistically significant at $p < .001$). A similar pattern was found for the comparison group, although it was less dramatic, and not statistically significant. In that group, 75.9 percent of the completers had no recidivism, compared to 57.6 percent of those who were negatively discharged.

The same patterns were found for arrests that led to convictions for domestic violence offenses. 91.4 percent of the men who were successful in EVOLVE had no subsequent convictions for domestic violence, compared to 80.0 percent of those who were negatively discharged (the difference is significant at $p < .02$). For men in the comparison group, those figures were 93.0 percent and 75.0 percent, respectively (this difference, too, was statistically significant at $p < .04$).

These differences in recidivism held up within racial/ethnic groups, as well. Among the men in EVOLVE, 80.7 percent of African American men (83.3 percent of Latino men and 90 percent of Caucasian men) who completed the group had no new arrests leading to conviction, compared to 56.1 percent of those who were negatively discharged (56 percent of Latino men and 75 percent of Caucasian men). These differences were not significant statistically for the Caucasian men. No new domestic violence arrests leading to conviction were found for 90.7 percent of African American completers (90.3 percent of Latino and 95.9 percent of Caucasian completers), compared to 77.4 percent (83.3 percent of Latino and Caucasian completers) of those who were negatively discharged. None of these apparent differences were significant statistically. Comparable figures for African American men in the comparison site were 70.4 percent vs. 41.7 percent for any type of crime (82.1 percent vs. 68.8 percent for Latinos), and

92.3 percent vs. 54.5 percent (92.9 percent vs. 87.5 percent for Latinos) for a domestic violence crime. Figures are not provided for Caucasians in the comparison group because their numbers were so small, but the pattern of differences between completers and those who were negatively discharged was repeated.

Completers were not only less likely to have new convictions, but when they did, the offenses occurred longer after the men had started the group. Among the successfully completing men in EVOLVE who started their group at least a year before recidivism data were collected, and were ultimately arrested for a new crime that led to conviction, 22.2 percent did not do so until at least a year after they started the group, compared to 10.0 percent of the men who were negatively discharged ($p < .001$). The comparable figures for men in the comparison group were 38.5 percent and 7.1 percent respectively ($p < .03$). The patterns for timing of new domestic violence offenses were similar: men in both groups who committed new crimes and successfully completed their programs were more than twice as likely as those who were negatively discharged to have waited at least a year before reoffending. These patterns also held up within racial/ethnic groups.

Advocates' Perspectives. In-depth interviews conducted with the advocates found that they had more difficulty contacting and connecting with the partners of the men in EVOLVE than they did with women earlier in the court intervention process or with women whose partners had been arrested for the first time. According to the advocates, many victims, by the time this intervention was ordered, were no longer involved with the men, could no longer be contacted because information was out of date, were angry at the court system for ordering such an intrusive intervention (and requiring ongoing protective orders they sometimes experienced as constraining), or had placed their faith in this program as the one that would finally be effective.

In these ways and others, the existence of the EVOLVE program altered the advocates' role in court and their relationships with female victims. The advocates' primary concerns related to inconsistent court responses, limited resources in the face of state-wide budget issues, and clarifying their relationships with group facilitators.

Implications. This study's findings provided a picture of the challenges that can be faced by intensive court-ordered group treatment programs for domestically abusive men who have criminal histories. In this context, the program completion rate of over 63 percent for EVOLVE and 65 percent for the comparison group is notable—especially the higher success rates for Latino men. The goal of increased group completion rates (and corresponding reductions in repeat violence) appears to have been accomplished for this group.

Although the lower rates of successful completion for the African American men in EVOLVE might appear to suggest problems with the curriculum or with men's resistance (or other factors), it was also true that the African American men in the EVOLVE sample were more associated with higher-risk characteristics than their Latino or Caucasian counterparts. They were more likely to have extensive criminal histories and less likely to be employed. They were also less likely than the others to complete the program successfully when they scored in the "pathological" range on the avoidance, depression, antisocial and anxiety scales, and in the alcoholic range on the MAST. These patterns suggest the potential importance of more complete assessments of men as part of the group referral process, to increase the likelihood that men are appropriately referred and have the supplemental supports they might need.

