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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

One of the motivating factors in our decision to write this manual was a frustration with the lack of material available to assist practitioners in working with women who have lived with, or are still living with domestic abuse. It seemed to us that there is a wealth of material for working with perpetrators or for direct work with children who have experienced domestic abuse, but resources directly targeted at work with women are scarce. This manual seeks to address that gap in ways that can be used both by those who have undertaken this type of work before and by less experienced workers.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 widened the definition of harm (within the meaning of *The Children Act 1989*) to include harm suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another, such as that caused by witnessing domestic abuse (OPSI, 1989, 2002). Tackling domestic abuse is reported to be high on the agenda in many statutory and voluntary agencies, but there is still a long way to go in truly understanding and addressing the impact of domestic abuse. For example, in a recent poll commissioned by the Home Office around one in five people thought that it would be acceptable, or acceptable in certain circumstances, for a man to hit or slap his wife or girlfriend in response to her being dressed in sexy or revealing clothing in public (Ipsos MORI, 2009).

It is important to acknowledge that men may also be victims of domestic abuse (Dewar Research, 2007). We would not wish to ignore this. Our experience however lies in working with women and it is therefore women we are targeting with this manual.

This manual is split into three sections. The first section deals with the impact of domestic abuse and challenges readers to begin to understand how it feels to be a victim. This section also provides practical advice for running a group with women who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse. The second section includes exercises that can be used as the basis for a groupwork programme. The third section includes photocopiable handout sheets for use during groupwork.

We have deliberately used non-academic language (primarily to make this manual easily accessible to as many women as possible). This straightforward approach also enables practitioners, who have not had the benefit of academic training to take responsibility for undertaking this work, while still being a helpful resource for more experienced practitioners.

Helping women to break cycles of abuse and move on from damaging relationships can be extremely rewarding work, but it is not without its demands. Listening to women's accounts of horrific violence and oppression week-in, week-out during the life cycle of a group has to take its toll on the facilitator. Good quality, regular supervision is vital, and indeed is every practitioner's right. In helping others to protect and value themselves, it

is crucial that you also recognise the need to do the same for yourself. Supervision is obviously more than simple line management in that it should offer dedicated and sufficient time for you to discuss and reflect on the group's progress and your own practice with someone who has an understanding of the issues. Good supervision should allow you the opportunity to explore your own feelings and develop coping strategies for working with abuse.

Finally, you will see that we want our work to help you develop your own groupwork programme and therefore wish you luck!

References

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