The study also points to the potential impact of resource disruptions and insufficiently clear protocols for monitoring and enforcing intervention programs that are part of criminal sanctions. If men know in some places that some of them will not experience

consequences for marginal compliance with court orders, they may have less incentive for full compliance.

The theme of the importance of attending to men's roles as fathers was raised by the female partners of the men, in particular, but also by the men themselves. Although the evidence of the benefits of this attention is not yet clear, it deserves further exploration, in both programming and evaluation research. Further attention is warranted, as well, to men's constructions of their behavior, and the meanings they attach to different behavioral labels. More research and evaluation designs that connect subjective constructions with objective measures are clearly needed.

This study also serves as a case example of the importance of future research paying closer attention to strategies to overcome the rapidly growing difficulties involved in longitudinal designs—especially if they call for telephone contact. Alternative contact approaches that still do not cross ethical boundaries for intrusiveness need to be developed. Experimentation with a reasonable balance of a range of incentives would be valuable.

Finally, and most important, the study supports further efforts to develop meaningful group interventions for abusive men (it did not address abusive women)—particularly those that are sensitive and competent regarding issues of race and ethnicity. Latino men had the highest rates of successful completion, especially in the EVOLVE groups; in general, the high-risk men who completed the groups did were less likely to return to the criminal system. That should provide encouragement for further intervention development. The stakes are high.

**Exhibit 1: Demographic Characteristics of Group Participants by Type of Group
(in percent)**

Characteristic	EVOLVE (N = 420)	Explore (N = 124)	Total (N = 544)
Age:			
18 – 20	4.8	3.2	4.4
21 – 25	22.4	18.5	21.5
26 – 30	14.8	21.8	16.4
31 – 35	19.5	24.2	20.6
36 – 40	15.0	13.7	14.7
41 – 50	20.7	16.9	19.9
> 50	2.9	1.6	2.6
Race/Ethnicity:			
African American	47.6	44.4	46.8 ***
Caucasian	23.1	10.5	20.1
Latino/Hispanic	26.7	44.4	30.8
Other	2.7	0.8	2.2
Education:			
< high school	5.9	6.5	6.1
9 – 11 years	27.1	37.9	29.5
high school grad/GED	45.1	42.7	44.6
some college	17.3	8.9	15.4
college grad	4.5	4.0	4.4
# children:			
none	23.4	16.4	21.8 **
one	24.6	21.3	23.8
two	25.1	24.6	25.0
three – five	25.3	30.3	26.4
six - eight	1.7	7.4	3.0
Relationship Status:			
Married, together	18.3	16.9	18.0
Not married, together	49.2	56.5	50.8
Relationship, but not living together	14.7	9.7	13.6
“Broken up”	10.0	8.9	9.7
Divorced	1.2	0.8	1.1
Other	6.6	7.3	6.8
Years in Relationship:			
Less than one	6.2	3.2	5.5
One – two	25.0	19.4	23.7
Three – five	28.1	31.5	28.9
Six – ten	22.6	31.5	24.6
Eleven or more	18.1	14.5	17.3
Have job?:			
Yes	55.1	57.3	55.6
Primary language English: (yes)	82.1	79.0	81.4

* p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

Exhibit 2: Criminal History by Type of Program
(In percent)

Characteristic		EVOLVE (N = 420)	Explore (N = 124)	Total (N = 544)
# of Prior Convictions	None	12.7	6.5	11.3
	One	9.6	11.3	10.0
	Two	14.9	14.5	14.8
	Three – five	32.5	33.9	32.8
	Six – ten	20.0	18.6	19.6
	More than ten	10.3	15.3	11.5
Age at First Arrest	Under 18	15.5	14.6	15.3
	18 – 20	21.9	21.1	21.7
	21 – 25	24.3	24.4	24.3
	26 – 30	12.1	13.8	12.1
	Over 30	26.2	26.0	26.2
# of Prior DV Convictions	None	28.0	15.6	25.2 *
	One	34.4	45.1	36.8
	Two	22.4	22.1	22.4
	Three – five	13.7	16.4	14.3
	Six – ten	1.5	0.8	1.3

* p < .05